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## Young women's transitions from education to the labour market in Ethiopia: A gendered life-course perspective

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WIDER Working Paper 2021/96

## **Young women's transitions from education to the labour market in Ethiopia**

A gendered life-course perspective

Yeshwas Admasu,<sup>1</sup> Gina Crivello,<sup>2</sup> and Catherine Porter<sup>3</sup>

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**Abstract:** We investigate the causes of the gender disparity in labour market participation in Ethiopia using iterative quantitative and qualitative longitudinal analysis through the whole childhood of the individual into early adulthood, from age 8 up to age 25. Multilevel survival analysis shows that girls have higher probability of remaining in school at all grades, and by age 22 significantly more women than men have completed high school or tertiary education. From an early age, both women and men undertake a lot of unpaid labour for their households that tends to be highly gendered, and women’s work is uncounted in the current System of National Accounts definition of labour. However, women still undertake less paid work than men. Decent work for young women in rural areas remains especially limited; female job-seekers complain of poor working conditions and low pay or a mismatch with what they were trained to do in college or university. The role of social and migration networks in young people’s transitions was less discernible in the quantitative findings but emerged as crucial in the qualitative analysis. Opportunities for young women in the labour market remain constrained compared with those for young men. This leads to less pressure on girls to drop out of school, and they have higher educational achievements; however, these do not translate into labour market participation. Marriage at a younger age also remains a key driver of women leaving the labour force in Ethiopia.

**Key words:** gender, female labour force participation, Ethiopia

**JEL classification:** B54, I25, J22, J24, O15

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## 1 Introduction

Despite rapid increases in women’s educational attainment, labour force participation rates among women are well below those for men in developing countries (Agénor et al. 2018). In particular, the transition from education to employment is a challenge for young individuals, with young women being especially disadvantaged. The situation is mirrored in Ethiopia, where young women have higher educational attainment than young men but much lower levels of labour force participation. This paper uses data from the mixed-methods Young Lives study in Ethiopia to examine the determinants of and barriers to female labour force participation (FLFP) among a cohort of youth born in 1994/95 living in different rural and urban areas of the country.

The economics literature has examined macro-level trends in FLFP over time. For example, Goldin (1989, 1994) found support for the idea of a ‘U hypothesis’: that FLFP first falls then rises with the level of economic development. Gaddis and Klasen (2011), however, find less support for this hypothesis; they show that countries’ idiosyncratic factors explain most of the worldwide variation in FLFP. Ganguli et al. (2014) analyse microdata from 40 countries and argue that there is no evidence at the country level that closing the gender gap in education reduces the gender gap in labour force participation. Jayachandran (2020) has recently highlighted the role of social norms in determining FLFP, noting that gender norms differ across societies for reasons besides their stage of development. FLFP is often limited due to the feminization of unpaid care work and the pressures of supporting other household members. In developing countries, women allocate a substantial amount of time to activities that are not traditionally considered, in the System of National Accounts (SNA), economic ‘activities’, such as household chores and caring for other household members (children and the elderly), which limits their participation in paid employment (Klasen 2019). However, less is known about the detail of how women’s life choices interrelate with rural/urban location, economic and social status, wider norms, and their interaction, though broader trends are apparent (Klasen 2019; Sarkar et al. 2019; Verick 2018). These findings suggest that a careful micro-approach to investigating the determinants of FLFP can contribute to the literature.

In Ethiopia, gender inequalities are very pronounced and the gender gap in labour force participation remains large (Buehren et al. 2019). The education levels of young women have improved; however, evidence indicates that women continue to face significant barriers in the labour market and to be more disadvantaged than men. For example, women are twice as likely as men to be unemployed among the economically active population. In addition, working women are more likely to be engaged in self-employment or unpaid family work, and they often perform a larger share of unpaid household and care work (ILO 2016). Women in rural areas perform more than 90 per cent of domestic work (such as child rearing, domestic chores, firewood and water collection, and food production); in comparison, men only contribute 8.5 per cent in these activities (CSA 2014). This disparity in household activities reduces young women’s available time for education and to engage in paid work, echoing the general pattern in developing countries noted above. Of Klasen’s (2019) three noted trends which should lead to increased FLFP—economic growth, female education, and reduced fertility—Ethiopia has certainly experienced two of the three: high economic growth and improved educational outcomes for women. Fertility rates have declined since the turn of the century, though not as rapidly as, for example, in South Asia, and at 4.2 births per woman (2018), Ethiopia is just below the average for low-income countries (World Bank 2019).

A body of qualitative research in Ethiopia provides a broad picture of the social context in which young people navigate school-to-work transitions, and of young people’s experiences of these

transitions. Studies looking at generational change and continuity find that there is a perception among Ethiopians that this generation of youth has greater gender equality than previous generations (Crivello et al. 2019). Together with a growing awareness of child rights, the discourse of gender equality reflects assumptions about girls' expanded choices and opportunities for schooling and employment and for delaying marriage. The literature refers to the phrase 'bright future' (*birub tesfa* in Amharic; *egaree bareeda* in Afan Oromo), used popularly to describe the promises of education for the younger generation. In contexts of poverty, a 'bright future' is about hope and transcending adversity in the transition to adulthood (Chuta and Crivello 2013). However, patriarchal norms continue to regulate young women's choices, including what they do after they leave school (Pankhurst and Tafere 2020) and when they marry (Tafere et al. 2020).

There is also a rich qualitative literature on children's time use, on the social value of children's work, and on the competing pressures faced by adolescent girls, who are expected to combine working, attending school, and housework (Boyden 2009; Boyden et al. 2020; Heissler and Porter 2013). Most boys and girls are found to combine schooling with some form of work (Morrow and Boyden 2018). Pankhurst et al. (2015) found some cases in data up to 2013 of children who had dropped out of school but were able to go back to school with the income they earned. Longitudinal studies in particular provide evidence that the transition from education to the labour market is not linear and occurs at different ages, if at all (Tafere and Chuta 2016, 2020). Ethnographic studies describe this younger generation as being caught between the disparate worlds of tradition and modernity, which creates profound challenges for their transitions between schools and from school to work (Abebe 2008).

This paper adds an in-depth study of the recent situation in Ethiopia. We undertake mixed-methods research, iterating quantitative and qualitative analysis of the lives of a cohort of young people growing up in various regions, and in urban and rural locations, in Ethiopia, following their life trajectories to their current (2019) situation up to the age of 25. We examine the factors that influence transitions between education, work, and/or marriage of young women in rural and urban Ethiopia between the ages of 12 and 25, adding to scarce evidence in Ethiopia on women's decision-making, opportunities, and constraints in relation to secondary and tertiary education, 'decent' work, and fertility and marriage. The objective is to deepen understanding of the determinants of women's work through adolescence into early adulthood, from a gendered life-course perspective.

## 1.1 Definitions of work and labour force participation

The definition of (female) labour force participation in the global SNA is any of: (i) those who worked for pay or profit for a minimum number of hours in a reference period; (ii) those who were unemployed but actively looking for such work; and (iii) those who produced goods for their own consumption. Those who produce services for their own use (e.g., care and household services) are not considered by these definitions part of the labour force (ICLS 2013).

A broader discussion on the value of unpaid labour such as care and housework is summarized by Klasen (2019), who critiques this definition of labour force participation as it relegates much work—particularly that done by women—to being outside of the labour force, excluding it in the SNA and thus in measurement of economic output (GDP). The argument has been made in several places that the distinction made in the SNA between unpaid work in subsistence production and unpaid care work is arbitrary and artificial (UNDP 1995).

The International Labour Organization (ILO) created an expanded definition of *work* in 2013 (ICLS 2013). The definition now includes caring for others within the household and other housework. It also 'created a new definition of the *labour force*, which is narrower than previously

defined. In particular, this definition now excludes subsistence farmers, that is, those who produce products for their own use.’ Klasen also notes that ‘a statement of self-declared intentions of main use of production is now a crucial boundary between being in and out of the labour force’ and may be difficult to use in practice (Klasen 2019: 164). Indeed, in our data we find that most households are producing crops for their own consumption, and if it is a good year, they may also sell their products on the market, which creates a somewhat arbitrary transition of the same person between working in the labour force and not, though they are performing the same activities.

We examine work activities, comparing the SNA definition of labour participation with the broad definition of work from ILO/ICLS 2013, but focus particularly on the barriers to women’s *paid* employment in Ethiopia. Paid employment has been documented to improve female bargaining power and empowerment in different contexts (Kabeer et al. 2011; Majlesi 2016), though there have also been examples of adverse effects, including increased burden of total work, and domestic violence (for a review, see Doss 2013). Furthermore, we capitalize on the mixed-methods design of our study and use the qualitative data to identify how young women and men conceptualize the different types of work that they do, contributing local understandings of what ‘decent’ work might mean for youth in this context.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 describes the data sources. Section 3 presents the empirical models. Section 4 discusses the main results of the paper, including the determinants of school drop-out and participation in paid employment. The final section summarizes the main results and concludes.

## 2 Data sources

We use the Young Lives Older Cohort (OC; aged 22 in 2016) sample in Ethiopia. Young Lives is a longitudinal study of child poverty that followed two cohorts of children, a younger cohort born in 2001/02 and an older cohort born in 1994/05, since 2002 (Barnett et al. 2013). The sample comprises randomly selected households with a child in the required age range from 20 sentinel sites in both rural and urban areas, with oversampling of poor households. Although the sample was not nationally representative, it ensured a balanced representation of the ethnic, religious, and geographical diversity of the country (see Young Lives 2021).

The OC quantitative data includes five rounds; the first round took place in 2002 (children in sampled households aged eight) and Round 5 was collected in 2016 (aged 22). The sample used in this paper contains 814 individuals surveyed in 2016 who had remained in the survey, which indicates a 17.7 per cent attrition rate<sup>1</sup> since Round 1, or just over 1 per cent per annum—a much lower rate than that of other longitudinal studies (Sánchez and Escobal 2020). Attrition includes deaths, but the main reason for attrition in Round 5 was inability to locate the household, with no refusals of those who were located (Sánchez and Escobal 2020). The survey contains rich data on young men and women, including on education, health, and socioeconomic background; cognitive skill development (maths, reading, vocabulary); detailed time use; participation in paid and unpaid activities; gender attitudes (female empowerment index); marriage; and fertility histories. Table 1 presents the summary statistics of variables used in the estimation model.

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<sup>1</sup> Most attrition is the result of household mobility (Barnett et al. 2013).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of variables

	Female		Male	
	mean	sd	mean	sd
Married or cohabiting	0.117	0.322	0.02	0.142
Older child	0.154	0.361	0.172	0.377
Child's age at start of Grade 1	7.882	1.936	8.257	2.203
Rural	0.57	0.495	0.623	0.485
Female household head	0.301	0.459	0.268	0.443
Household size	5.672	2.337	5.83	2.281
Hours/day spent in				
Caring for household members	0.997	1.691	0.352	0.771
Household chores	3.185	1.923	1.399	1.411
Domestic tasks	0.841	1.875	2.371	3.029
Paid activity	0.984	2.837	1.463	3.386
Household head's education				
No education	0.242	0.429	0.245	0.43
Primary	0.529	0.499	0.584	0.493
Post primary	0.195	0.397	0.131	0.338
Wealth index				
Top tercile	0.393	0.489	0.367	0.482
Middle tercile	0.317	0.465	0.374	0.484
Bottom tercile	0.275	0.447	0.247	0.431
Shocks				
Death of livestock	0.21	0.408	0.227	0.419
Death/illness of household member	0.357	0.479	0.375	0.484
Drought, pest, crop failure	0.289	0.454	0.296	0.457

Note: sd = standard deviation.

Source: authors' construction based on Young Lives (2021), Rounds 1–4.

We also analyse qualitative data generated in 2019 with 60 male and female OC youth aged 25 in ten sites (five regions) drawn from the Young Lives survey sample. Five of the ten sites (and around 30 of the youth) form part of a qualitative longitudinal study since 2007 (age 12) with the fifth of five waves of data collection in 2019 (age 25).<sup>2</sup> The longitudinal component uses semi-structured repeat interviews with the same youth at different ages to document transitions and trajectories through schooling, work, and marriage. The fifth-wave study focused on gendered transitions to adulthood, with a particular emphasis on work and employment outcomes. The fieldwork was carried out by an experienced team of Ethiopian social researchers who speak the local languages and who were involved in previous Young Lives research. Data were generated through individual and group discussions involving youth, their caregivers/spouses and peers, and

<sup>2</sup> Ethics approval to undertake the fifth wave of data collection was granted by the University of Oxford and by the Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers and Anthropologists (ESSWA).

key informants, including job creation/agricultural officers, technical vocational educational training officers, and local employers.

### 3 Empirical methods

To examine factors influencing transitions from education to the labour market and unpaid domestic work in Ethiopia, we undertook an iterative mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis. Without a randomized control trial or natural experiment, it is difficult to reach a causal interpretation for these questions using quantitative data, even with rich longitudinal information. Decisions on whether to continue studying, to work, and, if working, to do so in unpaid or paid employment are co-determined, and in one wave we may observe e.g. that someone is working and has also dropped out of school, but we cannot ascertain through the quantitative data whether they worked because they had left school or they dropped out of school because of work pressures. We therefore focus our quantitative analysis on examining associations between characteristics of the individual, their household prior to age 22, and adverse events, or shocks, that may be considered somewhat exogenous to the individual's decision. We turn to the qualitative data to understand motivations behind various decisions that appear simultaneous in the quantitative data (for example, dropping out of school and getting married) to try to understand the causal mechanism more clearly.

The qualitative data are in the form of narrative interview transcripts that have been translated from their original languages into English and coded thematically using Atlas-ti computer software. For this paper, we combined broad thematic analysis of the 2019 qualitative data with more detailed biographical analysis of a subset of the cases across the ten sites, in some cases reviewing interview transcripts from previous data waves to build a longitudinal picture of individuals' school and work trajectories over time. We used an analytic matrix to create a case-by-case record of biographical data and quotes relating to school, work, and marriage, identifying analytic themes (e.g. networks) and sub-themes (e.g. sibling networks) within and across the cases and sample communities. The qualitative data were further interrogated in response to emerging findings from the quantitative analysis, as part of an ongoing and iterative process of co-produced understanding.

The iterative approach worked as follows. (1) we began by describing the status of 22-year-olds using the survey data, e.g. are they working in paid employment, doing unpaid work in the household (either housework, childcare, or working for the family farm or business), or in formal education? We found that a substantial minority are combining both. (2) We analysed the qualitative data to understand variables which appeared important to the determinants of paid work, in order to include these in the quantitative model, such as marriage and adverse shocks. (3) We examined the risk of school drop-out using quantitative data using the model, and additionally found a high risk of drop-out at Grade 10. (4) We investigated the qualitative data for reasons why at Grade 10 there was a high risk of drop-out. (5) We investigated determinants of paid labour at age 22, incorporating into the model the variables which the qualitative analysis had highlighted. As a robustness check, we also used a multinomial probit model to examine correlates of work/education status simultaneously at age 22. (6) We explored some themes that it was not possible to include in the quantitative model but that the qualitative work had highlighted, including international migration, and the role of networks in finding work. (7) Finally, we evaluated the role of work in young people's wellbeing and what they consider to be meaningful, decent work.



### 3.1 Quantitative model specifications

To examine school trajectories, we first plotted Kaplan-Maier survival functions, to reveal the gendered differences in the probability of exiting school. Then we estimated a parametric equivalent, the mixed-effects survival-time model.<sup>3</sup> This model allows for the clustered sampling design of the Young Lives study, and also the inclusion of time-invariant determinants of school drop-out (individual and household characteristics) as well as time-varying determinants (test scores, time use, marriage, economic shocks).

$$h_{ij} = h_0(t) \exp(X_{ij}^T \beta + Z_{ijt}^T \mathbf{b}_i) \quad (1)$$

Individual  $i$  lives in cluster  $j$ . The conditional distribution of the response given the random effects and the baseline hazard function  $h_0(t)$  was assumed to be Weibull.  $X_{ij}$  is a vector of fixed individual and household characteristics, which contains education attainment (primary, secondary, and higher education), religion, and ethnicity, age, gender, and education of household head. Vector  $Z_{ijt}$  contains time-varying individual- and household-level characteristics, including marital status, household size, number of children, participation in unpaid domestic work (care, chores, and agricultural work), wealth index, and shocks (including mother's death, father's death, illness of household member).

After then identifying the main factors influencing an individual decision to exit from school using the qualitative data, we examined the determinants of (paid) labour force participation using the quantitative data. We examined the probability of being in paid employment by the age of 22 by estimating a probit model. The dependent variable takes a value of 1 if an individual is in paid employment at the age of 22 ( $T$ ) and 0 otherwise:

$$P_{iT} = F(\alpha_j + \beta_1 X_i + \beta_2 Z_{it}) \quad (2)$$

The model was estimated separately for women and men at the age of 22.  $P_i$  is the probability of an individual  $i$  being in paid employment (regular and casual) at age 22.  $\alpha_j$  is a district (Kebele) fixed effect that captures local labour market level. Vector  $X_i$  includes time-invariant characteristics as above, and vector  $Z_{it}$  includes the time-varying characteristics measured at any age (e.g. whether the individual has ever experienced the death of their mother or father).

As a robustness check, we used a multinomial probit model to jointly estimate school and work decisions simultaneously, for women only. Following Favara et al. (2018), we modelled the probability that a young woman is engaged in studying only, studying and working, or working only, or is not in education, employment, or training (NEET) at age 22. The conditional probability that an individual  $i$  belongs to category  $k$  at age 22 is written as:

$$P(L_{it} = k | Y_{it}) \quad (3)$$

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<sup>3</sup> Using mestreg (xstreg) in Stata 16.

where  $k$  is the category of young individual— $k = 0$  for participation in studying only,  $k = 1$  for studying and working,  $k = 2$  for working only, and  $k = 3$  for NEET—and  $Y_{it}$  has the following structure:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha_{dt} + \beta_1 X_i + \beta_2 Z_{it} \quad (4)$$

The vectors  $X_{it}$  and  $Z_{it}$  are defined as per the probit model in Equation 2 above.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 School, work, and marriage: outcomes at age 22

#### *Educational attainment*

The qualitative analysis found that by age 22, young women in this study have had greater access to and have gone further in their schooling compared with their mothers, as formal schooling has expanded throughout the country. Discussions with older and younger groups of women in both rural and urban areas conveyed this strong sense of generational change. The quote below is from Biritu’s mother (aged 37) when Biritu was aged 15, living in a rural community in Oromia. She compared her life with her daughter’s at the same age:

Well, during [my] time, a girl could do nothing better than get married. Marry. There was no other role for us ... We had no other kind of jobs except fetching water and collecting firewood ... The present time is better ... women and men are equal. But during [my] time, if a woman tried to go to school, she would be discouraged by being told that a woman’s education will bring and mean nothing. (Biritu’s mother, age 37, rural Oromia)

By 2019, Biritu had completed her undergraduate university degree and was looking for work. This trend of improved access to education for the younger generation of women is also reflected in the survey (Table 2).

Table 2: Comparison of school completion by younger and older generations

	Primary certificate (Grades 1–8)				Secondary certificate (Grades 9–10)			
	Young women	Mother	Young men	Father	Young women	Mother	Young men	Father
Urban	88.2	17.2	84.3	20.8	74.9	10.8	70.8	15.7
Rural	64.3	6.0	56.1	13.0	46.15	2.7	38.2	6.5

Source: authors’ construction based on Young Lives (2021), Round 5.

A large proportion of 22-year-olds are currently attending formal education, and there are no significant differences in current enrolment between men and women. However, the apparent lack of gender disparity in enrolment masks important underlying patterns which we investigate later. For example, on average, young women stay longer in school than their male peers. For young individuals who remain in the education system at age 22, most have only completed 11 years (men) and 12 years (women) of education, although normally by this age they would be expected to have reached or completed university education. For those who are no longer enrolled in any education programmes, the average years of completed education are seven to eight years (men)

and eight to nine years (women). This lower educational attainment might be linked with grade repetition or with late enrolment, with the average child's age at starting Grade 1 being eight years for girls but eight to nine years for boys.

One of the young women, Fanus, in rural Tigray, was interviewed from age 12 to 25. She first enrolled in school aged seven but had to drop out because it was too far away for her to walk. She started again aged eight. Aged nine, she developed epilepsy which affected her schooling, causing her to miss weeks of school at a time. At 16, she became so ill with this chronic condition that she left school for three years, re-enrolling in Grade 9 when she felt better (aged 19). She took the Grade 10 National Exam but did not score well, and she decided to look for work instead of trying to stay in education.

Our qualitative research found that boys are especially compelled to seek out paid work both in response to their families' economic need and in line with their emerging masculinity and breadwinner role. Bereket, in Addis Ababa, lost both his parents at a young age and was raised by his grandmother. Aged 12, he wanted to be an engineer and go to university. He worked washing and decorating cars. But by age 17, he had quit school and had continued working with cars; he said, 'I do not regret quitting school. I am happy with my work. Education has no use ... I am angry because I did not start work earlier.' By age 20, married and a young father, he had branched out into different areas of the car business and was doing relatively well.

The survey data show (Table 3) that the majority of youth in our sample are no longer in school, and that the majority of out-of-school youth aged 22 are making or had made the transition to work without ever having completed secondary school. We found that while there is no significant gender difference in secondary and university completion, women are more likely to have completed vocational education compared with their male peers. Of those who are still enrolled, again significantly more women are enrolled in vocational training (25 per cent).

Table 3: Educational attainment at age 22, by enrolment status and gender

	No longer in school		Enrolled in education		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Primary	0.57	0.45**	0.19	0.12	0.42	0.34**
Lower secondary	0.30	0.34	0.18	0.16	0.25	0.28
Upper secondary	0.03	0.02	0.21	0.19	0.10	0.08
Vocational	0.06	0.12*	0.14	0.25*	0.09	0.17**
University	0.02	0.05	0.27	0.27	0.11	0.12
No. of observations		520		294		814

Notes: primary: Grades 1–8, lower secondary: Grades 9 and 10, upper secondary: Grades 11 and 12; asterisks indicate statistical significance of t-test for equality at 1% (\*\*\*), 5% (\*\*), and 10% (\*).

Source: authors' construction based on Young Lives (2021), Round 5.

### *Paid and unpaid work*

Participation in work is high, and mostly in the informal sector, with many of the young people engaged in paid employment. A significant number of them also participate in unpaid work, broadly defined. Most of those participating in unpaid work are doing farm work for their families. Participation in both paid and unpaid work, as defined in the SNA, is generally lower for women compared with their male counterparts, and they spend much more time on unpaid domestic work.

The survey data corroborate the observations made in the qualitative research (Table 4), a few years earlier.

Table 4: Sector and type of work, 22-year-olds

	Male	Female
Working in family business		
Agriculture	0.43	0.31**
Aquaculture	0.06	0.00***
Livestock	0.07	0.08
Services	0.08	0.01***
Business	0.15	0.23**
Other non-agriculture	0.10	0.18**
Salary/wage employment		
Agriculture	0.09	0.04**
Non-agriculture	0.21	0.13**
Regular salaried	0.20	0.25
Housemaid	0.00	0.09***
Employment sector		
Formal	0.20	0.25
Informal	0.76	0.71
No. of observations	369	278

Note: formal sector includes all regular salaried employment; informal sector includes all agricultural and non-agricultural wage employment (non-salaried) as well as work for other household members; asterisks indicate statistical significance at 1% (\*\*\*), 5% (\*\*), and 10% (\*) levels.

Source: authors' construction based on Young Lives (2021), Round 5.

The qualitative data collected in 10 of the 20 Young Lives sites records the types of jobs that young people in the study are doing at age 25. Among the young women in paid work, jobs include tailor's assistant, office messenger, bank teller, registration clerk, cashier, factory worker (food production, plastics chemical factory), and in a beauty salon. A few had started their own businesses, including a coffee shop, a clothing boutique, and selling prepared foods. Those who describe themselves as housewives (in rural and semi-urban areas) mostly do unpaid work in the home and on the family farm. In rural areas, most available work is in agriculture, requiring those who want to work in other sectors to migrate to towns and cities, or abroad, which can be difficult for young women unless they have social networks.

Table 5 presents the labour market participation and time use pattern of young individuals by gender and current enrolment status at the age of 22. Labour market participation is very high for individuals who are no longer enrolled in any educational programmes. There are significant gender differences in labour market participation when using the SNA definition, which excludes unpaid domestic work and care work (but which does include unpaid work on the family farm or in the family business), with 97 per cent of young men engaged in at least one labour activity (paid or unpaid economic activities) compared with 81 per cent of young women. The gender gap is quite large and significant in paid employment, with only 56 per cent of young women participating in paid labour compared with 80 per cent of young men. Results are similar when we look at individuals currently enrolled in school: 70 per cent of young men are in the labour market as per the SNA definition compared with 52 per cent of young women. This suggests that the gender differences in labour market participation are substantial for both young individuals currently

enrolled in school and those no longer enrolled, though below we see that women spend more time working when the definition is broadened.

Table 5: Labour participation and time use at age 22, by enrolment status and gender

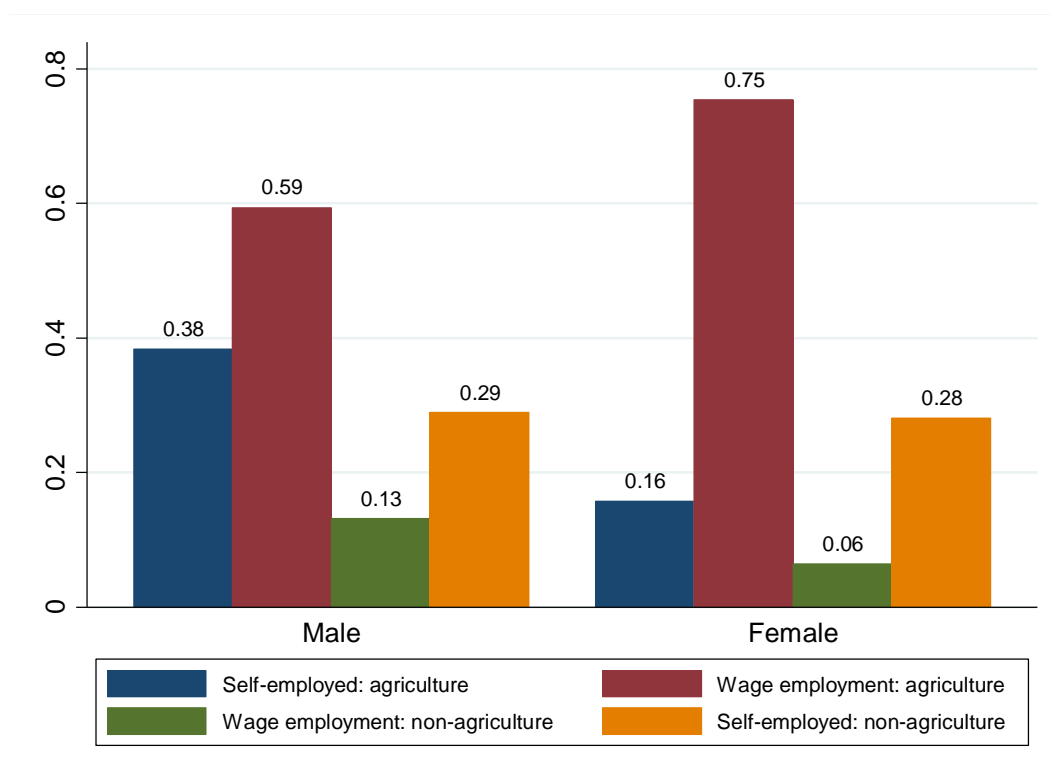
	Not currently in education		Enrolled in school/ university/training	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Labour participation				
Paid work	0.80	0.56***	0.40	0.26*
Unpaid: family farm/business	0.46	0.38*	0.43	0.29*
Unpaid: care and domestic tasks	0.48	0.93***	0.46	0.85***
Unpaid work activities (broad)	0.70	0.94***	0.62	0.85***
Labour force (SNA)	0.97	0.81***	0.70	0.52**
Time use (hours/day)				
Household care	0.20	1.84***	0.24	0.53*
Household domestic tasks	0.92	3.82***	0.88	2.35***
Paid work	3.70	1.59***	1.34	0.42***
Unpaid work for family farm/business	4.53	3.18**	1.40	1.26
Total hours	9.35	10.44***	3.85	4.56
No. of observations	263	257	164	130

Notes: unpaid work (broad) based on ILO definition (ICLS 2013) includes all unpaid domestic work (including caring for household members, domestic tasks, participation in family farming, and business); labour force based on SNA definition includes participation in paid work and unpaid household family farming and business; asterisks indicate statistical significance at 1% (\*\*\*), 5% (\*\*), and 10% (\*) levels.

Source: authors' construction based on Young Lives (2021), Round 5.

To better understand the gender differences in labour market participation ('economic work') in favour of men, we examine time spent in different activities (all forms of work) per day. The total time spent by women working in all different activities that may be considered paid or unpaid work, whether domestic or not, is an average of 10.44 hours per day, while for men the average is 9.35 hours per day. This disparity is statistically significant and accounts for more than a full hour's difference. The longer work time is primarily driven by the additional hours spent on domestic tasks and care work by women (5.66 hours per day) compared with men (1.12 hours per day). Looking at labour market participation as per the SNA definition, men spend on average 8.23 hours per day in paid and unpaid activities, while women spend on average 4.77 hours per day (see Figure 1). Clearly, then, we see that women spend more hours working when work is most broadly defined.

Figure 1: Work sector of young individuals at age 22, by gender



Notes: the figure shows proportion of young individuals' work activity by sector (using SNA definition); we considered multiple activities for a single individual, which means an individual may participate in both self-employment and wage employment; self-employment refers to unpaid work in the household business.

Source: authors' construction based on Young Lives (2021), Round 5.

### *Transitions to higher education and the labour market*

Using a multinomial logit, we investigated activities at age 22: work, education, combining both work and education, or neither (NEET—but including unpaid domestic work and care). Along with other household responsibilities, earlier economic circumstances also are associated with paid labour participation and school completion. At 22, marriage is one of the key factors driving the differences in labour and education participation; for women in particular, being married is a key predictor of (not) being in paid work, as well as of (not) continuing in education.

### *Marriage status*

Other surveys and qualitative studies point to marriage as a key factor influencing school-to-work transitions in this context (Chuta and Morrow 2015; Nilsson 2019). In the Young Lives sample, the survey shows that a significant proportion of women are married or cohabiting and have a child by age 22. Around 34 per cent of young women were married or started cohabiting with a partner by the age of 22, compared with just 7 per cent of young men. For those who remain in the education system, only 8 per cent of young women and 3 per cent of young men are married or cohabiting with a partner. In addition, women are more likely to get married or give birth compared with men. The results suggest statistically significant gender differences in the likelihood of getting married and giving birth.

### *Young marriage as a barrier to women's paid work*

The survey data show that by age 22 many young women have transitioned to marriage rather than to formal work. Underage marriage (before age 18) is most common among girls in rural areas. The qualitative study identifies strong social norms that contribute to young marriage, which is closely linked to adolescent pregnancy. Marriage and motherhood are barriers to young women's schooling and their school-to-work transitions. Most of the young women who were followed-up through the qualitative study and had married were not in paid work, even if they had been working prior to marriage. Husbands generally have the final say in whether their wives work outside the home for an income. Group discussions with young mothers illuminated the unequal gender relations and division of labour that characterize their marital roles.

A man's responsibility is to work, earn money, and bring enough food home. A wife just concentrates on her family responsibility ... she becomes very busy with her household activities and taking care of her baby. (young mother, focus group, rural Tigray, 2014)

For some months, we were in a good economic condition after marriage. However, after our children were born, we had serious economic problems. As I had to take the responsibility of caring of the children, my husband became the main breadwinner, which put huge pressure on my family's economic condition. (young mother, focus group, urban Addis Ababa, 2014)

These differing household roles and responsibilities affect how young people allocate their time throughout the day, as reflected in Figure 2, which reports time use across different categories of work by gender and marital status. The survey data confirm that women spend a significant amount of time in unpaid domestic work and caring for other household members, which limits their available time to participate in the labour market.

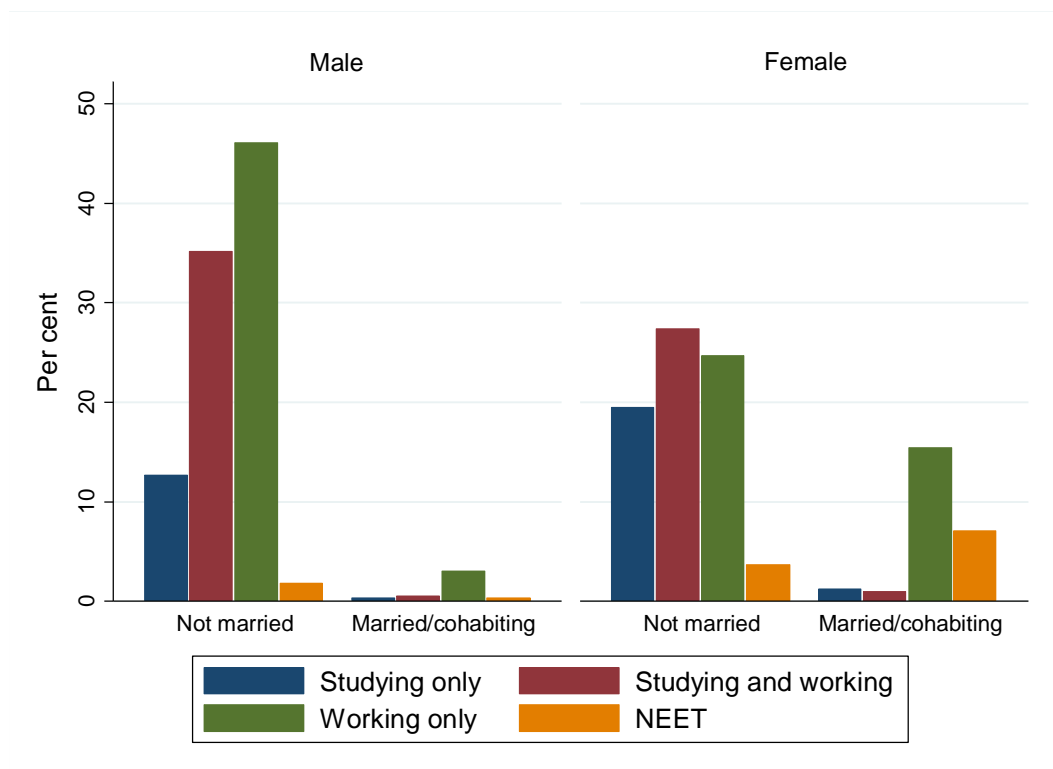
Figure 3 indicates that very few of the young women who are married (cohabiting) are still studying (5 per cent studying only, 3 per cent combining studying and work). Around 67 per cent of married young women are participating in 'economic' work (paid work or unpaid work on family farm/business), while the corresponding figure for married young men is 83 per cent. A significant proportion of married women would be classified by the literature as NEET: 24 per cent, compared with 3% of men. However, young women who are NEET are engaged in unpaid domestic work and providing care to other household members (children and the elderly), which are not traditionally considered economic activities within the economics literature.

Figure 2: Hours spent on work activities at age 22, by marriage status and gender



Source: authors' construction based on Young Lives (2021), Round 5.

Figure 3: Education and labour market participation at age 22, by gender and marital status



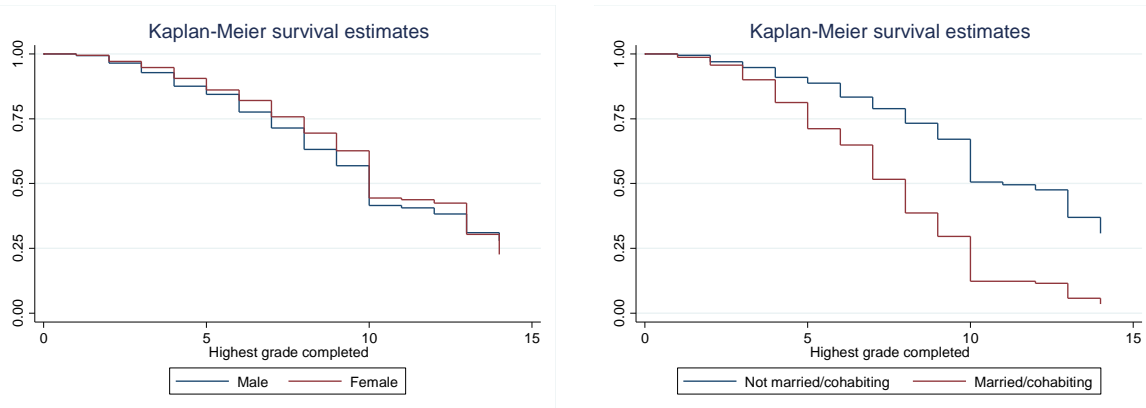
Source: authors' construction based on Young Lives (2021), Round 5.



## 4.2 School drop-out: determinants and critical moments

The Kaplan-Meier survival graphs in Figure 4 show the likelihood of continuing in education at each school grade. The first graph shows how survival rates of continued enrolment differ for female and male students. Enrolment survival rates fall as the level of grade increases. The figure shows a much steeper drop-off in enrolment survival rate in secondary school (at Grades 9 and 10). The exit differences are less pronounced once students are enrolled in tertiary school. We examine the reasons for drop-out at the critical point of Grade 10, and with respect to marriage, using the qualitative data below. The second graph of Figure 4 shows how survival rates of continued education differ for students who are married by age 22 and those who have not married by that time. The figure shows a steeper drop in the enrolment survival rate starting from Grades 6 and 7, around age 15, which coincides with the age when girls might begin to face pressure to marry and boys to increase their earnings. The exit differences increase with the level of grade increases, and once students are enrolled in secondary school the difference is very large. While this suggests that the decision to marry may come after that to drop out of school, it may also be that parents do not invest in the education of a girl who is already intended to be married young.

Figure 4: Kaplan-Meier survival estimates, by gender and marriage



Source: authors' construction based on Young Lives (2021), Rounds 1–5.

Table 6 shows the comparable parametric results based on Equation 1. The results confirm what is shown in the graphs—that boys drop out faster than girls and that marriage or cohabitation is a strong determinant of drop-out. The results also show that especially girls who live in a household where the head has some education are more likely to stay in school, though oldest girls are much more likely to leave school. For both boys and girls, the probability of drop-out increases with the amount of work undertaken, and for boys in particular, shocks such as the death of a family member increase the likelihood of drop-out.

Qualitative results corroborate these findings and show that young people begin to drop out of school in early grades and across all ages, despite their childhood aspirations to go far in their education. The Grade 10 National Exam (known as the Ethiopian General Secondary Education Certificate Exam/EGSECE) is a critical turning point in the school-to-work transitions of these students. It is taken at the end of Grade 10 and requires a pass in at least five subjects to pass to the next level. The exam cannot be repeated, and results determine whether a student is tracked for college preparatory (Grades 11 and 12), or technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges. Private TVET colleges may be an option for those who do not score highly enough, but they are generally considered a lesser choice with limited options.

Table 6: Determinants of school drop-out

	All	Female	Male
Female	-0.356*** (0.104)		
Married or cohabiting	0.765*** (0.170)	0.920*** (0.198)	0.679* (0.374)
Age order of child (reference: youngest)			
Middle child	0.090 (0.113)	0.211 (0.174)	-0.004 (0.145)
Eldest child	0.169 (0.146)	0.400** (0.204)	-0.015 (0.196)
Only child	0.225 (0.174)	0.087 (0.255)	0.298 (0.248)
Child's age at start of Grade 1	0.191*** (0.028)	0.150*** (0.037)	0.205*** (0.041)
Maths score	-0.021*** (0.003)	-0.026*** (0.006)	-0.021*** (0.005)
Hours/day spent in			
Caring for household members	0.194*** (0.033)	0.145*** (0.041)	0.364*** (0.078)
Household chores	0.252*** (0.024)	0.302*** (0.030)	0.168*** (0.046)
Domestic tasks—farming, family business	0.245*** (0.016)	0.220*** (0.027)	0.274*** (0.020)
Paid activity	0.235*** (0.012)	0.234*** (0.018)	0.245*** (0.018)
Female household head	-0.058 (0.103)	-0.041 (0.151)	-0.089 (0.148)
Household size	-0.006 (0.023)	-0.017 (0.035)	0.000 (0.031)
Number of siblings	-0.006 (0.025)	-0.004 (0.040)	-0.020 (0.036)
Household head's education (reference: no education)			
Primary	-0.209** (0.105)	-0.648*** (0.145)	0.087 (0.143)
Post primary	-0.584*** (0.150)	-1.007*** (0.194)	-0.389* (0.225)
Wealth index (reference: lower tercile)			
Middle tercile	-0.278** (0.137)	0.037 (0.192)	-0.763*** (0.213)
Top tercile	-0.348* (0.199)	0.068 (0.290)	-0.841*** (0.281)
Shocks			
Death of livestock	-0.102 (0.103)	-0.107 (0.170)	-0.084 (0.142)
Drought, pests, crop failure	0.029 (0.102)	0.003 (0.148)	0.048 (0.143)
Death or illness of household member	0.172* (0.093)	0.047 (0.145)	0.266** (0.132)
Constant	0.843***	0.876***	0.869***

	(0.047)	(0.070)	(0.064)
No. of observations	2,840	1,396	1,444

Note: robust standard errors in parentheses, \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Source: authors' construction based on Young Lives (2021), Rounds 1–5.

Faced with a low exam score, young women weigh their options and opportunities around TVET courses, informal training (for example, through local churches or mosques), looking for work, self-employment, marriage, and/or migration. Haftey, for example, from a village in Tigray, said that she developed a desire to go far in her education after she had started achieving good marks. She had been raised by her grandmother since the age of seven after both her parents died. She went to live with her aunt in the city so that she could attend a better school. In earlier interviews, Haftey expected to reach university and had progressed well in school to reach the end of Grade 10. However, when she failed the National Exam, she lost all hope for her education. Many of the young people in the study who failed the exam had been faced with the question of what to do next.

Though the Grade 10 exam represents a pivotal moment in school-to-work transitions among this cohort of youth, the quantitative survival analysis (Figure 4) confirms that most young people leave school before reaching that point. Findings from the qualitative interviews explain why and under what circumstances. Both data sources indicate that female students are pushed out by factors such as poor-quality schooling, low grades, conflict with teachers, distance, or exam failure. They are also pulled away from school by the need to earn money or to provide unpaid work and caregiving for the household, or in response to an unintended pregnancy or a marriage proposal.

### 4.3 Paid labour: determinants and challenges

The results from the probit models on the determinants of (paid) labour force participation at the age of 22 are presented in Table 7. We estimate the determinants of participation in paid labour, which includes both wage employment and self-employment. Estimation results show marginal effects from separate estimation on female and male subsamples. The marginal effects show the change in the probability of being in paid employment which is associated with a one-unit change in the explanatory variables; for indicator variables, it is the difference from the reference category.

The results indicate that educational attainment plays an important role in the probability of being in paid employment for both male and female individuals. While only university-level education has a strong negative effect on female paid labour participation, both vocational and university-level education have a negative effect on male paid labour participation. This is likely to be because at age 22, many who will eventually reach the highest levels of education are still in the education system. Related to this, findings from the qualitative interviews provide explanatory insights, such as that families support young people who have gone far in their education by reducing their workloads at home so that they can focus on studying, sometimes hiring help to fill the gap.

The survey results indicate that being married reduces the probability of women's participation in paid employment but, conversely, increases the probability of paid employment for men.

Table 7: Paid labour participation at age 22, average marginal effects

	Paid labour			
	Female	Male		
Education attainment (reference: primary)				
Secondary	-0.077 (0.061)	-0.246*** (0.048)	-0.077 (0.061)	-0.246*** (0.048)
Vocational		-0.058 (0.080)		-0.179** (0.081)
University		-0.428*** (0.062)		-0.585*** (0.058)
Married or cohabiting		-0.202*** (0.053)		0.204** (0.099)
Unpaid labour (SNA)		-0.217*** (0.053)		-0.321*** (0.047)
Household head's education attainment (reference: illiterate)				
Primary		0.124** (0.063)		-0.090* (0.054)
Secondary		0.131* (0.071)		0.080 (0.066)
Head's age		0.001 (0.002)		-0.002 (0.002)
Head's gender		-0.033 (0.060)		0.035 (0.055)
Household size		-0.003 (0.012)		0.009 (0.011)
Wealth index (reference: bottom tercile)				
Top tercile		-0.259** (0.106)		-0.150* (0.084)
Middle tercile		-0.099 (0.076)		0.027 (0.061)
Access to services		0.354** (0.148)		0.209 (0.138)
Mother death		0.005 (0.109)		-0.074 (0.088)
Father death		0.037 (0.082)		0.064 (0.063)
No. of observations		385		419

Notes: the dependent variable is paid labour, which takes a value of 1 if an individual participates in paid activities; unpaid labour is defined as work in family farm/enterprise and excludes domestic work (i.e. SNA definition); probit model estimated separately for men and women; standard errors reported in parentheses, \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Source: authors' construction based on Young Lives (2021), Round 5.

The results also show for both men and women that individuals participating in unpaid labour are significantly less likely to participate in paid employment. This is particularly the case in rural areas, where most unpaid work is in farming for the family, and likely reflects local labour market conditions.

Moreover, living in a better-off household significantly reduces the probability of men's participation in paid employment, probably because they are also most likely to be the ones continuing their education. Surprisingly, better access to services (another measure of wealth)

increases women's participation in paid employment. Finally, we do not find any significant effect of shocks such as the death of the mother or father on women's or men's labour force participation. We also investigated other types of shock but found no significant associations.

As a robustness check, we estimated a multivariate logit; results are presented in Table A2 using the standard definitions of work (based on SNA) and of NEET. The results are consistent with the probit model. First, the relative probability of working only and/or of being NEET is significantly higher for young women who are married (compared with unmarried women). Married women are also significantly less likely to combine working and studying, reflecting the fact that most married women are no longer in education. Second, for both men and women, living in a rural area significantly increases the relative probability of combining working and studying rather than studying only. However, women (married and unmarried) who live in rural areas are significantly less likely to be NEET. Third, young people (both male and female) who grew up in better-off households are less likely both to be working only and to be combining working and studying.

#### *Networks and migration: facilitating access to paid work*

The role of social and migration networks in young people's transitions was less discernible in the survey findings but in the qualitative analysis emerged as crucial. For example, young women in rural areas access schooling in towns and cities when they have relatives in those destinations who offer them accommodation or shared rent. In the transition to work, networks are important for young women as sources of job information, references, and start-up capital; to form co-operative working groups with peers to access government loans; and to migrate domestically and internationally for work.

Decent work for young women in rural areas remains especially limited, even though flower farms, wineries, and factories exist in several of the study communities.<sup>4</sup> Female job-seekers complain of poor working conditions and low pay or a mismatch with what they were trained to do in college or university. Temporary migration to the Middle East to undertake employment as live-in domestic workers remains an attractive option for young women wishing to earn money, especially when continuing in education no longer seems possible. Securing work abroad usually involves a broker and a loan.

The case of Haftey, mentioned earlier, who had lost all hope for education after failing her exam, is illustrative. Through her uncle, she found a job working in a spare parts shop in the city. Then one day, she was at home when female relatives who were working in the Middle East came to visit:

I told them to take me back with them. I decided to go. They agreed to help me fill out the visa application and I paid for it with the money I saved from working in the garage. My family didn't want me to go but once they knew I was going, they loaned me money for the travel.

She worked as a maid in the Middle East for two years, sending money back home to her family, and saving 30,000 birr (~US\$1,400) for herself. She chose to return to Ethiopia when her contract ran out. She planned to use her savings to open her own spare parts auto shop. Even though she

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<sup>4</sup> See qualitative study in Young Lives sites by Pankhurst and Tafere (2020).

had a boyfriend, she was waiting to marry him and resisted pressure from her grandmother to marry. Her view was, ‘I can lead my life by working’.

This example illuminates the importance of networks for accessing both learning and earning opportunities for young women, involving migration and the help of relatives. Young women who lack these networks may be disadvantaged. Our findings show, for example, that young women who are not themselves migrants nevertheless benefit from the remittances sent from abroad by their siblings or other relatives who have migrated. One young woman, aged 23, from Tigray, had three siblings who had migrated—two sisters in the Middle East and a brother in Sweden. After she completed her accounting course, she could not find work and, in her words, she remained ‘idle’ for one year. Responding to her predicament, her siblings put money together so that she could open a clothing boutique in town. She managed the shop on her own, noting that her accounting skills were useful in the running of the business, which she hoped to expand in the future.

### *The unmet promises of education and job creation*

Lack of jobs for university and college graduates, as in the example of the young woman cited above, was a notable concern among families and youth. Graduates wanted jobs related to their degrees, but they were criticized when they were seen to be too choosy in the jobs they were willing to accept. In recent years, the government has encouraged the country’s unemployed youth to create their own job opportunities via the Jobs Creation Commission and the Youth Revolving Fund. These schemes aim to link unemployed youth to employers, and to provide loans, training, and self-employment opportunities. Young people are encouraged to organize themselves in small groups and to propose income-generating projects. There is widespread awareness, and some experience, of these schemes among the young people in our study. But many young people are disappointed by their experiences, citing excessive bureaucracy and delays, collateral requirements disadvantaging poor youth, lack of follow-up in training, and nepotism. Some youth prefer individual loans rather than working in groups, since there is often a mismatch in the level of interest, skill, and commitment among group members, and when one member defaults on their part of the loan the whole group is affected. Nevertheless, these schemes remain important options, including for the country’s growing numbers of unemployed university graduates.

The government schemes aim to address the problem of unemployed graduates and the concerns around political unrest stemming from disillusioned jobless youth. Indeed, many youths from poor households will have overcome many obstacles to reach university and the psychological effects of under- and unemployment can be particularly hard. One of the young women in our study, for instance, aged 23, from Oromia region, stands out in her village for having graduated from university (in statistics). She had been searching for a job since graduating and is at risk of feeling like a failure because she cannot find work. She had invested many years in her education, relocating to town for five years of high school, then to the city for three years of university. She had since returned to her village while searching for work.

[I]t is not interesting to live with one’s family after graduation. This is similar to a returnee. A person who comes back from abroad also does not like to live with his/her family of orientation. It may not be totally awful but it is inconvenient to live with one’s family after graduation from a university.

Her experience at university was transformative on account of being exposed to different people, ethnicities, and ideas. Her main source of support had been her brother: ‘My brother has been supporting me as a mother, a father, and a brother. He has been all these three bodies for me.’

Not only did her brother help her financially, but he was instrumental in convincing their parents to let her move away to study, though they resisted. She explained:

All other family members refused. Even neighbours made refusals. They said, ‘how is a girl set free to live in town?’ It is only my brother that influenced them and enabled me to live in town by telling them that it is better for me to live free from the stress they used to cause to me. He said that it is better for me to live in town to seek a job as well.

She prefers to work rather than marry immediately, though in her view marriage would be inevitable if she were unable to find a job:

The government is saying that a lot of employment-creating opportunities are being expanded. But I do not want to wait more than the next year. It is inevitable for me to get married if it goes beyond next year ... I do not want to depend on my husband ... I need to have some little job at least.

Across rural and urban settings, the high aspirations reported in childhood are tempered in the transition to adulthood. There is a growing perception among younger and older generations alike that education has failed to deliver on its promise to transform girls’ lives, elevating marriage as their next best chance in life (Crivello et al. 2019). A group discussion in 2018 with older mothers (of female youths) recorded their opinion that ‘Education is dead, and girls do not want to die with education. They want to establish a family now through marriage. Many girls stay idle after completing Grade 10 ... Girls should not die together with education.’

#### **4.4 Work and wellbeing**

Finally, emerging from the qualitative analysis is an understanding of how young people assess their work options and the value they place on work that can transform their lives for the better. From young people’s accounts of their working lives, we can identify three broad types of work. The first is about daily survival and is often distress-driven (due to poverty or a shock); young people describe this as living ‘from hand to mouth’. The second type is work that complements rather than overtakes other aspects of life—for example, work that helps to pay for schooling or training. The third type is work that helps in ‘changing one’s life’ for the better—and for young people, that means jobs that are compatible and can be combined with further education, such as distance or part-time courses. Work of this third type is the opposite of ‘idleness’ and of ‘hand to mouth’ labour.

One of the young women in Addis Ababa is arguably a ‘success’ story and an example of potentially transformative work. She graduated university in economics and works in a large bank in the city centre. She is study for an MBA on the weekends. She had got the job after one of her friends who worked in a different bank messaged her on Facebook about it. She applied and passed an exam. She started working full-time in the bank as a permanent formal employee four years ago. She lives with her family and uses her salary to pay for her MBA and personal expenses, and to give her mother money. Her plan is to remain with the bank and to apply for a better position once she finishes her MBA. She said that in the next five years, ‘If I finish my education, I think I will take some courses because I will have enough time ... Simple courses that enable me to update myself’. She added, ‘[I] want to support myself properly’.

Securing a formal, permanent contract, however, is rare, for men and women alike, especially in the rural areas. Their sense of wellbeing nevertheless rests on the belief that they are improving their lives and are not stuck. For example, one of the young women from a village in Tigray found

her working conditions had improved by taking on a factory job. The youngest of five siblings, she was raised by her grandparents in poverty. Her grandfather, who suffered from a chronic heart condition, pressured her to drop out of school in Grade 8 to focus on work. She explained:

I was learning, I was a child with an old father, and I was struggling to live by working and learning, until Grade 8. I did haricot bean picking ... starting from when I was 7 until 20 years old.

Picking haricot beans by hand was the kind of work that ‘is for life ... to live’, meaning that it is the kind of work you do to survive. She worked ‘to support the family and as a source of income for myself. Also, my family wouldn’t like it if I didn’t work and bring in an income. So, I did the job both for my family and for myself.’ A turning point came when a haricot bean processing factory opened up in a neighbouring town. She relocated to the town and lives with her sister, who was already working in the factory and helped her get the job. They work separate shifts so that they can alternate caring for her sister’s children. She prefers the factory work to picking by hand, because it is performed by machine, it is paid better, and it is safer. With her savings, a contribution from her mother, and a government loan, she had bought a piece of land on which she plans to build a house. Although she has a boyfriend, she is delaying marrying him so that she can continue to support her family, on the understanding that once she marries, she will not be in a position to do so.

#### *The scourge of ‘idleness’*

Young people do not wish to be idle, despite the norm in economics of classifying those not in education, employment, or training as NEET, a category that implies a degree of inactivity. Findings from the survey indicate that urban men and women are more likely to be classified as NEET. However, the perception of youth ‘idleness’, of presumed chosen inactivity in work or in education, is widely socially maligned. Idleness is viewed as a moral failing and a personal choice, and it appears to affect men more than women on account of the emphasis placed on productive work in the construction of hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, young women who fulfil unpaid domestic roles (housework and childcare) are not judged as ‘idle’ (even when classified as NEET). Through marriage, young women avoid idleness, whereas young men must stay active through work or education.

However, young women’s economic participation is dynamic across the life course. Attitudes can change depending on the family life cycle, economic needs, and opportunity. For example, Ayu, from rural Oromia, left school in Grade 2 at the age of 13. Once out of school, she was happy to start earning money in agriculture. She then got married at 16 to a man ten years her senior. Her husband had not allowed her to continue working, and she lost touch with friends. By age 22, she had two children. Although she was not in paid work, she felt her husband supported her and she planned to open up a small shop when the children were older. By the following year, when the research team returned, Ayu had recently opened a food stall, preparing and selling beyayinet (traditional food platters), at the entrance of her family compound. She is also preparing her documents and training and has obtained her passport in order to migrate to the Middle East for work; the latter move will mean temporarily leaving her family behind and becoming the main earner in the family. In the meantime, she plans to continue her food stall.



## 5 Conclusions

Despite much improvement in educational attainment during recent years, young women in Ethiopia are still less likely at the age of 22 to be in paid employment than young men at the same age. We investigated the causes of this disparity using both quantitative and qualitative approaches that consider the whole lifetime of the individual. The results from our analysis indicate that there are many reasons why female (and male) students leave school before finishing. They are pushed out by factors such as poor-quality schooling, low grades, or exam failure. Or they are pulled away from school by the need to earn money or to provide unpaid work or caregiving for the household, or in response to an unintended pregnancy or a marriage proposal. By age 22, both men and women undertake a lot of unpaid labour for their households which tends to be highly gendered—with women cooking, cleaning, and caring while men help on the farm or in the family business. It is thus partly a consequence of statistical assumptions around labour market reporting (SNA definitions) that young men appear to be more active than women in the labour market.

However, women do undertake much less paid work. Marriage is one of the key factors driving the gap—at the age of 22, 34 per cent of women are married compared with only 7 per cent of men, and married women tend to spend more time on housework and caring for family members, leaving less time for ‘economic work’. Earlier life circumstances also matter—higher wealth at age 15 increases the likelihood of high school completion for both male and female individuals. Qualitative analysis can add depth to our understanding of young women’s aspirations for the future, and more detail on what working activities they are trying to combine and how their different circumstances change their perception of their own wellbeing.

The quantitative and qualitative findings both complement and challenge each other, showing the value of mixed-methods research.

In conclusion, opportunities for young women in the labour market remain constrained compared with those for young men. This leads to less pressure on girls to drop out of school, and they have a higher level of educational achievement; however, this does not translate into labour market participation after school completion. Marriage at a younger age also remains a key driver of women leaving the labour force in Ethiopia.

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## Appendix A: Further tables

Table A1: Educational attainment of young individuals (currently not in school) at age 22, by school completion status and gender

	Not completed		Completed	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Primary	0.45	0.36*	0.12	0.09
Lower secondary	0.09	0.10	0.21	0.25
Upper secondary	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.02
University	0.02	0.05		
Vocational	0.06	0.12*		
No. of observations	263		257	

Note: university and vocational includes both completed and not completed.

Source: authors' construction based on Young Lives (2021), Round 5.

Table A2: Multinomial probit model: average marginal effects

	Study and work (SNA definition)		Work only (SNA definition)		NEET (includes domestic work)	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Married or cohabiting	-0.222*** (0.057)	-0.088 (0.099)	0.124* (0.066)	0.219** (0.110)	0.176*** (0.039)	0.017 (0.025)
Top tercile wealth	0.133** (0.062)	0.037 (0.063)	-0.262*** (0.076)	-0.131* (0.069)	-0.024 (0.051)	-0.009 (0.019)
Middle tercile wealth	0.148*** (0.051)	0.062 (0.051)	-0.140** (0.067)	-0.082 (0.057)	-0.023 (0.049)	-0.018 (0.020)
Primary	0.101* (0.053)	0.040 (0.055)	-0.023 (0.049)	-0.018 (0.020)	-0.048 (0.045)	0.017 (0.021)
Post primary	0.100 (0.063)	0.248*** (0.075)	-0.086 (0.078)	-0.193** (0.085)	-0.029 (0.050)	-0.010 (0.029)
Rural	0.126*** (0.048)	0.129** (0.052)	0.002 (0.063)	-0.023 (0.058)	-0.128*** (0.043)	-0.039* (0.021)
No. of observations	385	424	385	424	385	424

Notes: multinomial probability model estimated separately for men and women; base category is 'study only'; standard errors are reported in parentheses; asterisks indicate statistical significance at 1% (\*\*\*), 5% (\*\*), and 10% (\*) levels.

Source: authors' construction based on Young Lives (2021), Round 5.