

Young People in WCA: Health, demographic, education and socioeconomic indicators



By 2025, West and Central Africa (WCA) will not only have the largest number of young people globally, but will also be the only region of the world where the population of young people will continue to grow. Protecting the lives and ensuring the well-being of these young people is a precondition for development and progress in the sub-region.

This fact sheet presents evidence on the situation of young people in WCA. It specifically addresses the health, economic, educational, demographic,

and other conditions related to young people in the sub-region, and highlights essential evidence in the drive towards the region's first demographic dividend and much-vaunted vision of shared prosperity for all its citizens.

Most WCA countries did not achieve the millennium development goals (MDGs) 2015 target on universal primary education. The primary school intake ratio, defined as a number of children enrolled in primary school regardless of age, divided by the population of the age group that officially corresponds to

Population people aged 10-24

Benin	11,166,658	Ghana	28,033,375
Burkina Faso	18,633,725	Guinea	12,947,122
Cameroon	23,924,407	Guinea-Bissau	1,888,428
Cape Verde	526,993	Liberia	4,615,222
CAR	4,998,492	Mali	18,134,835
Chad	14,496,000	Mauritania	4,166,462
Congo	4,741,732	Niger	20,715,285
Côte d'Ivoire	23,258,055	Nigeria	186,987,563
DRC	79,722,000	São Tomé and Príncipe	194,390
Equatorial Guinea	869,702	Senegal	15,589,485
Gabon	1,763,452	Sierra Leone	6,592,102
Gambia	2,054,985	Togo	7,496,833

Source: UNDESA (2015)

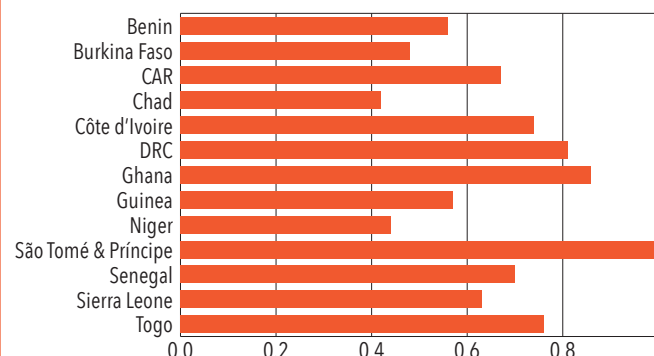
WCA at a glance

Education

In 2013, about a third of the global 59 million out-of-primary-school children lived in WCA. In 2014, 52% of children out-of-school were girls, highlighting the gender imbalances in school enrollment and performance. Rates of out-of-primary school-age children stood at 28% for boys and 31% for girls in 2015, compared with 21% (boys) and 22% (girls) in Eastern and Southern Africa.

Children in rural households are also 1.3 times more likely to be out of school, compared with their counterparts in urban households. The rural/urban difference in the percentages of out-of-school children is also disproportionately high compared with other world regions.

GPI for literacy rate for children aged 15-24 in some WCA countries



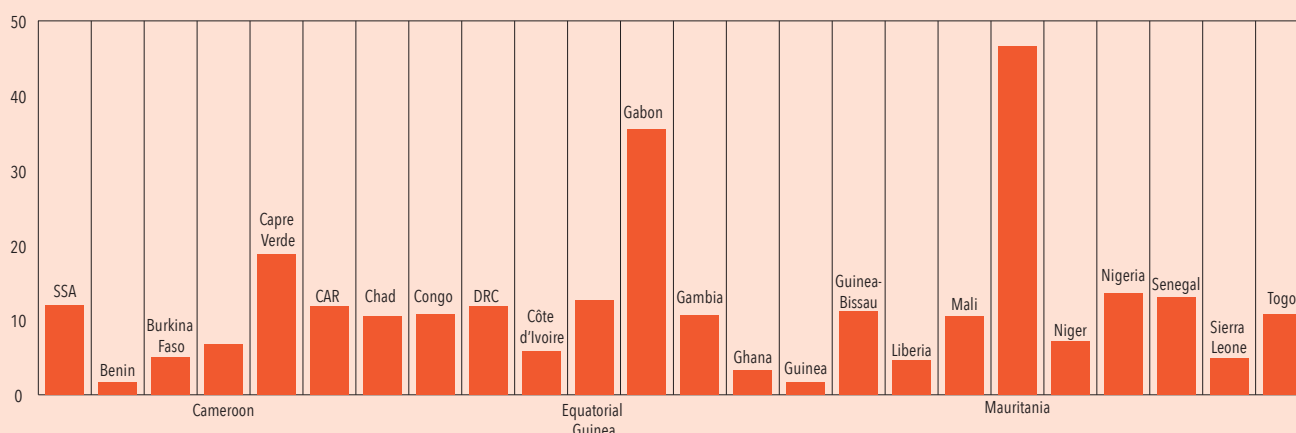
Source: World Bank (2016) World Development Indicators

Socioeconomic circumstances

Employment-to-population ratios in the 15-24 age group are generally low. Only about one-third of women and two-thirds of men in this age group are employed. WCA has the highest incidence of

child labour worldwide, particularly among boys. While some child labourers work in agriculture, many are also involved in peddling items/goods for sale on the streets, especially in towns and cities and bonded domestic labour.

Youth unemployment, total (percentage of total labor force aged 15-24), 2014



Source: UN Data: Gender Development Index ACET (2016): Report on unemployment in Africa

Sexual and reproductive health

WCA has the highest rates of teenage pregnancy (27.9%) in Africa. Condom use among young people who have multiple sexual partners in the sub-region is generally low, particularly among women. The contraceptive prevalence rate in this age group in most of WCA countries is lower than the SSA regional average of 28%.

Abortion on request or for economic or social reasons is illegal in all WCA countries except Cape Verde.

People convicted of providing and obtaining an abortion in most WCA countries risk long jail terms. Evidence suggests that girls below age of 25 bear the brunt of unsafe abortion.

Countries in which abortion is legally permitted

Reasons	Countries
Prohibited altogether, or no explicit legal exception to save the life of a woman	Angola, CAR, Congo, DRC, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal
To save the life of a woman	Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Nigeria
To preserve physical health (and to save the life of a woman)*	Benin (a, b, c), Burkina Faso, Cameroon (a), Chad, Equatorial Guinea (a, b, c), Morocco (e) Togo (a, b, c)
To preserve mental health (and all of the above reasons)	The Gambia, Ghana (a, b, c, d), Liberia (a, b, c), Sierra Leone
Without restriction as to reason.	Cape Verde

Key: Grounds on which abortion is permitted: a) rape b) incest c) fetal impairment d) other grounds e) abortion permission requires spousal authorization.

*Include countries with laws that refer simply to health or therapeutic indications that might be interpreted more broadly than physical health.

Source: Adapted from Guttmacher Institute's Fact Sheet on Abortion in Africa: Incidence and Trends, May 2016

Key facts for some WCA countries

- West and Central Africa is a 24-country contiguous area home to 468.7 million people
- Most WCA countries did not achieve the millennium development goals 2015 target on universal primary education
- A third of the sub-region's current population, projected to reach 1.2 billion by 2050, is aged between 10 and 24
- By 2025, WCA will not only have the largest number of young people globally, but will also be the only region of the world where the population of young people will continue growing
- Data also suggests that more young people in the sub-region are increasingly moving to live and work in urban areas.



Sexual violence and health

Adolescent mortality is high. Maternal conditions, including unsafe abortion, remain the leading cause of death among young women in Africa, contributing to 69% of deaths in this age group.

WCA is currently considered the riskiest world region for girls and women to get pregnant and/or give birth in.

Interpersonal violence also contributes to mortality rates among men, particularly in countries such as Sierra Leone and DRC.

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) refer to cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, cancers, mental illnesses, and injuries. The region is currently facing a double burden of disease, defined as the coexistence of communicable and non-communicable diseases. Available data shows that girls and women in WCA are more affected by NCDs compared with their male counterparts.

HIV/AIDS remains a leading cause of death among young people in

Sexual violence prevalence among young people aged 15-19

Countries and territories	Lifetime experience of sexual violence (%) 2004-2013		
	Male	Female	
Cameroon	2	22	
Côte d'Ivoire	N/A	5	α
DRC	N/A	21	α
Equatorial Guinea	N/A	17	
Gabon	N/A	14	
Ghana	N/A	17	
Liberia	N/A	13	
Nigeria	N/A	6	
São Tomé and Príncipe	N/A	9	

Source: UNICEF Global databases 2014, based on DHS, MICS and other nationally representative surveys.
NA = Not available. α = Data differ from the standard definition or refer to only part of the country

Africa. The average HIV prevalence in WCA is substantially lower than in Eastern and Southern Africa, although young women are twice more likely to be infected with HIV than young men. However, many countries in CWA have a high, yet unmet, need for antiretroviral therapies, as well as face a lack of support to improve health systems that address the needs of those living with HIV and AIDS.

Mental health conditions and substance abuse pose an increasing burden in Africa. Substance use and abuse are generally higher among males compared with the females, except in CAR, Gambia, and Sierra Leone, where substance use is higher among young women and girls. Evidence of high prevalence of tobacco use by both males and female adolescent aged 13-15 was found.

Improving the outlook for young people in WCA

Ensuring a better future for young people in WCA involves:

- Expanding access to schooling at all levels for all young people and ensuring that girls and children from poor households and communities are not left behind in access to quality educational opportunities;
- Creating and sustaining economic opportunities and protection for young people through effective and workable rights-based legislations, laws, and policies from all socioeconomic and other vulnerabilities like violence, child marriage, servitude, and labour exploitation;
- Developing and implementing effective health promotion programs to address poor health among young people;
- Ensuring that health systems deliver efficient, accessible, and affordable services to prevent and control diseases and suffering, and reduce threats, among youth;
- Fostering the involvement of youth in governance and in the development and articulation of solutions to the issues that face them;
- Strategic investment in research and data systems on the drivers and dynamics of the challenges of young people, including what works to sustainably address these challenges and in filling the critical data gaps on young people in WCA; and
- Develop leadership on economic and cultural issues that undermine sustainable economic development in WCA.



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