# WOMEN IN THE LABOUR FORCE IN UGANDA

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# WOMEN IN THE LABOUR FORCE IN UGANDA

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# ABSTRACT

The paper aimed to assess and share evidence on the labour market dynamics for women in Uganda and discuss the factors that influence female labour force participation across the two NLFS survey rounds, 2016/17 and 2021. Using descriptive analyses, the study finds a notable decline in overall employment rates between 2016/17 and 2021, with women experiencing a sharper reduction (6 percentage points) than men (4 percentage points). The findings also indicate that employment rates for women peak between the ages of 35 and 39 years. Women predominantly work in vulnerable sectors, often as independent workers with no hired employees. In 2021, at least 65.1% of women worked in agriculture, while 22.4% worked in services and 12.2% worked in industry. Women's overrepresentation in agriculture and underrepresentation in industry and services underscores systemic barriers, including restricted access to capital, training, and formal employment avenues. Unpaid care work emerged as a critical constraint, with women spending significantly more hours on domestic responsibilities than men. The proportion of female youth categorised as Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET) is nearly double that of male youths, further underscoring the compounded challenges of unpaid care, educational disparities, and limited job opportunities. The multinomial logistic regression analysis identified education as a pivotal factor influencing women's employment outcomes. Higher educational attainment significantly increases the likelihood of formal wage employment, while those with lower education levels are more likely to be concentrated in informal roles. The analysis further reveals that age, marital status, and urban residence shape the type of employment women engage in, with older women more likely to be self-employed, married women less likely to be unemployed while urban women are more likely to access wage employment. The study concludes that addressing gender disparities in employment requires comprehensive strategies, including targeted skills development, flexible work policies, enhanced social protections, and region-specific employment initiatives. By fostering inclusive labour markets and empowering women through education and policy reforms, Uganda can harness its female workforce's potential to drive sustainable economic growth and gender equity.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in the labour force is not just a matter of equality, but a key driver for economic development and poverty reduction. Globally, the labour force participation rate for women averages 47%, significantly lower than the 72% participation rate for men, reflecting persistent structural barriers to female economic engagement ((ILO, 2022)). In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the overall female labour force participation rate (FLFP) has stagnated around 60% since the 1990s despite substantial improvements in education, access to healthcare, and economic opportunities (Bachaus & Loichinger, 2022). Uganda is no exception to this trend, where women's participation in productive and decent employment remains limited, with vulnerable employment and informal labour disproportionately affecting women. In Uganda, for example, 75% of total employment is in the informal sector. In comparison, 92% of youth entering the workforce join this sector.[1] These scenarios underscore the critical importance of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 and 8, which aim to achieve gender equality, empower all women and girls, and promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all, respectively.

In Uganda, the female labour force participation rate stood at 39% in 2021, while the rate for men was 58% (UBOS, 2021). This relative gender gap masks deep inequalities in the quality and nature of employment opportunities available to women. Despite the relatively high FLFP rate, most Ugandan women in the workforce, especially in rural areas, are engaged in subsistence agriculture, informal work, or vulnerable employment characterised by low pay, lack of job security, and minimal social protection. Indeed, vulnerable employment affects 81.4% of women, compared to 67.1% of men, underscoring the precarious conditions in which most Ugandan women work (UBOS, 2021). While agriculture employs 77% of the rural population, growth in the sector has remained weak, holding back the potential for agro-industrial development and higher-value employment, which could provide better prospects for women.

Notably, even with the experienced impressive economic growth, particularly between 2010 and 2019, with an annualised average growth rate of 5.4% (World Bank, 2020). However, the economy's ability to create productive and decent jobs has lagged this growth. This has resulted in high unemployment and underemployment rates, especially among the youth and women. In addition, female entrepreneurship is rising, with Uganda boasting one of the highest rates of female entrepreneurship globally (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2022). However, this entrepreneurship is often driven by necessity rather than opportunity, with many women starting businesses to cope with the lack of formal employment opportunities. Societal expectations regarding unpaid domestic and caregiving work further burden women, limiting their ability to participate fully in the labour market. Women in Uganda spend nearly twice as much time on unpaid care work as men, dedicating 14.6% of their day to such tasks, compared to 7.5% for men (UBOS, 2019).

Therefore, examining women's employment in Uganda is critically important. Studies suggest that harnessing women's economic potential could elevate Uganda's GDP by as much as 15% (World Bank, 2018; IMF, 2019). Furthermore, studies show a direct link between women's income and improved household well-being and poverty reduction (UNDP, 2015). As Uganda strives to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), the economic empowerment of women becomes not just a matter of equity but a cornerstone of sustainable national development (UN Women, 2015). Against this background, this paper aims to assess and share evidence on the labour market dynamics for women in Uganda. In addition, the paper discusses the factors that influence women's participation in the labour force to inform development policies aimed at women's economic inclusion.

1 https://balloonventures.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Decent-Work-in-Ugandas-Informal-Economy.pdf

# 2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Women's labour force participation (FLFP) has been a global focal point of academic and policy discussions due to its critical role in promoting economic growth, reducing gender disparities, and achieving sustainable development (ILO, 2022; Mukhopadhyay, 2023). Across regions, significant variations exist in FLFP rates, driven by a complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and policy factors. Globally, the labour force participation rate for women is 47%, compared to 72% for men, with the gender gap being particularly pronounced in South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where economic participation scores are as low as 33.8% and 40.9%, respectively (ILO, 2022; Global Gender Gap Report, 2021). Conversely, regions like Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa show relatively higher rates, reflecting differing socio-economic structures and policy environments (Mukhopadhyay, 2023; Blau & Kahn, 2016). Mukhopadhyay (2023), while examining the disparities in female labour force participation, found that many factors shape labour force participation, with each factor playing a different role.

Various studies emphasise the central role of education in enhancing FLFP. Higher educational attainment increases women's employability and access to higher-quality jobs, as noted in studies from both developing and developed regions (Marjanović et al., 2024; Itaoui et al., 2024; Cholifah & Sutrisno, 2023; Aprirachman & Nurasia, 2022; Heath & Jayachandran, 2018). For instance, in East Java, Indonesia, women with higher education levels were significantly more likely to participate in the labour force, illustrating how education aligns with human capital theory (Cholifah & Sutrisno, 2023). Similarly, studies in Mexico and Europe show that educational advancements have facilitated women's entry into the workforce, albeit with regional variations influenced by cultural norms and economic structures (Pederzini & Meza, 2023; Bussolo et al., 2024). Studies focusing on Uganda and other African countries provide evidence supporting the positive impact of education on female labour force participation (FLFP). In Uganda, Bbaale (2014) found that women with secondary and post-secondary education levels are more likely to engage in the labour force, highlighting the role of education in enhancing women's economic participation. Similarly, Backhaus and Loichinger (2021) observed that in sub-Saharan Africa, higher educational attainment among women correlates with increased labour force participation despite overall stagnation in FLFP rates. In addition to education, Guli and Geda (2021) and Gebreyes (2019) found age and marital status to be among the determinants of women's participation in the labour force in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

Childcare responsibilities and family obligations remain significant barriers to women's participation in the labour force (Delecourt et al., 2023; Le Barbanchon et al., 2020). Halim et al. (2023), in their meta-analysis, found that improved access to affordable childcare increased female participation on both the extensive (whether a woman works) and intensive margins (how many hours she works) in 21 out of 22 studies across low-income countries. The lack of affordable childcare options often forces women to make significant compromises in their work arrangements, limiting their income potential and productivity. Delecourt and Fitzpatrick (2021) report that up to 38% of women bring their children to work, which results in lower earnings for self-employed women than their male counterparts. Studies from the OECD further emphasise the importance of childcare subsidies and paid parental leave in supporting women's workforce participation, suggesting that policy interventions like these could alleviate the dual burdens of work and family obligations (OECD, 2004). For instance, childcare subsidies have been particularly effective in increasing FLFP by reducing the opportunity cost of employment for mothers, especially in high-tax economies (Heath et al., 2024). However, policies like child benefits, which generate income effects without linking them to labour market participation, may inadvertently reduce labour supply (OECD, 2004). Also, while promoting workforce re-entry, paid parental leave can have diminishing returns when excessively extended, potentially harming career trajectories and skill retention.

On the one hand, socio-cultural norms continue to shape women's participation in the labour market, particularly in developing countries where traditional gender roles often prevail. These norms often reinforce

the perception of men as primary breadwinners and women as primary caregivers, further limiting women's engagement in formal employment (ILO, 2022; Gentile et al., 2023). Studies from Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) reveal that such norms restrict women's mobility and control over finances, exacerbating gender disparities in the labour force (Bertay et al., 2020; World Bank, 2012). Verick (2014) notes that societal expectations in developing countries often restrict women's opportunities for formal employment, perpetuating economic dependency and limiting their financial autonomy. Bursztyn et al. (2023) find that in most countries, women are more supportive than men of the idea of working outside the home. However, restrictive social norms present significant barriers, particularly in developing countries. Targeted interventions to shift household dynamics, such as granting women financial autonomy through bank accounts, have demonstrated the potential to overcome these constraints (Field et al., 2021). In Uganda as well, these entrenched patriarchal norms and practices continue to undermine the position of women in society, limiting their autonomy and economic opportunities (UNDP, 2022; USAID, 2017; World Bank, 2021). By keeping women from realising their potential (Ahaibwe, 2016), these cultural constraints partly contribute to women's overrepresentation in subsistence agriculture and informal employment, sectors characterised by low wages and job insecurity.

In addition to social norms, economic structures, labour market dynamics, and policies play critical roles in shaping women's workforce participation. Structural transformation, particularly the shift from agriculture to non-farm employment, has been pivotal in some regions but insufficient in others. In India, declining agricultural employment and limited growth in non-farm jobs disproportionately affected women, contributing to a notable decline in FLFP (Deshpande & Singh, 2024). In contrast, Mexico experienced an upward trend in FLFP driven by increased education levels and declining fertility rates, although the pace of growth has varied over decades (Bhalotra & Fernández, 2024). Uganda's predominantly agricultural economy offers few non-farm employment opportunities, contributing to the exclusion of women from formal sectors and complicating efforts to increase their participation rates. However, the demand side of labour markets also poses challenges. Discrimination in hiring practices and unsafe working conditions remain significant barriers, particularly in developing countries. For instance, in Pakistan, demand-side constraints such as employer biases against hiring women outweighed supply-side factors in limiting job opportunities for women (Gentile et al., 2023). Similarly, the concentration of desirable jobs for women in specific sectors, such as textiles, exacerbates monopsony power and wage disparities, further discouraging participation (Sharma, 2023).

The characteristics of available jobs, including workplace safety and flexibility, greatly impact women's decisions to participate in the labour market. Unsafe working conditions and harassment are common barriers, especially in low-income and labour-intensive industries. For instance, Boudreau et al. (2023) report that nearly 8% of garment workers in a large Bangladeshi factory experienced sexual harassment. Similarly, Datta et al. (2023) indicate that inflexible work arrangements and limited access to family-friendly policies restrict women's labour force participation. In addition, Chiplunkar and Goldberg (2021) highlight that female entrepreneurs face higher barriers to starting businesses than men. However, they find it easier to recruit female workers, suggesting that reducing barriers to female entrepreneurship could significantly increase FLFP. Evidence from cross-country studies reveals that proactive policies can address the barriers women face in joining and staying in the workforce. For example, Heath et al. (2024) report that childcare provision and employment flexibility policies in Mexico positively impacted female labour force participation. By contrast, policies lacking gender sensitivity, such as austerity measures advocated by the IMF, have been associated with increased female unemployment during economic crises (Pederzini & Meza, 2024).

Gender wage gaps persist as a critical issue, undermining the economic incentives for women to join and remain in the labour force. Discriminatory practices, differential access to high-amenity jobs, and the undervaluation of women's work partly account for these gaps (Blau & Kahn, 2017). Research from Brazil highlights how limited commuting options and unsafe environments confine women to low-wage jobs, perpetuating wage disparities (Sharma, 2023). Studies show that the gendered nature of automation and technological shifts

disproportionately threaten women's jobs, particularly in routine-intensive roles (Brussevich et al., 2018). Social protection policies, such as equal retirement ages and anti-discrimination laws, have demonstrated the potential to mitigate gender disparities in the labour force. Marjanović et al. (2024) found that these policies positively influence FLFP, particularly when combined with efforts to enhance women's education and net earnings. Nonetheless, policy effectiveness often depends on context-specific factors, including the degree of enforcement and the alignment of policies with cultural norms and economic realities.

In summary, the labour market dynamics and the determinants of FLFP are multifaceted, encompassing education, cultural norms, economic structures, demand-side barriers, and inflexible or unsafe work environments, among other factors. Although some regions have made progress, persistent barriers including discrimination, unsafe work environments, and inadequate childcare options continue to hinder women's economic inclusion. Therefore, this study examines the labour market dynamics that shape women's labour force participation in Uganda and the determinants of their participation.

## 2.1 Efforts to boost female labour force participation

Over the years, the Ugandan government and various stakeholders have made significant strides toward empowering women economically through targeted interventions. These range from legal frameworks promoting gender equality to programs enhancing women's access to education, entrepreneurship, and employment opportunities. Despite these efforts, challenges remain, necessitating a continuous evaluation of the effectiveness of these initiatives in addressing the socio-economic barriers that hinder women's full participation in the labour market. Below outlines some of the major strategies, their achievements, and the challenges faced in their implementation.

The initial effort to enhance FLFP in Uganda was through the *Gender Equality Provisions* enshrined in the 1995 Constitution. These provisions established a legal framework promoting gender equality, particularly in employment and education, laying the foundation for women's empowerment and increased participation in the workforce.

The *National Gender Policy (1997, revised in 2007)* established a framework for mainstreaming gender across various sectors, with MoGLSD leading its implementation.[2] The 2007 revision was due to the emerging focus on addressing economic growth and poverty eradication by enhancing livelihoods, advocating for women's rights, promoting gender equality in decision-making and governance, and integrating gender perspectives into macroeconomic management.[3] Despite these advancements, the policy's implementation has encountered significant challenges, particularly at the grassroots level, where cultural and traditional norms limit women's full participation, particularly in the labour market. Despite increased women's political representation, deeply rooted gender biases still favour male dominance in top leadership roles (Watson, Kyomuhendo & Chimire, 2020).

*Skilling Uganda Program (2012-2022)* made strides in increasing vocational training opportunities for women, enhancing their employability across various sectors. Through the Skills Development Facility, 27,059 women received hands-on practical training, reflecting the program's success in increasing skills development (MoES, 2020).[4] Nevertheless, gender stereotypes in technical and vocational education and training have led to low female enrolment in traditionally male-dominated fields such as construction and technology (STEM courses) like bicycle repair and electrical-related fields (MoES, 2019[5] & Sow and Grow Foundation, 2017[6]).

The *Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP)*, launched in 2015, aimed to empower women through grants and credit to women-owned businesses and enhanced financial inclusion. According to FOWODE's

2 https://leap.unep.org/en/countries/ug/national-legislation/uganda-gender-policy-2007
3 https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/uga163564.pdf
4 https://www.education.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/3-200826-PROJECT-ACHIEVEMENTS.pdf
5 MoES (2019). The Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Policy (2019)
6 https://afard.net/publications/evaluation-and-research/152-action-research-report-btvet-skilling-effectiveness/file

review, the program effectively addressed key barriers to women's entrepreneurship, focusing on start-up capital provision and business management training to mitigate business failure risks. By 2018, UWEP had reached 100,999 women, surpassing its target of 100,000 beneficiaries. Despite these achievements, the program inadequately addresses non-financial barriers such as gender inequalities within households and societal norms restricting women's business ownership and management. In addition, UWEP lacks strategies to enhance women's access to markets and does not sufficiently prioritise increasing innovation, which is key to emerging economies (FOWODE, 2020).[7]

In 1990*, Affirmative Action in Higher Education* was introduced, granting qualified women an additional 1.5 bonus points for college admission to promote their participation in higher education (Odaga, 2020).[8] This policy significantly boosted female enrolment, with numbers rising from 57,721 in higher education institutions (HEIs) in 2006 to 120,561 in 2019/20, more than doubling within this period. This progress has contributed to a better representation of women in higher-skilled occupations (UNCHE, 2010[9]; 2019/20[10]). Despite these gains, the initiative has disproportionately benefited women from the Central region, particularly in Wakiso and Kampala districts, which accounted for 40 percent of beneficiaries. These districts are home to the country's top-performing high schools, creating an advantage for women in urban areas while disadvantaging those in rural regions with less access to quality secondary education (Odaga, 2020).

Other education initiatives, such as Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Secondary Education (USE) policies, have significantly improved access to education for girls, reducing gender gaps in primary and secondary school enrolment. However, high dropout rates among girls due to early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and inadequate access to secondary education in rural areas remain a persistent challenge.

*Equal Opportunities* Policy (2006), *the Employment Act (2006),* and the *National Employment Policy for Uganda (2011)* have collectively aimed to promote gender equality and reduce disparities in employment. The Equal Opportunities Policy and the Employment Act introduced affirmative action, maternity leave, and protections against workplace harassment, leading to increased female representation in public administration and improved workplace rights. Similarly, the National Employment Policy sought to address gender gaps by promoting decent work opportunities. However, these initiatives face common challenges, including weak enforcement mechanisms, particularly in the informal sector, persistent gender biases, and limited public awareness of their provisions. The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) is charged with eliminating discrimination and inequalities based on sex and other grounds and with advancing affirmative action initiatives.[11] Low visibility and insufficient influence limited its impact, especially in addressing discriminatory practices in private-sector employment.

In conclusion, while there have been notable achievements, such as increased access to education, financial inclusion and employment opportunities for women, several challenges persist. These include structural barriers like limited access to formal markets, gaps in policy implementation, and societal norms that continue to undermine gender equality. Moreover, despite improvements in some sectors, women's participation in vulnerable employment remains high, indicating the need for more targeted interventions to address their unique challenges in the labour market. Moving forward, sustained efforts are essential to ensure that these initiatives reach a broader segment of women, particularly in rural areas, and are better aligned with the evolving needs of Uganda's female workforce.

7 FOWODE (2020). Accelerating Women's Economic Empowerment? A Review of the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP)

8 Odaga, G (2020). Gender in Uganda's tertiary educational distribution. Social Sciences & Humanities Open 2 (2020) 100023

9 https://www.unche.or.ug/repository/files/original/a6f7e577079735c17e55d-c6f9fc477a1.pdf

10 https://unche.or.ug/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/State-for-Higher-Education-Report-2019-2022.pdf

11 https://www.eoc.go.ug/about-us/

# 3. DATA AND METHODS

The study uses nationally representative secondary data from the Uganda National Labour Force Surveys i.e. the NLFS 2021 and NLFS 2016/17. The Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS collected this data). To quantify and understand the disparities in participation and representation, the study investigates labour market dynamics for women. The study achieves this by undertaking descriptive analyses of key employment characteristics such as labour force participation rates, wages, employment status, sectors, industries, and job types held by women comparing these to men's characteristics and exploring trends across different sectors, age groups, and regions. The study also delves into the socio-cultural, economic, and other policy-relevant factors that impact women's ability to join and thrive in the labour market. Specifically, following Cook (1998), a multinomial logistic regression analysis is used to examine the factors associated with employment outcomes in Uganda. This method estimates the probabilities of each employment outcome relative to the reference category (Unpaid work), allowing for an understanding of how each independent variable influences the likelihood of different employment statuses. The MNL assumes that each individual of working age (14 to 64 years) may select among five mutually exclusive alternatives in Uganda's labour market, that is; formal wage employment, informal wage employment, employer/ own account worker, unpaid work, or being unemployed. The model specification is as follows:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_i X_i + U_i$$

Where $Y_i$ represents the dependent variables and $X_i$ represents the independent variables. The MNL model essentially compares any given outcome with a reference outcome and thus has response probabilities given as,

$$P(y = j|x) = exp(x\beta_j)/\left[1 + \sum_{h=1}^{J} exp(x\beta_h)\right], j = 1, \ldots, J \quad (1)$$

where $\beta_j$ is a $(K \times 1)$, $j = 1, \ldots, J$. In addition, to ensure model identification, $\beta_j$ is set to zero ($\beta_j = 0$ ) for one of the categories, and coefficients are then interpreted with respect to that category, termed the base category, where $J = 1$, is the base category and $\beta_1 = 0$ is the identification condition.

Specifically, the multinomial logistic regression model is written in the form:

$$Yij = f(Age, Marital\ status, Residence, education\ level, household\ size, household\ head, householdsize, region, migration\ in\ the\ last\ five\ years, disability, main\ source\ of\ information) \quad (2)$$

Where $Yij$ captures woman $i's$ classification of employment for pay or profit based on self-reported occupations. Because rural and urban areas are not homogenous and thus have different labor markets, we estimated separate models for the rural-urban and national levels. Table 1 below specifies and presents all model variables.

**Table 1: Definitions and measurement of variables**

| Variable name | Definition and Measurement |
|---|---|
| **Dependent variables** | |
| | Classification of employment for pay or profit based on self-reported occupations. |
| Unpaid work | Dummy 1=Yes, 0=Otherwise |
| Unemployment | Dummy 1=Yes, 0=Otherwise |
| Formal wage employment | Dummy 1=Yes, 0=Otherwise |
| Informal wage employment | Dummy 1=Yes, 0=Otherwise |
| Employer Own account | Dummy 1=Yes, 0=Otherwise |
| **Explanatory variables** | |
| Age | Self-reported age of the respondent |
| | 1. 14 to 17 (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 2. 18 to 30 (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 3. 31 to 64 (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| Marital status | Self-reported current marital status of the respondent |
| | 1. Never married (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 2. Currently married (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 3. Divorced/ Separated (1=Yes,0 otherwise) |
| | 4. Widow/ Widower (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| Household head | Dummy 1=Yes, 0=Otherwise |
| Household size | Measured as a count variable. |
| Residence | Dummy 1=Rural, 0=Urban |
| Region | 1. Kampala (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 2. Buganda south (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 3. Buganda North (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 4. Busoga (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 5. Bukedi (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 6. Bugisu (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 7. Teso (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 8. Karamoja (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 9. Lango (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 10. Acholi (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 11. West Nile (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 12. Bunyoro (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 13. Tooro (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 14. Ankole (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 15. Kigezi (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| Education level | Self-reported highest level of educational attainment |
| | 1. No education (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 2. Some primary (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 3. Completed primary (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 4. Some secondary (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 5. Completed secondary (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 6. Post primary specialised training (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 7. Post-secondary specialised training (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 8. Degree+ (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| Migration in the past five years | Dummy 1=Yes, 0=Otherwise |
| Disability | 1. Disabled |
| | 0. Without disability |
| Major Source of information | 1. Radio (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 2. Newspaper/books/magazine (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |
| | 3. Community Barazas/ announcers (1=Yes, 0 otherwise) |

Source: Authors' construction, 2024.

# 4. EVIDENCE ON LABOUR MARKET DYNAMICS FOR WOMEN IN UGANDA

## 4.1 Employment rates in Uganda

We calculate the employment rate (employment-to-population ratio) using information on usual activity, which is, the proportion of the population aged 14 to 64 years who were employed during the reference period. Findings in Table 2 reveal key changes in employment rates and the distribution of employed individuals in Uganda across the two NLFS survey rounds, 2016/17 and 2021 based on gender, residence, region, and marital status. Nationally, there was a 5 percent reduction in Uganda's employment-to-population ratio from 48% in 2016/17 to 43% in 2021. This decline affected both genders, with females experiencing a sharper 6 percentage point decrease compared to males' 4-point drop, mainly due to COVID-19 disruptions. In addition, the proportion of working-age women (33.8%) employed is lower than that of men (51.9%). This low proportion is more pronounced for women in rural areas (29.6%) compared to urban women (42.1%). This highlights that rural women were disproportionately impacted in terms of employment and partly implies that the rural population contributes more to the unemployment rates in the country (rural 38.4% versus urban 51.2%).

**Table 2: Employment rates and percentage distribution of the employed working-age population in Uganda by gender, residence and marital status, 2016/17 & 2021**

| Group | Employment-to-Population ratio | | | Percentage distribution of employed[12] | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2016/17 (%) | 2021 | Change (% points) | 2016/17 (%) | 2021 | Change (% points) |
| **National** | 47.6 | 42.5 | -5.1 | 58.7 | 48.8 | -9.9 |
| **Gender** | | | | | | |
| Female | 39.8 | 33.8 | -6 | 43.7 | 40.9 | -2.8 |
| Male | 56.2 | 51.9 | -4.3 | 56.3 | 59.1 | 2.8 |
| **Rural** | 42.8 | 38.4 | -4.4 | 65.4 | 61.2 | -4.2 |
| **Gender** | | | | | | |
| Female | 35.4 | 29.6 | -5.8 | 43.1 | 39.1 | -4 |
| Male | 50.7 | 42.1 | -8.6 | 56.9 | 60.9 | 4 |
| **Urban** | 60.5 | 51.2 | -9.3 | 34.6 | 38.8 | 4.2 |
| **Gender** | | | | | | |
| Female | 51.1 | 42.1 | -9 | 44.8 | 43.7 | -1.1 |
| Male | 71.4 | 61.6 | -9.8 | 55.2 | 56.3 | 1.1 |
| **Central** | 50.3 | 50.7 | 0.4 | 37.4 | 34.9 | -2.5 |
| **Gender** | | | | | | |
| Female | 41.2 | 41.7 | 0.5 | 42.9 | 42.6 | -0.3 |
| Male | 53.6 | 60.5 | 6.9 | 57.1 | 57.4 | 0.3 |
| **East** | 27.1 | 32.4 | 5.3 | 14.2 | 19.4 | 5.2 |
| **Gender** | | | | | | |
| Female | 19.3 | 22.5 | 3.2 | 36.3 | 35.5 | -0.8 |
| Male | 29.5 | 42.7 | 13.2 | 63.7 | 64.5 | 0.8 |
| **North** | 34.5 | 42.8 | 8.3 | 21.6 | 20.2 | -1.4 |
| **Gender** | | | | | | |
| Female | 33.5 | 37.9 | 4.4 | 46.9 | 45.9 | -1 |

12 The employment-to-population ratio reflects the percentage of the working-age population (14–64 years) that is employed. In contrast, the percentage distribution of employed persons refers to the proportion of employed individuals in a given category (e.g., female, rural, never married) out of the total number of employed people.

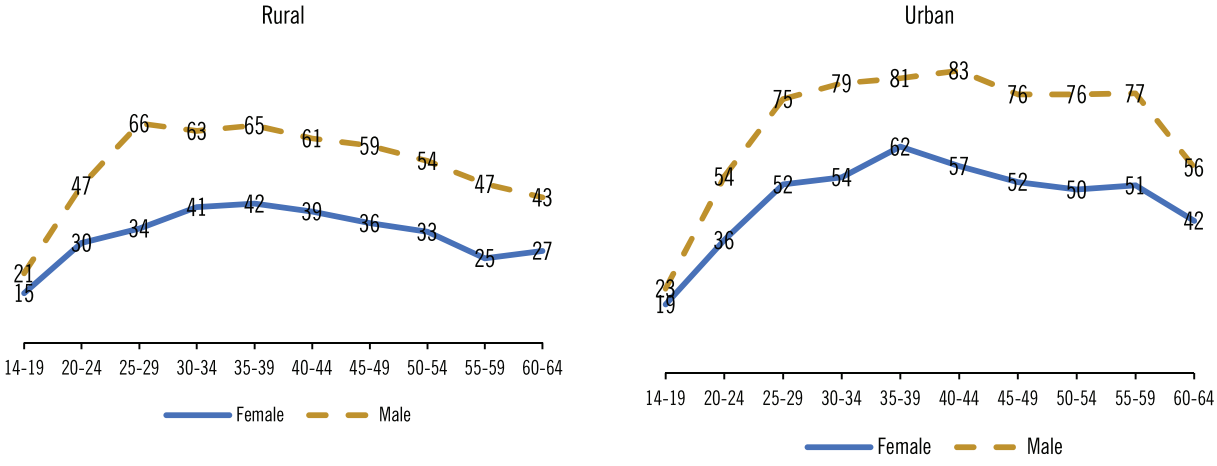
| Group | Employment-to-Population ratio | | | Percentage distribution of employed[12] | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2016/17 (%) | 2021 | Change (% points) | 2016/17 (%) | 2021 | Change (% points) |
| Male | 34.8 | 48.2 | 13.4 | 53.1 | 54.1 | 1 |
| **West** | 42.3 | 43.1 | 0.8 | 26.8 | 25.5 | -1.3 |
| **Gender** | | | | | | |
| Female | 41.1 | 32.6 | -8.5 | 46 | 38.8 | -7.2 |
| Male | 42.7 | 54.2 | 11.5 | 54 | 61.2 | 7.2 |
| **Never married** | 23.9 | 28.4 | 4.5 | 24.4 | 25.8 | 1.4 |
| **Gender** | | | | | | |
| Female | 25.7 | 23.6 | -2.1 | 34.4 | 38 | 3.6 |
| Male | 23 | 32.3 | 9.3 | 65.6 | 62 | -3.6 |
| **Currently married** | 52.4 | 51.6 | -0.8 | 64.4 | 64 | -0.4 |
| **Gender** | | | | | | |
| Female | 45 | 36.4 | -8.6 | 41.7 | 36.3 | -5.4 |
| Male | 53.3 | 67.8 | 14.5 | 58.3 | 63.7 | 5.4 |
| **Divorced/Separated** | 59.7 | 54.8 | -4.9 | 7.9 | 7.2 | -0.7 |
| **Gender** | | | | | | |
| Female | 59.7 | 53.8 | -5.9 | 68.4 | 73.5 | 5.1 |
| Male | 59.7 | 57.6 | -2.1 | 31.6 | 26.5 | -5.1 |
| **Widowed** | 32.3 | 43.5 | 11.2 | 3.3 | 3 | -0.3 |
| **Gender** | | | | | | |
| Female | 34.1 | 43.5 | 9.4 | 92.4 | 87.1 | -5.3 |
| Male | 24.8 | 43.7 | 18.9 | 7.6 | 12.9 | 5.3 |

Source: Author's computation using NLFS 2016/17 and 2021

Employment rates in Uganda increased regionally at varying levels. The north saw the largest percentage point increase of 8%, followed by the east (5%), the west (1%), and the central (0.4%). The observed percentage point increase in employment favoured men in all regions; estimates were 12%, 13%, 13%, and 7% for the western, northern, eastern, and central regions, respectively. Compared to women, it is 9%, 4%, 3% and 1% for the western, northern, eastern and central regions, respectively. Regarding marital status, employment rates for married are nearly twice as low for women (36.4%) compared to men (67.8%). Similar findings are reported by Teniola (2024) in the Borgen Project, revealing that in Uganda, labour market participation varies significantly between men and women, influenced by household type and marital status. Men consistently have higher employment rates across all categories, with marital status further affecting this gap. Teniola (2024) reveals that married women face more significant challenges in the labour market than their single counterparts, often due to childcare and family responsibilities. This is also consistent with Delecourt et al. (2023) and Le Barbanchon et al. (2020), who identify childcare responsibilities and family obligations as significant barriers to women's labour force participation. Employment rates for women are, however, highest among the divorced/separated (53.8%), surpassing that of their married counterparts. We observe this trend globally. Moreover, several factors explain this. Upon the dissolution of a marriage, women often assume the role of primary breadwinner, necessitating their increased participation in the labour force to support themselves and their dependents. Uganda does not uniquely experience this trend. However, it is important to note that despite higher employment rates, divorced or separated women often face significant economic challenges, including loss of property and social exclusion (Van de Walle, 2017).

The percentage distribution of employed persons reveals that although women have lower employment-to-population ratios compared to men, they still

**Figure 1: Employment rates by residence, gender, and age groups, 2021 (%)**




Source: Authors' construction using NLFS 2021

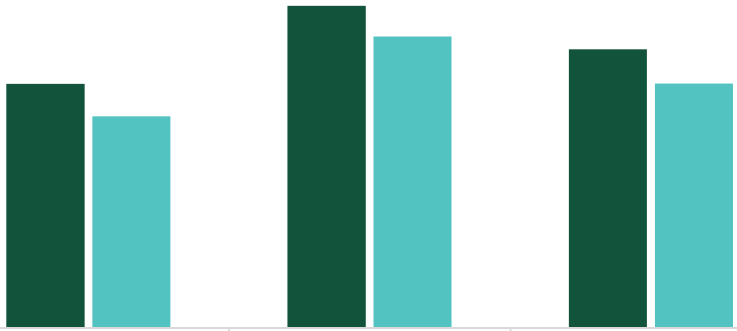
comprised a significant share of Uganda's employed population 40.9% in 2021, down slightly from 43.7% in 2016/17. This decline aligns with broader patterns of reduced female employment during the COVID-19 period. Regionally, the share of employed women dropped most sharply in the Western region (from 46% to 38.8%), while in the Central and Eastern regions, their representation remained relatively stable. Notably, among the currently married, the share of employed women also fell from 41.7% to 36.3%, reinforcing the disproportionate impact of care responsibilities on women's labour market outcomes.

Figure 1 highlights the employment rates of males and females across different age groups in Uganda's rural and urban areas. In both rural and urban settings, men consistently show higher employment rates than women, though the gap is more pronounced in rural areas. For instance, in rural regions, male employment starts at 21% for the 14-19 age group and peaks at 66% for the 25-29 age group or 65% for the 35-39 age group, whereas for women in rural areas, employment begins at 15% in the 14-19 age group and peaks at 42% between ages 35 and 39. This highlights a substantial gender divide, with men entering the labour force earlier and at higher rates than women, particularly in their prime working years. As the rural population ages, both men and women experience a decline in employment rates, though men remain more likely to be employed than women in older age groups.

In urban areas, employment rates are generally higher for both men and women compared to rural areas. Urban men start with a 23% employment rate in the 14-19 age group, reaching a peak of 83% in the 40-44 age group, while urban women start at 19% in the youngest age group and peak at 62% in the 35-39 age group. Diverse employment opportunities, better access to education, formal job sectors, and supportive services likely account for the smaller gender gap in urban employment, particularly among working-age adults. However, the gender gap is still evident, with men consistently achieving higher employment rates across all age groups. Therefore, this picture shows that while urban areas offer more employment opportunities for both genders, women in both rural and urban settings continue to face greater barriers to employment than men, reflecting broader structural inequalities in Uganda's labour market.

Several interrelated factors, such as reproductive patterns, early marriage, and educational attainment, account for the observed peak in employment rates among Ugandan women aged 35–39, in both rural and urban areas. Early marriage and high fertility rates are prevalent in Uganda, particularly in rural regions. Many women marry and begin childbearing at a young age, often completing their desired family size by mid-30s. According to the 2022 UDHS report, the median age at first marriage for women aged 25-49 is approximately 18.8 years, and the total fertility rate stands at 5.2 children per woman, with fertility rates peaking among women aged 20 to 24 years, followed by a decline after that age (UBOS, 2023). Implying that at age 35-39, many women have completed their

**Figure 2: Vulnerable employment rates by gender (%)**



| | Male | Female | National |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2016/17 | 53.6 | 70.8 | 61.2 |
| 2021 | 46.5 | 64 | 53.7 |

Source: Author's construction using NLFS 2016/17 and NLFS 2021

reproductive responsibilities, allowing them to re-enter or increase their participation in the labour market. According to the 2021 NLFS report, the percentage of females (16%) with no formal education was double that of males, with only nearly 10.8% having completed secondary education or higher. This limited education partly constrains their employment prospects, often delaying their entry into the labour market until after childbearing. Another factor could be that cultural expectations often prioritise women's roles as mothers and caregivers, leading many to focus on child-rearing during their early adult years[13]. Once their children reach school age or become more independent, women may have more time and societal acceptance to engage in employment activities.

Results in Figure 2 further show that there has been a significant national reduction in vulnerable employment[14] from 61% in 2016/17 to 54% in 2021, persistent gender disparities still exist. Despite the reduction, women consistently experienced higher rates of vulnerable employment compared to men. Both genders show a similar trend: a significant decrease in vulnerable employment from 2016/17 to 2021. For men, the rate dropped from 53.6% to 46.5%, while for women, it decreased from 70.8% to 64%. This trend suggests some progress in reducing vulnerable employment but also highlights the enduring challenges, particularly for women, who consistently face rates about 17-18 percentage points higher than men. The predominance of women in subsistence agriculture, informal trading, and unpaid family work explains their higher rates of vulnerable employment.

The decrease in vulnerable employment between the two survey rounds may reflect the successful implementation of policies to formalise the economy, foster economic growth, and improve education and skills training, in turn, contributing to more stable job opportunities. However, traditional gender roles, women's limited access to education (especially in rural areas) and formal employment opportunities, and cultural norms restricting their participation in specific sectors may explain the persistent gender gap. In addition, the slight increase in vulnerable employment in 2021 for both genders likely reflects the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have pushed more people into informal or vulnerable forms of employment due to economic slowdown and job losses in formal sectors. But also, these gendered patterns could reflect the inadequacy of family-friendly policies in Uganda, particularly the limited employment protection during pregnancy, childbirth, and maternity leave. These gaps in social and labour protections disproportionately affect women especially those in their reproductive years contributing to age-related dips or delays in women's labour force participation and reinforcing structural inequalities in access to decent work.

13 https://joyforchildren.org/the-role-of-social-and-cultural-norms-in-ugandas-child-marriage-and-teenage-pregnancy-crisis/

14 Vulnerable employment consists of the employed workforce who are own account workers or contributing family workers (NLFS, 2021). These are characterised by inadequate earnings, low productivity and difficult conditions of work that undermine workers fundamental right

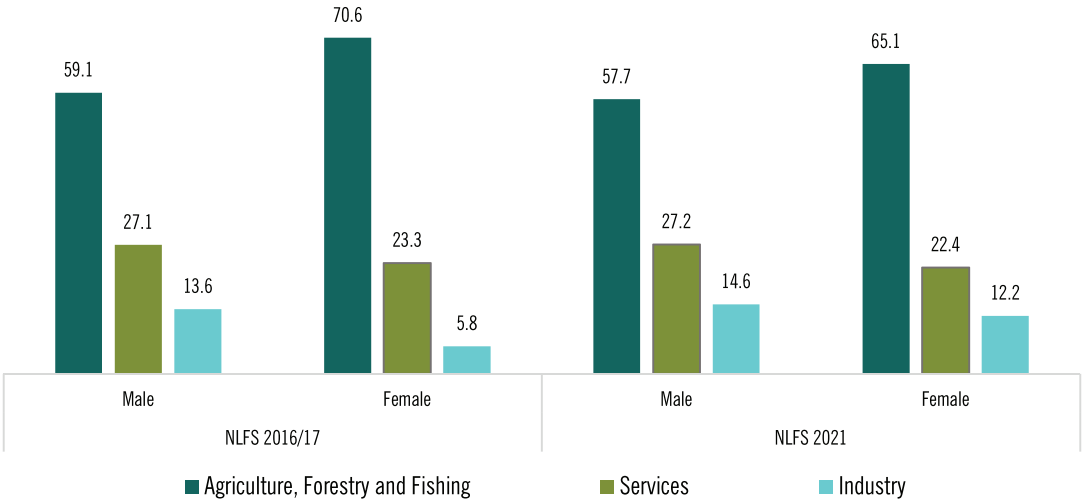
## 4.2 Distribution of the working population

### 4.2.1 Sectoral and industry distribution of the working population by gender

The distribution of Uganda's working population by sector reveals key trends in agriculture, industry, and services across the two NLFS survey rounds, 2016/17 and 2021, as shown in Figure 3, as shown in Figure 3. Agriculture remains the dominant sector for both men and women, though participation is higher among women. Female employment in agriculture was 70.6% in 2016/17 and dropped to 65.1% in 2021, while male participation fluctuated between 59.1% and 57.7% over the same period. The services sector has remained relatively stable for men, with around 27% employed in this sector over the three survey periods, while women's participation was lower, ranging from 21.1% to 22.4% by 2021. The decline in agricultural employment for all genders, suggests a shift toward other sectors or urban migration. On the one hand, women's overrepresentation in agriculture reflects deeper gender-specific constraints within the sector, such as limited access to, ownership of, and decision-making power over productive resources. These constraints make women more likely than men to engage in part-time, seasonal, and low-paying agricultural work, often receiving lower wages for similar roles even when they have comparable experience and qualifications. As a result, their agricultural employment is often concentrated in subsistence or informal activities, offering limited financial security or upward mobility. Table A1 reveals that women are still more heavily represented in non-market agriculture (55.3%) compared with men (44.3%). The underrepresentation of women in industry and high-value service sectors signals systemic barriers such as limited access to education, vocational training, and capital, among other things.

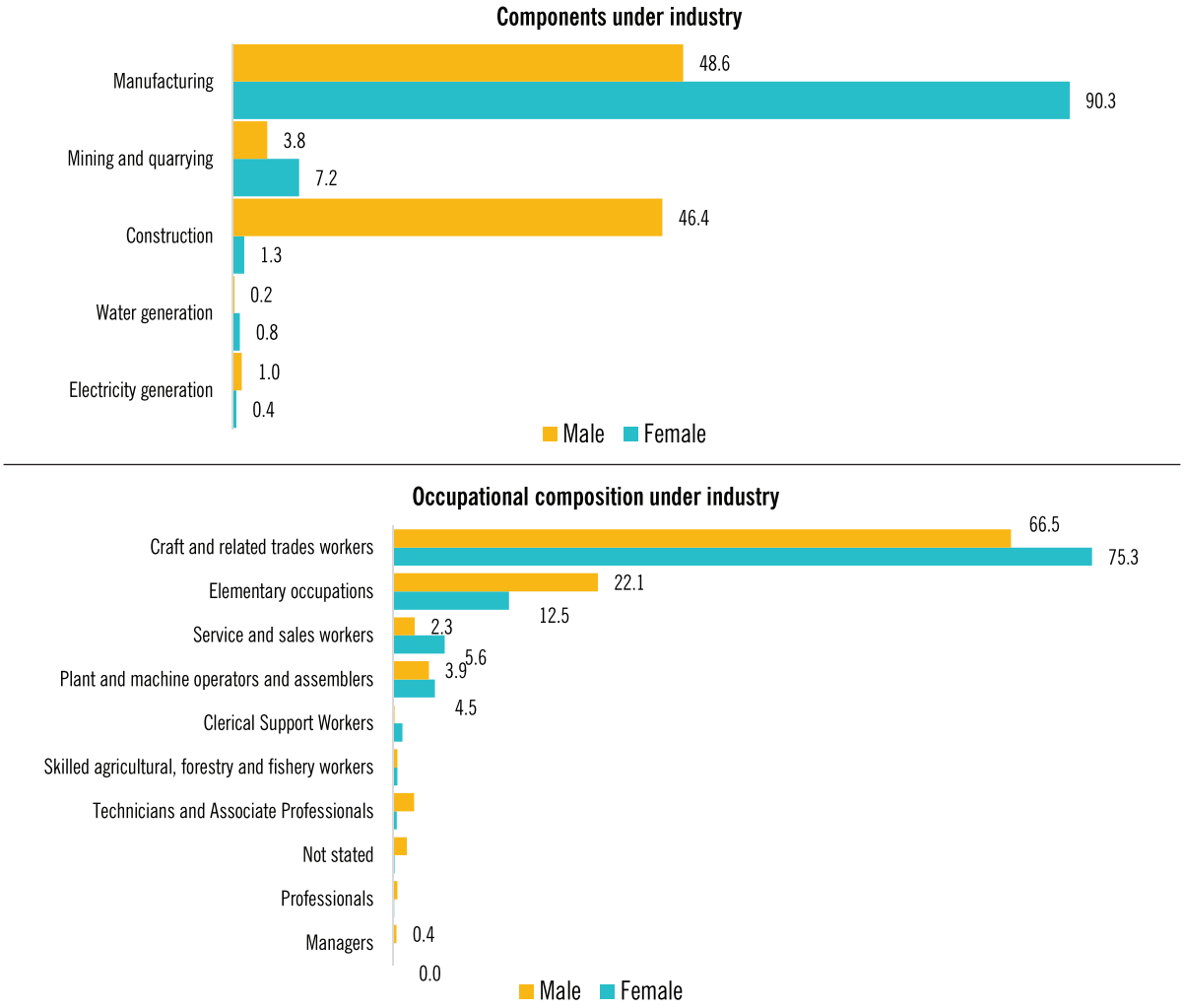
Data from the industry, reflecting the agricultural shift, reveals consistently higher male participation rates. However, the proportion of women in this sector increased significantly from 5.8% in 2016/17 to 12.2% in 2021, indicating growing opportunities for women in industrial work. This shift relates to the issue of productive employment, raising questions about the specific industries women are entering. In these industrial roles, women are typically engaged in labour-intensive roles such as assembly line work and packaging. For instance, at the Mbale Industrial Park, which spans 619 acres and employs over 3,500 women, many are involved in manufacturing processes,

**Figure 3: Distribution of the working population by sector of work**




Source: Author's construction using NLFS 2016/17 and NLFS 2021

**Figure 4: Distribution of the working population under industry by sex**




Source: Author's construction using NLFS 2021

including assembly and packaging tasks[15]. Figure 4 depicts this by revealing that the majority (90.3%) of the women in the industry sector are in manufacturing. However, the majority are in lower-skilled manufacturing jobs, that is, craft and related trades (75.3%), followed by 12.5% in elementary occupations and 5.6% working as sales and services workers.

However, although these jobs for women in the industry sector are associated with more employment benefits (such as leave), as depicted in Figure 5, where more women (18.6%) reported having employment benefits than men (6.6%), they are also associated with vulnerability including low pay, lack of social protection, minimal job security and limited benefits among others. These findings concur with the 2024 UN Women report, which revealed that women in manufacturing earn significantly less than men, with a gender pay gap of 103% in this sector[16].

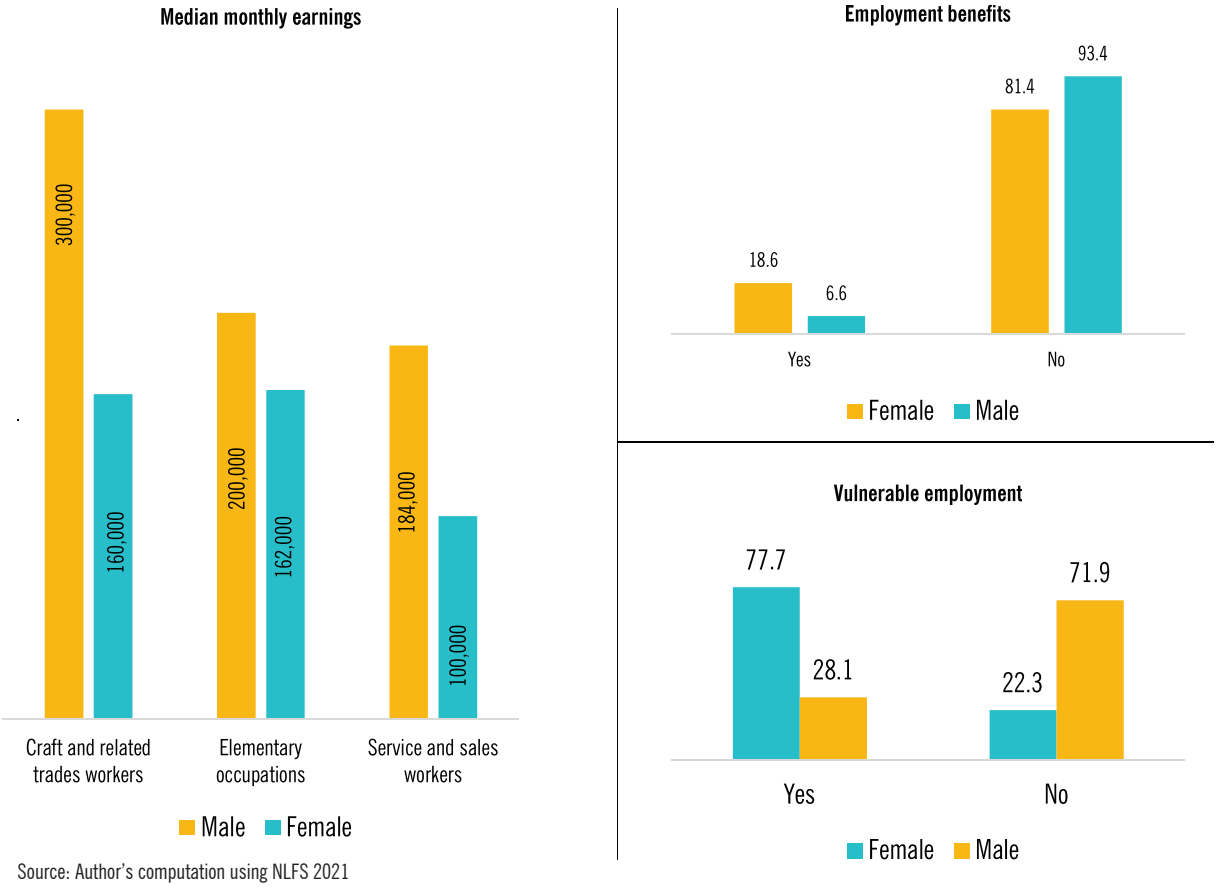
### 4.2.2 Distribution of the working population by the forms of work

The NLFS (2021) classifies the working population as individuals aged 14–64 who were engaged in economic activity, defined according to the System of National Accounts (SNA) standards, as those producing goods and services for pay, profit, or own-use during the reference period. The survey broadly categorizes

15 https://presidentialinitiatives.go.ug/empowering-women-in-mbale-industrial-park/

16 https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/brief-gender_pay_gap_and_labour_market_inequalities_in_uganda.pdf

**Figure 5: Employment benefits and earnings under industry**




Source: Author's computation using NLFS 2021

Uganda's working population into five mutually exclusive forms of work: (i) Own-use production work, which comprises the production of goods and services for one's own final use. This includes other subsistence work and works in subsistence agriculture, forestry and fishing; *(ii) Employment work,* which comprises work performed for others in exchange for pay or profit; (iii) *Unpaid trainee work,* which comprises work performed for others without pay to acquire workplace experience or skills; (iv) *Volunteer work* which consists of non-compulsory work performed for others without pay; (v) *Other work* activities not defined above, like community service. A limitation however is that, while this framework provides critical insights into labour market participation, it reflects a conventional labour statistics approach that excludes many unpaid care and domestic activities which are disproportionately carried out by women. As such, the data may understate the full scope of women's economic contributions.

Table 3 shows that almost half (49%) of the working-age population have jobs for pay or profit, with subsistence agriculture (40%) and other subsistence work (10%) following. A comparison reveals an 18% gap, with 58% of men employed for pay or profit versus 40% of women. Women are mainly engaged in subsistence agriculture (46%) compared to men (34%), reflecting a 12% disparity. This indicates that women, particularly in rural areas, rely more on subsistence agriculture as a source of livelihood. We observe similar trends for youth (aged 18 to 30): 60% of young men, compared to 39% of young women, work for pay or profit, a 21% difference. Young women participate more in subsistence agriculture, with 44% compared to 32% of young men working in this sector. Other subsistence work, including informal jobs, also sees greater involvement from young women (16%) than men (10%). This suggests that young women face more barriers to accessing formal employment and are more dependent on informal or subsistence-based work.

**Table 3: Distribution of the people in the labour force by gender, status in employment, youth status, and residence type for the working-age population aged 14 to 64 (2021)**

| | Female (%) | Male (%) | Total (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Total** | | | 100 |
| **National** | | | |
| Employment | 39.8 | 57.8 | 48.8 |
| Unpaid Trainee | 0.2 | 0.5 | 0.4 |
| Volunteer work | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.3 |
| Subsistence agriculture only | 46.0 | 34.4 | 40.2 |
| Other subsistence work | 13.8 | 7.0 | 10.4 |
| **Youth (18 to 30)** | | | |
| Employment | 39.3 | 60.2 | 49.1 |
| Unpaid Trainee | 0.4 | 1.0 | 0.7 |
| Volunteer work | 0.3 | 0.2 | 0.3 |
| Subsistence agriculture only | 43.8 | 31.6 | 38.1 |
| Other subsistence work | 16.2 | 6.9 | 11.8 |
| **Rural** | | | |
| Employment | 7.2 | 10.7 | 9.3 |
| Unpaid Trainee | 61.1 | 46.2 | 52.1 |
| Volunteer work | 3.1 | 2.6 | 2.8 |
| Subsistence agriculture only | 19.3 | 34.3 | 28.4 |
| Other subsistence work | 9.3 | 6.2 | 7.4 |
| **Youth (18 to 30)** | | | |
| Employment | 6.5 | 8.3 | 7.6 |
| Unpaid Trainee | 58.2 | 42.0 | 48.4 |
| Volunteer work | 3.0 | 2.0 | 2.4 |
| Subsistence agriculture only | 21.8 | 39.8 | 32.7 |
| Other subsistence work | 10.5 | 7.8 | 8.9 |
| **Urban** | | | |
| Employment | 9.2 | 12.9 | 11.3 |
| Unpaid Trainee | 48.4 | 32.3 | 39.3 |
| Volunteer work | 1.2 | 0.5 | 0.8 |
| Subsistence agriculture only | 34.6 | 50.3 | 43.4 |
| Other subsistence work | 6.6 | 4.1 | 5.2 |
| **Youth (18 to 30)** | | | |
| Employment | 4.6 | 4.7 | 4.7 |
| Unpaid Trainee | 42.8 | 26.7 | 34.2 |
| Volunteer work | 0.8 | 0.6 | 0.6 |
| Subsistence agriculture only | 41.9 | 62.7 | 53.0 |
| Other subsistence work | 10.0 | 5.3 | 7.5 |

Source: authors' computation using the NLFS 2021

### 4.2.3 Distribution of the working population by employment status

The NLFS (2021) broadly categorizes Uganda's working-age population (14 to 64 years) into two employment groups: independent and dependent workers. Results in Table 4 reveal that independent workers dominate the working population without employees (47%), followed by employees (34%), employers (10%), contributing family workers (7%) and least are the dependent contractors (2%). Independent workers without employees are predominantly women (56%) who live in rural (61%) and urban (48%) areas. Similarly, Palagashvili and Suarez (2021), Bonnet et al. (2019), and Vanek et al. (2014) reveal that women are predominantly engaged in informal self-employment, managing small-scale enterprises without employees, increasingly participating in independent work, driven by the flexibility and autonomy these positions offer. Independent workers without employees often experience inconsistent income, as their earnings depend on securing contracts, clients, or projects. They do not have employment benefits like health insurance, paid leave, or retirement benefits, among others. Financial institutions view them as higher-risk clients due to their fluctuating income, making it hard for them

**Table 4: Distribution of employed by gender, status in employment, youth status and residence type for the working-age population aged 14 to 64 (2021)**

| | Female (%) | Male (%) | Total (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Total** | | | 100 |
| **National** | | | |
| Employers | 8.1 | 11.5 | 10.1 |
| Independent workers without employees | 55.8 | 41.1 | 47.1 |
| Dependent contractors | 2.3 | 1.8 | 2.0 |
| Employees | 25.6 | 40.2 | 34.2 |
| Contributing family workers | 8.2 | 5.4 | 6.6 |
| **Youth 18 to 30** | | | |
| Employers | 5.7 | 7.0 | 6.5 |
| Independent workers without employees | 51.5 | 36.5 | 42.8 |
| Dependent contractors | 2.0 | 1.5 | 1.7 |
| Employees | 30.5 | 48.2 | 40.7 |
| Contributing family workers | 10.3 | 6.9 | 8.3 |
| **Rural** | | | |
| Employers | 7.2 | 10.7 | 9.3 |
| Independent workers without employees | 61.1 | 46.2 | 52.1 |
| Dependent contractors | 3.1 | 2.6 | 2.8 |
| Employees | 19.3 | 34.3 | 28.4 |
| Contributing family workers | 9.3 | 6.2 | 7.4 |
| **Youth 18 to 30** | | | |
| Employers | 6.5 | 8.4 | 7.6 |
| Independent workers without employees | 58.2 | 42.0 | 48.4 |
| Dependent contractors | 3.0 | 2.0 | 2.4 |
| Employees | 21.8 | 39.8 | 32.7 |
| Contributing family workers | 10.5 | 7.8 | 8.9 |
| **Urban** | | | |
| Employers | 9.2 | 12.9 | 11.3 |
| Independent workers without employees | 48.4 | 32.3 | 39.3 |
| Dependent contractors | 1.2 | 0.5 | 0.8 |
| Employees | 34.6 | 50.3 | 43.4 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Contributing family workers | 6.6 | 4.1 | 5.2 |
| **Youth 18 to 30** | | | |
| Employers | 4.6 | 4.7 | 4.7 |
| Independent workers without employees | 42.8 | 26.7 | 34.2 |
| Dependent contractors | 0.8 | 0.6 | 0.6 |
| Employees | 41.9 | 62.7 | 53 |
| Contributing family workers | 9.9 | 5.3 | 7.5 |

Source: Authors' computation using NLFS, 2021

to qualify for loans, mortgages, or credit. This implies that women are more inclined toward self-employment, likely in informal sectors where they manage small-scale businesses without hiring others.

Table 4 also reveals that employees make up 34% of the workforce but with a substantial gender disparity of 40% of them being men to 26% of women, indicating that men are more likely to engage in formal employment. Contributing family workers (7%) who work in family businesses without formal remuneration reflect the unpaid labour roles women often take up. The youth employment patterns mirror national trends but show some distinct characteristics. Fewer young people are employers (7%), with men still slightly ahead (7%) compared to women (6%). Young women dominate the category of independent workers without employees, with 51% engaged in such roles compared to 37% of young men, indicating that young women are more likely to pursue self-employment. The proportion of young employees is higher among men, with 48% of young men employed compared to 30.5% of young women, a significant gap of 18%, suggesting that young men have more access to formal jobs. Additionally, 8.3% of youth work as contributing family workers, with more young women (10%) in these roles compared to men (7%). Regarding the rural and urban divide, independent workers without employees still constitute the largest segment of the workforce, particularly for women and highest in rural areas. In urban areas, the employment landscape changes significantly, with more structured and formal opportunities. About 43.4% of urban workers are employees, with men (50.3%) much more likely than women (34.6%) to be employed in formal jobs. Women in urban areas are more likely to work independently, with 48.4% falling into this category compared to 32.3% of men. Also, urban men dominate the employer category, where 12.9% of men are employers compared to 9.2% of women. This suggests that urban areas offer more opportunities for formal employment, but women still tend to engage more in self-employment.

## 4.3 Wage dynamics in paid employment

A breakdown of monthly median wages for persons in paid employment, as shown in Table 5, reveals a general wage increase at the national level between 2016/17 and 2021. However, the youth (18 to 30 years) still need to realise this increase. There has been an average UGX 50,000 increment in the median wages for all workers from Ugx 200,000 in 2016/17 to Ugx 250,000 in 2021, a higher increment of UGX 60,000 for men compared to women's UGX 30,000. The increment was higher (at 80,000) for the working population aged 31-45 years compared to youth (UGX 30,000). However, the results also reveal that with the same level of education, women continue to earn less than men for all age groups. The concentration of women in lower-paying occupations and industries partly explains this. In addition, individuals holding degrees earn the highest median wages (Ugx 900,000 for both genders), underscoring the strong correlation between education and earning potential. Conversely, Those without formal education earn the least (Ugx 100,000), although there has been a slight increase from Ugx 96,000 in the previous period. These findings illustrate not only the challenges related to the gender pay gap but also the impact of educational attainment on wage levels, indicating that, while overall wages have improved, the growth is uneven across different demographics and sectors.

Regarding occupation, specific roles command significantly higher wages, particularly in management and professional categories. For instance, managers earn some of the highest wages, with an increase observed for both males and females. Technicians

**Table 5: Monthly median wages ('000) in paid employment**

| | Youth (18 to 30) | | 31 to 45 | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total** | 2016/17 | 2021 | 2016/17 | 2021 | 2016/17 | 2021 |
| **Total** | 170 | 200 | 300 | 380 | 200 | 250 |
| Female | 150 | 150 | 200 | 300 | 150 | 180 |
| Male | 200 | 225 | 316 | 400 | 240 | 300 |
| **Occupation category** | | | | | | |
| **Female** | | | | | | |
| Managers | 510 | 400 | 300 | 800 | 500 | 700 |
| Professionals | 165 | 300 | 480 | 500 | 290 | 500 |
| Technicians and Associate Professionals | 300 | 310 | 450 | 600 | 336 | 550 |
| Clerical support workers | 450 | 300 | 553 | 480 | 450 | 350 |
| Service and sales workers | 150 | 150 | 200 | 196 | 165 | 160 |
| Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers | 150 | 60 | 244 | 100 | 80 | 80 |
| Craft and related trades workers | 180 | 160 | 250 | 500 | 180 | 200 |
| Plant and machine operators and assemblers | 300 | 180 | 260 | 360 | 260 | 360 |
| Elementary occupations | 96 | 100 | 60 | 100 | 72 | 100 |
| Armed forces occupations | 685 | 500 | 200 | 780 | 685 | 780 |
| **Male** | | | | | | |
| Managers | 450 | 1,400 | 800 | 800 | 799 | 800 |
| Professionals | 270 | 600 | 500 | 600 | 440 | 600 |
| Technicians and Associate Professionals | 420 | 450 | 560 | 500 | 450 | 500 |
| Clerical support workers | 280 | 350 | 420 | 840 | 300 | 548 |
| Service and sales workers | 200 | 240 | 250 | 360 | 220 | 300 |
| Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers | 144 | 170 | 130 | 120 | 130 | 130 |
| Craft and related trades workers | 260 | 300 | 320 | 300 | 288 | 300 |
| Plant and machine operators and assemblers | 300 | 240 | 300 | 330 | 300 | 280 |
| Elementary occupations | 100 | 168 | 128 | 160 | 100 | 150 |
| Armed forces occupations | 499 | 500 | 531 | 490 | 400 | 500 |
| **Type of work** | | | | | | |
| Public | 300 | 450 | 470 | 560 | 440 | 560 |
| Private | 160 | 200 | 222 | 250 | 160 | 200 |
| **Public** | | | | | | |
| Female | 180 | 470 | 480 | 535 | 420 | 542 |
| Male | 336 | 450 | 470 | 576 | 450 | 568 |
| **Private** | | | | | | |
| Female | 150 | 150 | 135 | 180 | 131 | 150 |
| Male | 176 | 200 | 249 | 300 | 180 | 240 |
| **Education** | | | | | | |
| No education | 96 | 150 | 120 | 80 | 96 | 100 |
| Primary | 112 | 150 | 150 | 160 | 120 | 150 |
| Secondary | 200 | 230 | 270 | 320 | 224 | 260 |
| Post primary/secondary specialized training | 280 | 350 | 470 | 520 | 400 | 499 |
| Degree and above | 560 | 600 | 800 | 935 | 720 | 900 |
| **Female** | | | | | | |
| No education | 72 | 100 | 100 | 50 | 72 | 60 |
| Primary | 100 | 100 | 80 | 120 | 96 | 100 |
| Secondary | 150 | 160 | 150 | 255 | 150 | 180 |
| Post primary/secondary specialized training | 170 | 300 | 432 | 500 | 300 | 450 |
| Degree and above | 560 | 564 | 600 | 960 | 600 | 800 |
| **Male** | | | | | | |
| No education | 112 | 200 | 120 | 100 | 100 | 150 |
| Primary | 120 | 190 | 160 | 200 | 140 | 185 |
| Secondary | 210 | 260 | 300 | 350 | 250 | 300 |
| Post primary/secondary specialized training | 300 | 400 | 480 | 530 | 408 | 500 |
| Degree and above | 560 | 650 | 820 | 935 | 750 | 900 |

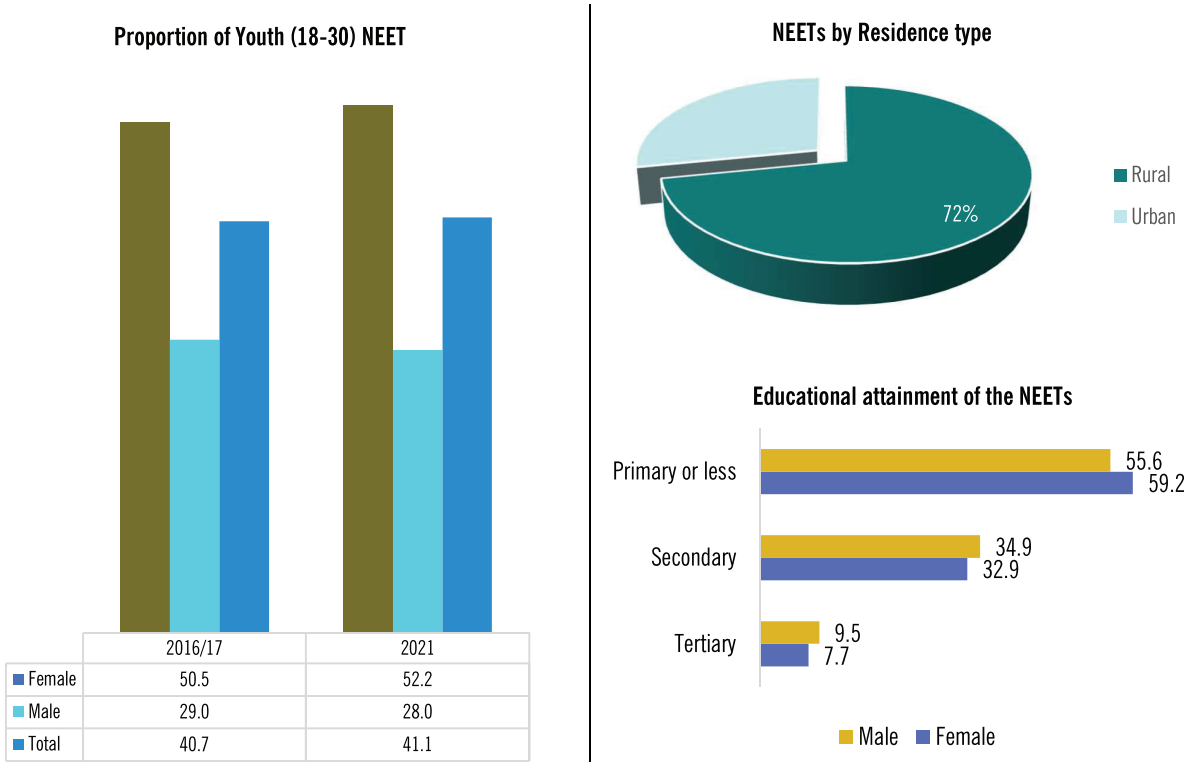
Source: Authors' computation using NLFS, 2021

also experience moderate wage growth, while service and sales workers remain among the lowest earners, showing minimal wage progression over the years. Gender disparities are pronounced within many occupations, as evidenced by male managers earning Ugx 800,000 compared to their female counterparts at Ugx 700,000. The armed forces category illustrates this gap, with female wages falling short of male wages. Median monthly wages also vary significantly by the type of work, with the public sector generally offering higher compensation (Ugx 560,000) compared to the private sector (Ugx 200,000). This disparity suggests that public employment provides greater job security and better pay. In the private sector, the wage trend remains consistently lower across both genders.

## 4.4 Status of the NEET - Neither in Employment, Education or Training

The 2021 NLFS data on Ugandan youth aged 18–30 who are NEET shows that 50.5% of young women were NEET in 2016/17, increasing to 52.2% in 2021 (see Figure 6). In contrast, the proportion of young men in the NEET category slightly decreased from 29.0% to 28.0% over the same period. Consequently, the overall NEET rate for this age group rose marginally from 40.7% to 41.1%. These figures suggest that young women face greater barriers to employment, education, or training opportunities. The 2023 National Planning Authority NEETs report attributes this number to many young women dropping out of school due to lack of funds. For women, they give up school or work due to the gender roles society attaches to them. Khan (2020) corroborates these reasons, revealing that socio-cultural barriers, financial constraints, and skills development challenges limit their competitiveness in the job market, contributing to higher NEET rates among young women. Examining the educational attainment of NEET youth further affirms their reason for being NEETs. Approximately 59.2% of female NEETs and 55.6% of male NEETs have a primary education or less. These statistics reveal that most NEET youth possess low educational qualifications, with a slightly higher percentage of males achieving tertiary education than females. Regarding the residence type of the NEETs, a substantial majority, 71.8%, reside in rural

**Figure 6: Status of the NEET**




Source: Authors' construction using NLFS, 2021

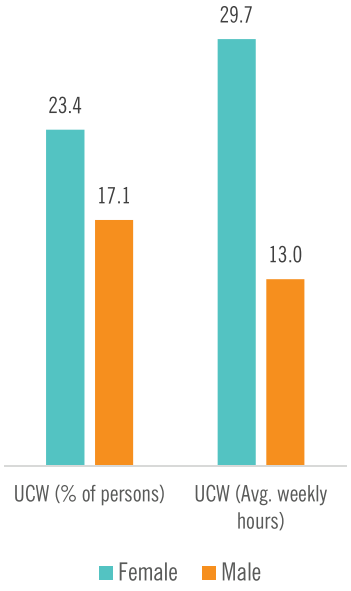
areas, while only 28.2% are in urban areas. This rural predominance reflects limited access to employment and educational opportunities outside urban centres. Additionally, rural youth may encounter challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, fewer educational institutions, and limited job prospects, contributing to higher NEET rates in these areas.

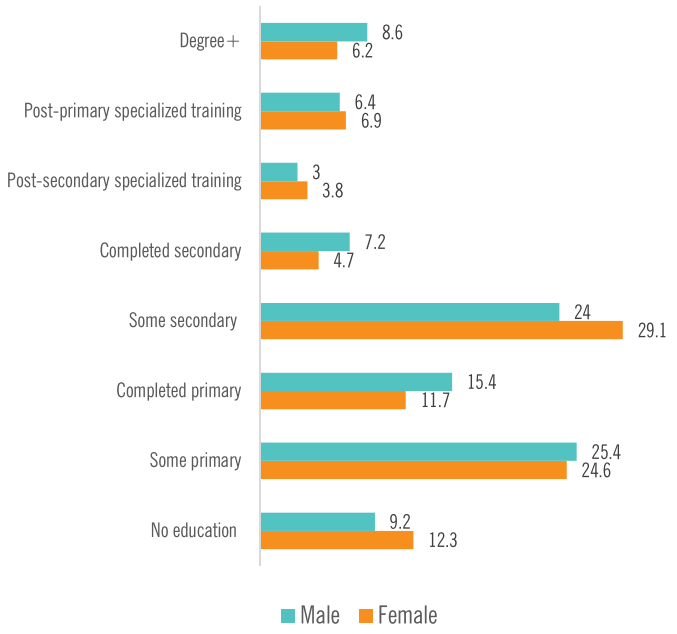
## 4.5 Unpaid Care Work

Figure 7 on unpaid care work (UCW) shows that approximately 23.4% of women engage in UCW, averaging 29.7 hours per week, whereas 17.1% of men participate, averaging 13.0 hours weekly. This indicates that women not only participate in UCW at higher rates but also commit more than twice the amount of time compared to men. These findings align with the Uganda Time Use Survey 2017-2018, which reported that women spend more minutes per hour on unpaid care work than men, with peak times between 7:00 to 9:00 am, 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm, and 6:00 to 9:00 pm, where women spend 25 to 30 minutes within the hour on such tasks, while men spend about 11 to 12 minutes during these periods.

Examining UCW participation by educational attainment reveals that the highest number of women in UCW have some secondary education (29.1%) and some primary education (24.6%), and it is the same for men (24% and 25.4%, respectively). Interestingly, women with higher education levels, such as post-secondary specialised training (3.8%) and degrees (6.2%), exhibit lower participation rates in UCW. This trend suggests that higher educational attainment may give women greater access to formal employment opportunities, reducing their involvement in unpaid care activities. However, it is important to note that even among the highly educated women still engage in UCW, reflecting persistent societal expectations. These findings underscore the entrenched gender roles in Ugandan society, where women disproportionately shoulder unpaid care responsibilities. This imbalance can limit women's opportunities for education and formal employment, perpetuating cycles of economic dependency and gender inequality.

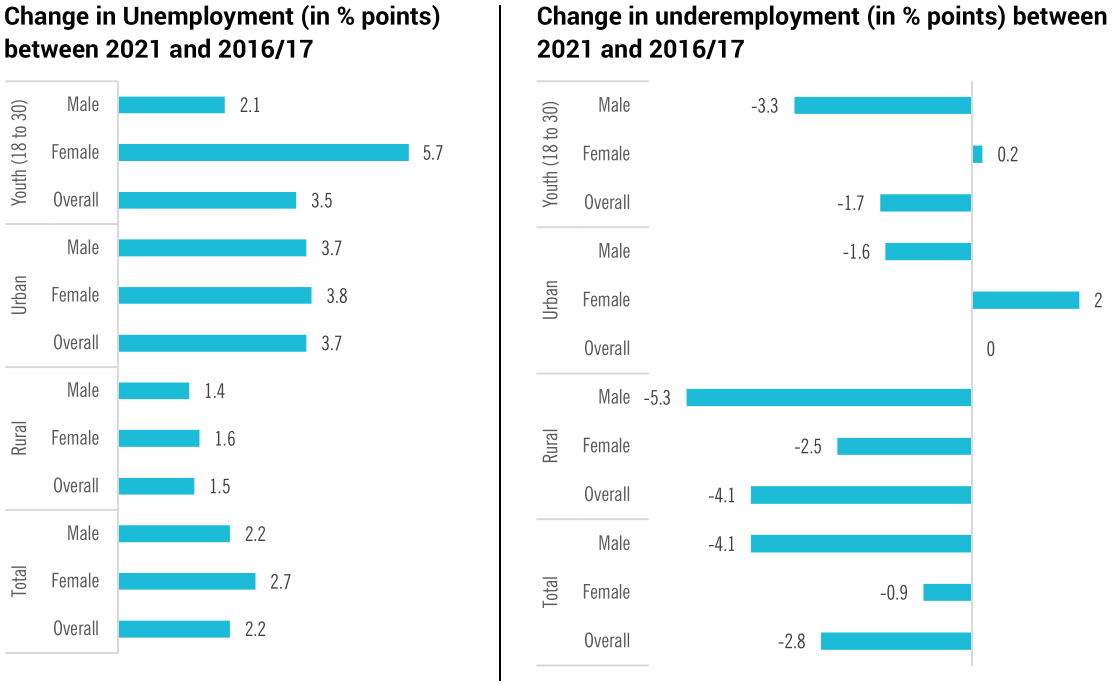
**Figure 7: Unpaid care work**




Source: Authors' construction using NLFS, 2021

**Figure 8: Unemployment and underemployment**




Source: Authors' computation using NLFS 2021 and 2016/17

## Unemployment and underemployment

Figure 8 presents the changes in unemployment and underemployment rates in Uganda between 2016/17 and 2021, broken down by gender, residence, and age groups. Overall, there was an increase in unemployment, with rural areas showing an increase of approximately 1.5 percentage points and urban areas showing an increase of 3.7 percentage points. Gender disparities are evident, as male unemployment increased by 2.2 percentage points, while female unemployment rose by 2.7 percentage points. Rural areas experienced a reduction of around 4.1 percentage points in underemployment, whereas urban areas saw no significant change. Among the youth (aged 18 to 30), unemployment increased by approximately 3.5 percentage points, with female youth showing a slightly greater increment compared to their male counterparts.

## Reasons for migration among those who are employed

Table 6 outlines the reasons for migration among employed individuals across different age groups and sex, distinguishing between national, rural, and urban contexts. The table highlights key motivations for moving, such as family support, marriage, employment-related reasons, and the desire to own a dwelling. Overall, the primary reason for migration across all demographics is related to employment, with 48.2% of respondents citing work or employment-related reasons. This motivation is particularly strong among younger individuals aged 18 to 30. Family-related migration ranks second, with 16.8% of the overall population moving to accompany family members; this reason is slightly more prominent among males (21.0%) than females (16.8%). Marriage is also a significant factor, and the desire to move to one's own dwelling is the least common reason, with only 6.7% of respondents citing this motivation. Women in rural areas mainly migrate for marriage, while their rural counterparts migrate mainly for work-related reasons.

**Table 6: Major reasons for migration among those who are employed**

| | 18-30 | | 31-40 | | 41 to 50 | | 51 - 64 | | National | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Overall |
| **All** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| To accompany family | 19.3 | 15.6 | 22 | 6.6 | 17.5 | 7.3 | 26.2 | 11 | 21 | 12.6 | 16.8 |
| Marriage | 30.5 | 0.6 | 33.3 | 0.3 | 29.5 | 0.2 | 26.2 | 1.6 | 29.5 | 0.5 | 15 |
| To work/for employment-related reasons | 37.7 | 66.4 | 25.4 | 63.4 | 30.2 | 64.3 | 15.1 | 64.5 | 32.5 | 63.7 | 48.2 |
| Moved to own dwelling | 0.9 | 3.7 | 7.2 | 12.2 | 11.8 | 12 | 13.8 | 13.9 | 4.9 | 8.5 | 6.7 |
| **Rural** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| To accompany family | 17.6 | 19.7 | 16.2 | 8.6 | 17.9 | 8.4 | 29.6 | 21.6 | 18.8 | 16.4 | 17.7 |
| Marriage | 46.9 | 0.6 | 42.5 | 0 | 36.3 | 0.3 | 33.6 | 4.1 | 41.8 | 0.7 | 22.5 |
| To work/for employment-related reasons | 22.8 | 57 | 23.3 | 57.2 | 27.7 | 55.1 | 7.3 | 54.9 | 23 | 54.7 | 38 |
| Moved to own dwelling | 1.8 | 6.4 | 4.7 | 16.2 | 9.2 | 10.9 | 5.2 | 9.3 | 3.8 | 10 | 6.7 |
| **Urban** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| To accompany family | 20.7 | 13.1 | 27.6 | 4.9 | 17.1 | 6.3 | 22.8 | 4.3 | 23 | 9.9 | 16.1 |
| Marriage | 16.1 | 0.6 | 24.1 | 0.5 | 23.7 | 0 | 18.8 | 0 | 18.5 | 0.4 | 8.9 |
| To work/for employment-related reasons | 50.8 | 72.2 | 27.5 | 68.5 | 32.4 | 72.1 | 23 | 70.7 | 41.1 | 70.1 | 56.4 |
| Moved to own dwelling | 0 | 2 | 9.6 | 9 | 14.1 | 12.9 | 22.5 | 16.8 | 5.9 | 7.4 | 6.7 |

Source: Authors computation using NLFS 2021

## 4.6 Determinants of women's participation in the labour force

Education emerges as a pivotal determinant of women's labour force participation in Uganda. Individuals with some secondary education are more than twice as likely to be in formal wage employment compared to those with no education. In contrast, the likelihood is threefold for those with completed secondary education. Higher educational attainment significantly enhances women's prospects of securing formal wage employment and engaging in entrepreneurial activities. These findings align with broader studies highlighting the central role of education in enhancing female labour force participation (FLFP) globally. For instance, Marjanović et al. (2024), Cholifah & Sutrisno (2023), Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, (2018). Sarr (2017) and Veneri and Maffei (2016) noted that higher educational attainment improves employability and access to quality jobs in both developed and developing regions. These studies and others collectively reinforce the importance of education as a tool for empowerment and economic inclusion of women.

Age also influences employment outcomes, with individuals aged 18 to 30 being over twice as likely to be unemployed and nearly two and a half times more likely to engage in self-employment compared to adolescents aged 14 to 17. These findings align with the International Labour Organization (2021), highlighting the persistent challenges young people face in accessing formal employment, driven by factors such as limited experience and skills mismatch. Those in the 31 to 64-year age group are more than four times as likely to be self-employed compared to adolescents, consistent with Kautonen et al. (2015), who found that older individuals are more likely to engage in entrepreneurship due to their accumulated experience and social capital. Additionally, the higher risk of unemployment (RRR = 1.762) for this age group suggests that age-related discrimination and fewer formal opportunities remain significant barriers (Finkelstein, 2017).

Results also reveal that married individuals are significantly less likely to be engaged in informal wage employment than those who have never been married. However, the effect of informal wage employment is negative and significant (RRR = 0.184). This reflects

**Table 7: Relative Risk Ratios of the MNL regression**

| VARIABLES (Ref: unpaid work) | (1) Unemployed | (2) Formal wage employment | (3) Informal wage employment | (4) Employer Own account |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Age (14 to 17)** | | | | |
| 18 to 30 | 2.226*** | 1.050 | 0.869 | 2.450*** |
| | (0.534) | (0.150) | (0.175) | (0.500) |
| 31 to 64 | 1.762** | 1.200 | 0.949 | 4.247*** |
| | (0.456) | (0.250) | (0.219) | (0.889) |
| **Marital status (Never married)** | | | | |
| Currently Married | 0.426*** | 0.695 | 0.184*** | 1.116 |
| | (0.052) | (0.200) | (0.024) | (0.105) |
| Divorced/ Separated | 0.745* | 0.813 | 0.629*** | 1.328** |
| | (0.127) | (0.325) | (0.110) | (0.159) |
| Widow/ Widower | 0.399*** | 0.568 | 0.333*** | 0.772* |
| | (0.109) | (0.323) | (0.092) | (0.109) |
| **Residence (Rural)** | | | | |
| Urban | 1.544*** | 1.716** | 2.908*** | 1.343*** |
| | (0.162) | (0.378) | (0.327) | (0.083) |
| **Subregions (Kampala)** | | | | |
| Buganda South | 0.422*** | 0.505* | 0.561*** | 0.804 |
| | (0.086) | (0.193) | (0.108) | (0.123) |
| Buganda North | 0.516*** | 0.796 | 0.641** | 0.850 |
| | (0.117) | (0.380) | (0.145) | (0.139) |
| Busoga | 0.211*** | 0.644 | 0.356*** | 0.479*** |
| | (0.054) | (0.312) | (0.085) | (0.079) |
| Bukedi | 0.265*** | 0.770 | 0.224*** | 0.232*** |
| | (0.071) | (0.386) | (0.068) | (0.047) |
| Elgon | 0.215*** | 0.669 | 0.182*** | 0.370*** |
| | (0.060) | (0.320) | (0.061) | (0.066) |
| Teso | 0.168*** | 0.514 | 0.200*** | 0.542*** |
| | (0.049) | (0.286) | (0.062) | (0.092) |
| Karamoja | 0.906 | 5.300*** | 0.682 | 3.649*** |
| | (0.255) | (3.238) | (0.244) | (0.660) |
| Lango | 0.500*** | 0.000 | 0.270*** | 0.708** |
| | (0.124) | (0.000) | (0.088) | (0.124) |
| Acholi | 0.399*** | 1.357 | 0.361*** | 0.865 |
| | (0.099) | (0.589) | (0.095) | (0.146) |
| West Nile | 0.469*** | 1.387 | 0.530** | 0.949 |
| | (0.114) | (0.669) | (0.140) | (0.156) |
| Bunyoro | 0.886 | 1.539 | 0.362*** | 0.742* |
| | (0.189) | (0.683) | (0.097) | (0.126) |
| Toro | 0.493*** | 1.608 | 0.271*** | 0.564*** |
| | (0.111) | (0.696) | (0.074) | (0.094) |
| Ankole | 0.206*** | 0.156*** | 0.347*** | 0.488*** |
| | (0.051) | (0.093) | (0.079) | (0.078) |
| Kigezi | 0.121*** | 0.548 | 0.369*** | 0.499*** |
| | (0.044) | (0.307) | (0.106) | (0.091) |
| **Household head (No)** | | | | |
| Yes | 1.335** | 2.273*** | 1.639*** | 3.013*** |

| VARIABLES (Ref: unpaid work) | (1) Unemployed | (2) Formal wage employment | (3) Informal wage employment | (4) Employer Own account |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (0.187) | (0.596) | (0.245) | (0.220) |
| **Household size** | 0.994 | 0.974 | 0.970 | 0.987 |
| | (0.016) | (0.038) | (0.019) | (0.010) |
| **Education level (No education)** | | | | |
| Some Primary | 1.155 | 0.000 | 1.488* | 1.656*** |
| | (0.196) | (0.001) | (0.345) | (0.144) |
| Completed primary | 1.314 | 0.000 | 1.710** | 2.218*** |
| | (0.259) | (0.001) | (0.441) | (0.227) |
| Some Secondary | 2.062*** | 11.882*** | 2.859*** | 2.784*** |
| | (0.368) | (9.520) | (0.670) | (0.272) |
| Completed Secondary | 3.558*** | 56.260*** | 3.812*** | 4.509*** |
| | (1.079) | (51.998) | (1.321) | (0.920) |
| Post Primary Specialized Training | 4.182*** | 200.325*** | 12.858*** | 2.754*** |
| | (1.132) | (159.573) | (3.695) | (0.525) |
| Post-Secondary Specialized Training | 6.620*** | 530.281*** | 23.935*** | 3.991*** |
| | (1.612) | (409.127) | (6.421) | (0.690) |
| Degree+ | 5.144*** | 662.921*** | 6.407*** | 3.601*** |
| | (1.439) | (523.630) | (2.028) | (0.752) |
| **Migration in the past 5 years (Yes)** | | | | |
| No | 0.860 | 1.001 | 0.424*** | 0.914 |
| | (0.121) | (0.306) | (0.056) | (0.085) |
| **Disability (Disabled)** | | | | |
| Without a disability | 1.223 | 2.085 | 2.961*** | 1.258** |
| | (0.228) | (0.991) | (0.806) | (0.117) |
| Constant | 0.131*** | 0.000 | 0.149*** | 0.060*** |
| | (0.051) | (0.000) | (0.065) | (0.017) |
| Observations | 9,887 | 9,887 | 9,887 | 9,887 |

Standard errors in parentheses *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$
Source: Authors computation using NLFS 2021

how marriage, by providing social and financial support, encourages more stable and entrepreneurial work arrangements (Meyer & Hellerstein, 2001). Divorced or separated individuals are over one and a quarter time more likely to engage in self-employment and about 63% less likely to participate in informal wage employment. This indicates that marital disruptions often push individuals toward more flexible and independent work arrangements. This also supports the notion that divorce, or separation often leads individuals to seek alternative income sources without a stable household (Oliveira et al., 2014).

Regarding the place of residence, urban residents are 54.4% more likely to be unemployed, suggesting that urbanisation does not automatically guarantee employment, reflecting challenges like labour market mismatches (Mberu, 2006). Also, evidence from other studies shows that in contrast, in rural areas, employment is often more informal, and self-employment is common, which may provide more opportunities for women to engage in economic activities, albeit with lower pay (Van Den Broeck, et al, 2023). However, urban areas offer greater access to formal wage employment, with urban residents being 71.6% more likely to work in the formal sector, aligning with studies showing the concentration of formal jobs in cities (Sutherland, 2016). Moreover, urban areas also have a higher likelihood of informal wage employment, with urban residents being nearly three times as likely to work informally (RRR = 2.908), highlighting the significant informal economy in cities (Chen, 2012). Lastly, while urban residents are more likely to be self-employed or employers (RRR = 1.343),

this is less pronounced than other forms of employment, suggesting that entrepreneurship, while present, is less common than wage work in urban areas (Mberu, 2006).

Results also indicate that being a household head significantly influences employment outcomes in Uganda. Individuals who are household heads are more likely to be employed in both the formal and informal wage sectors, as well as self-employed or employers, compared to those who are not household heads. Specifically, Household heads are more than twice as likely to secure formal wage employment, about one and a half times more likely to participate in informal wage work, and three times as likely to engage in self-employment compared to non-household heads. This finding aligns with previous studies indicating that household heads often bear the responsibility of providing for their families, which may drive them to seek multiple forms of employment, including both formal and informal sectors (Munyoki & Kim, 2016). On the other hand, non-household heads tend to have a lower likelihood of participating in formal and informal wage employment, possibly due to fewer financial obligations or differing socioeconomic motivations (Johnson, 2014).

Lastly, the results reveal that women who have not migrated in the past five years are less likely to engage in informal wage employment. This partly implies that recent migration might be associated with seeking or being limited to informal employment opportunities. Previous research shows that many female migrants find employment in informal sectors such as domestic work, and childcare (Masanja, 2012). Similarly, Dustmann and Görlach (2016) revealed that migrants often face barriers in accessing formal employment due to factors such as lack of local networks, discrimination, and differences in qualifications recognition.

Persons without disabilities show a higher likelihood of engaging in informal wage employment (RRR=2.961) and self-employment (RRR=1.258), indicating that individuals with disabilities face significant barriers in the labour market. The literature offers several explanations for the challenging job market faced by persons with disabilities, citing a combination of social, economic, and systemic factors. First, there is widespread social stigma and discrimination against persons with disabilities, which negatively affect their employment opportunities. Employers often hold negative attitudes, which can lead to exclusion from the labour market (Ebuenyi, et al, 2018). Second, many workplaces do not provide the necessary reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities, making it difficult for them to participate in the labour market. This includes both physical accessibility and supportive workplace policies (Marumoagae, 2012). Finally, there is often a lack of government welfare and inadequate policy implementation to support the employment of persons with disabilities. This includes insufficient investment in training and education that could facilitate their entry into the labour market. Furthermore, evidence suggests that self-employment may often serve as a viable alternative for individuals with disabilities, allowing them to overcome traditional workplace barriers (ILO, 2020).

In summary, education is a critical factor influencing women's labour force participation in Uganda. However, place of residence, household headship, marital status, age and disability status also significantly shape employment outcomes for women in Uganda.

# 5. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The paper aimed to assess and share evidence on the labour market dynamics for women in Uganda and discuss the factors that influence female labour force participation. Employing both descriptive and regression analyses, the study offers a nuanced understanding of the interplay between socio-economic factors, gender roles, and labour market dynamics in shaping women's employment outcomes. The analysis began with descriptive findings that shed light on the disparities in labour force participation between men and women. The evidence reveals that women's employment-to-population ratio (EPR) remains significantly lower than men's, reflecting untapped potential for economic growth. Among women, employment rates are highest for those aged 35-39, suggesting that barriers related to childcare and cultural expectations disproportionately affect younger women, particularly during childbearing years.

The study also found that women largely work in informal and vulnerable sectors, with many working independently without employees. This group often lacks access to employment benefits, financial security, and career advancement opportunities. Furthermore, women's overrepresentation in subsistence and low-value segments of agriculture and underrepresentation in industry and services highlights systemic barriers, including limited access to capital, training, and formal employment opportunities. Also, women's unpaid care work emerged as a critical factor limiting their participation in formal employment. Women spend significantly more hours on unpaid care work than men, contributing to persistent gender roles that constrain their economic opportunities. The high proportion of female youth classified as NEET further highlights the compounded challenges of unpaid care work, educational disparities, and limited access to employment. Regional disparities in employment patterns were also evident, with urban women having greater access to formal employment but facing higher unemployment rates compared to rural women. However, a lack of diversified employment opportunities means rural women are disproportionately employed in subsistence agriculture and informal activities.

The regression analysis provided deeper insights into the determinants of women's labour force participation. The analysis identified education as a pivotal factor, with higher educational attainment significantly increasing the likelihood of formal wage employment and entrepreneurship. Women with post-secondary education were more likely to secure formal jobs, while those with lower education levels concentrated in informal and vulnerable employment. Age, marital status, and household headship also significantly shaped employment outcomes. Younger women were more likely to face unemployment, while older women tended to engage in self-employment. Married women exhibited higher participation in entrepreneurial activities, supported by the stability and resources associated with marriage. On the other hand, divorced, separated, and widowed women were more likely to engage in informal employment, reflecting the economic vulnerabilities associated with marital disruptions. The study also highlighted the influence of residence and regional factors. Urban areas offered greater access to formal employment but also exhibited high levels of informal work and unemployment. Regional disparities underscored the need for targeted interventions in underserved areas, where limited economic opportunities exacerbate gender disparities in employment.

In conclusion, this study underscores the multifaceted nature of barriers to women's labour force participation in Uganda. Despite progress in expanding education and policy frameworks, significant gaps persist in addressing gender disparities in employment. Comprehensive strategies that address educational attainment, unpaid care work, regional disparities, and socio-cultural norms are essential for empowering women economically and promoting gender equity. By implementing targeted interventions and fostering an inclusive labour market, Uganda can harness the full potential of its female workforce to drive sustainable economic growth and development.

Policy Implications include:

- **Targeted Skills Strengthening for NEET Female Youths**. The high proportion of young women categorised as NEET highlights the need for tailored vocational and entrepreneurial training programs. These initiatives should equip women with industry-relevant skills to enhance their employability and economic productivity. Collaborating with local governments and private sector stakeholders will ensure alignment with labour market demands.
- **Encouraging Women's Participation in Industry**. Facilitating women's transition into industry and service sectors requires targeted incentives, such as tax breaks, grants, and mentorship programs for women entrepreneurs. Strengthening access to industrial training and certification programs can help women diversify their employment opportunities beyond subsistence agriculture and informal trade.
- **Flexible Working Policies and Return-to-Work Programs**. Implementing flexible work arrangements and return-to-work initiatives is critical for addressing the barriers faced by women under 35 years, particularly during childbearing years. Policies such as paid parental leave, part-time work options, and workplace childcare facilities can support young mothers in

re-entering and remaining in the labour force.

- **Strengthening Social Protection and Formalization Incentives**. To reduce women's vulnerability in informal employment, we must expand social protection programs such as affordable healthcare, pension schemes, and maternity benefits. Simplifying regulatory requirements and offering financial incentives will encourage the formalisation of women-owned businesses, providing them with greater stability and access to resources.
- **Addressing Unpaid Care Work**. Subsidised childcare centers and public campaigns promoting equitable domestic responsibilities are vital for reducing the burden of unpaid care work on women. These measures will enable more women to participate in formal employment and entrepreneurial activities.
- **Regional Employment Programs**. Designing region-specific employment initiatives can address the unique challenges faced by women in different parts of Uganda. For instance, agro-industrial programs in rural areas and industrial apprenticeship schemes in urban centers can help bridge regional disparities.
- **Supporting Young Women's Economic Inclusion**. Programs targeting young women, particularly those under 35, must prioritise mentorship, skills training, and job placement services. These initiatives should also address socio-cultural barriers that limit young women's participation in productive economic activities.

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# APPENDIX:

**Table A1: Distribution of the working population by industry of work**

| | Male | Female | National |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Industry of work** | **NLFS 2021** | **NLFS 2021** | **NLFS 2021** |
| Market oriented agriculture, forestry and fishing | 13.4 | 9.8 | 11.6 |
| Non-market-oriented agriculture, forestry and fishing | 44.3 | 55.3 | 49.8 |
| Trade | 10.3 | 12.2 | 11.3 |
| Water generation and supply | 4.4 | 7.9 | 6.2 |
| Manufacturing | 5.1 | 3.9 | 4.5 |
| Construction | 4.7 | 0.0 | 2.4 |
| Transport and storage | 6.1 | 0.0 | 3.0 |
| Hotels, restaurant eating places | 0.9 | 3.2 | 2.0 |
| Education | 2.3 | 1.6 | 2.0 |
| Other service activities | 1.6 | 1.4 | 1.5 |
| Public administration | 1.8 | 0.4 | 1.1 |
| Human health and social work activities | 1.1 | 1.1 | 1.1 |
| Activities of household employers | 0.6 | 1.8 | 1.2 |
| Other industry* | 2.9 | 1.1 | 1.9 |

Source: Authors computation using NLFS 2021

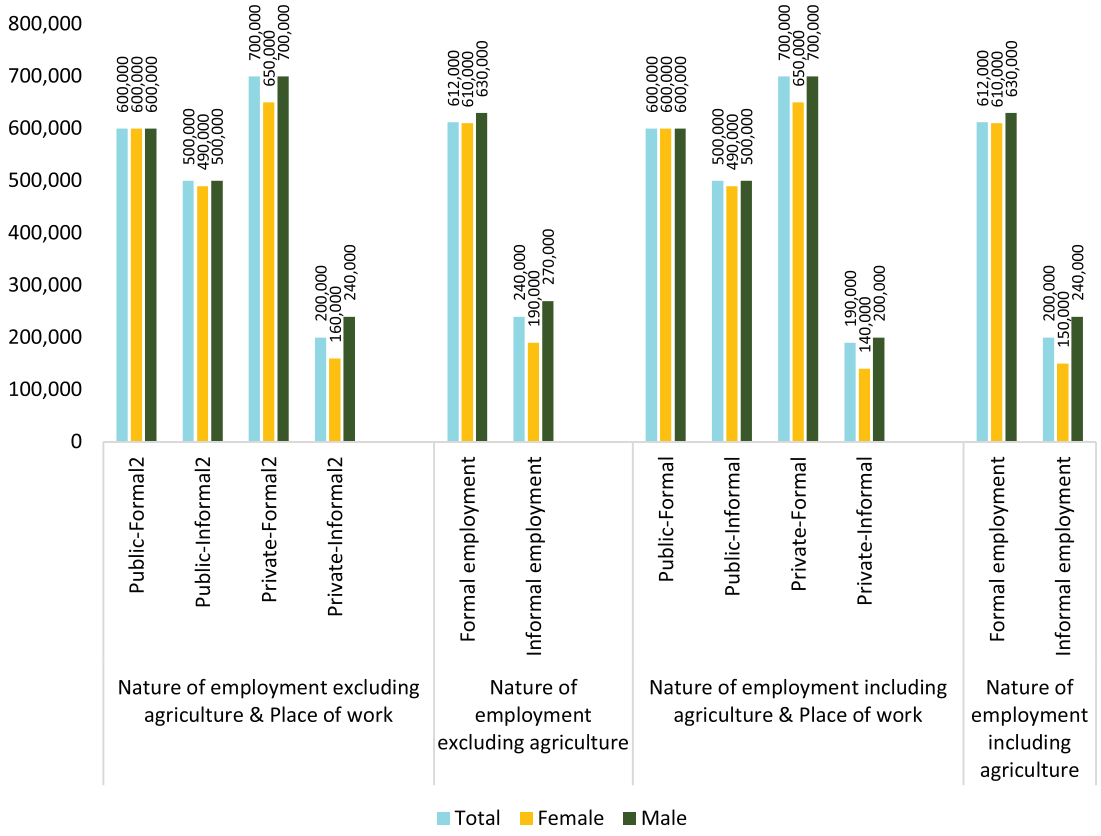
**Table A2: Regional distribution of the working population by sex**

| | Female | | | Male | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Region** | **Agriculture, forestry and fishing** | **Services** | **Industry** | **Agriculture, forestry and fishing** | **Services** | **Industry** | |
| **KAMPALA** | 3.7 | 90.1 | 6.3 | 3.5 | 79.2 | 17.3 | 100 |
| **Buganda South** | 44.5 | 50.1 | 5.4 | 47.5 | 38.1 | 14.4 | 100 |
| **Buganda North** | 68.5 | 29.7 | 1.7 | 58.0 | 27.7 | 14.2 | 100 |
| **Busoga** | 75.6 | 21.5 | 2.9 | 58.0 | 29.8 | 12.1 | 100 |
| **Bukedi** | 86.8 | 12.8 | 0.4 | 67.2 | 24.5 | 8.3 | 100 |
| **Elgon** | 85.5 | 12.4 | 2.2 | 74.4 | 19.9 | 5.7 | 100 |
| **Teso** | 81.7 | 13.7 | 4.7 | 69.0 | 23.9 | 7.2 | 100 |
| **Karamoja** | 59.6 | 18.0 | 22.4 | 58.3 | 30.5 | 11.2 | 100 |
| **Lango** | 80.6 | 12.5 | 6.9 | 72.9 | 20.0 | 7.0 | 100 |
| **Acholi** | 73.1 | 21.3 | 5.6 | 69.9 | 21.8 | 8.3 | 100 |

| Region | Female | | | Male | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Agriculture, forestry and fishing | Services | Industry | Agriculture, forestry and fishing | Services | Industry | |
| West Nile | 65.7 | 26.4 | 7.9 | 65.2 | 26.2 | 8.6 | 100 |
| Bunyoro | 77.5 | 21.1 | 1.4 | 59.6 | 28.5 | 11.8 | 100 |
| Toro | 79.5 | 18.7 | 1.9 | 66.5 | 23.7 | 9.9 | 100 |
| Ankole | 71.3 | 25.7 | 3.0 | 59.8 | 28.9 | 11.3 | 100 |
| Kigezi | 83.5 | 14.8 | 1.7 | 62.2 | 26.8 | 11.0 | 100 |

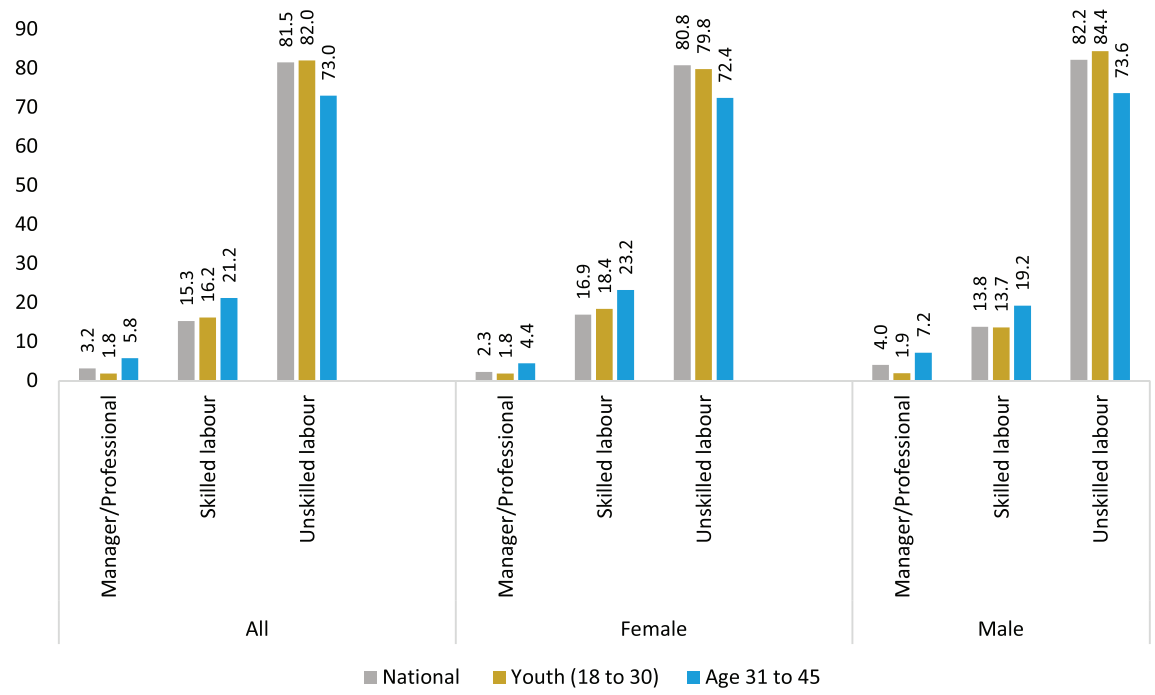
Source: Author's computation using NLFS 2021

**Figure A1: Median monthly earnings in Informal versus Formal employment (including agriculture) 2021**




Source: Authors computation using NLFS 2021

**Figure A2: Skill status of wage employees (2021)**

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