

Youth Unemployment and Security in Somalia Prioritizing Jobs for Achieving Stability



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Executive summary

For decades, the Somali people have experienced extreme poverty, high unemployment, and a low level of human development. Somalia has one of the youngest populations globally, with more than 80 percent of the population below the age of 35. With the proper education, skills, and employment opportunities, young Somalis have the potential to be a source of social progress, development, and economic growth in their country. However, the evidence presented in multiple studies point to the under-development and under-utilization of Somalia youth's human capital.

Based on survey in seven major cities in Somalia, this report explains the dynamics, depth, scope, and salience of youth unemployment in the country. It further discusses the vulnerability of unemployed youth to recruitment by violent groups as well as extremism, clan violence, armed political militancy, and armed robbery. Finally, the research explores the prospects for employment programs that can help prevent youth from participating in violent conflicts.

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Many young people are deeply frustrated by the injustice of the dysfunctional labor market, which created a sense of economic marginalization and grievance

Nearly 70 percent of young Somalis surveyed were unemployed. Among the participants of the study, unemployment was more pronounced in young women than men. Those surveyed reported that overall lack of jobs and nepotism in both the public and private sectors as the two main reasons for youth unemployment. As a result, many young people are deeply frustrated by the injustice of the dysfunctional labor market, which created a sense of economic marginalization and grievance. We also found that lack of skills development and experience among youth inhibits them from gaining employment. Like many other countries across the globe, the results of this study indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has reduced the chances of Somali youth getting jobs, with 67 percent of the young people surveyed noting that the pandemic has made it more challenging for them to find work.

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Fifty-eight percent of those surveyed reported unemployment as the main driver for youth joining violent groups

This report found that factors related to youth unemployment are drivers of violent conflict, undermining the long-term prospects of security and stability in Somalia. The youth surveyed for this report affirmed that violent crime is widespread and is the main security issue they face. Fifty-eight percent of those surveyed reported unemployment as the main driver for youth joining violent groups. This implies that, in the absence of a legal source of income, young people resort to violent crime as a means of livelihood and survival. This report also finds that the creation of employment programs would contribute to peace. A striking 70 percent pointed to employment programs as the cornerstones for abating security challenges of the country. Other report findings showed that 34 percent of youths surveyed said that independent/self-employment was their preference of work, followed by jobs in the public and private sectors.



The study recommends an economic-driven response including creating massive employment opportunities for young people to overcome the security threat created by youth unemployment

The study recommends an economic-driven response including creating massive employment opportunities for young people to overcome the security threat created by youth unemployment. Going forward, jump-starting employment for Somali youth is crucial for revitalizing the country’s massive public works projects. Developing and rehabilitating public infrastructures, such as roads and government buildings, will provide jobs, strengthen local skills, and rebuild the economy.



Empowering unemployed young people to engage in self-employment is vital. Improving microcredit facilities would help

Finally, the study proposes the establishment of institutional mechanisms that provide access to finance for young entrepreneurs. Empowering unemployed young people to engage in self-employment is vital. Improving microcredit facilities would help. The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the Federal Member States (FMS) should also start placing unemployed graduates in the national and state civil services, including positions at ministries and government agencies. Moving forward, Somali stakeholders should pursue the diversification of the economy from the current low value added productive sectors to more modern, high added value sectors to create jobs for youth.

Creating employment programs in the digital economy for young people is also imperative for Somalia. Vibrant digital entrepreneurship can help young Somalis start and develop their technology-oriented businesses, creating more jobs and promoting the Somali economy. This requires collaborative action from various stakeholders including higher education institutions, government, and international development partners, to invest in digital skills-intensive training programs to help Somali youth fully leverage their potential in the digital economy.

1. Introduction



The conditions of young people in Somalia, especially those who are unemployed or under-employed, is a major concern for policymakers

After a long civil war, Somalia is emerging from a conflict that has destroyed the country socially, economically, and physically.¹ The war led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people and the displacement of millions.² At the core of the conflict were young people, especially in rural areas.³ The conditions of young people in Somalia, especially those who are unemployed or under-employed, is a major concern for policymakers. A report from the National Bureau of Statistics argued that many people under the age of 35 who are inactive in the labor market could undermine the development and stability of the country.⁴ Many of these young people have no opportunities to acquire skills.⁵

1. Development Initiatives Report. (2016). Somalia: an overview of poverty, vulnerability and financing. Retrieved from: <http://www.devinet.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Somalia-an-overview-of-poverty-vulnerability-and-financing.pdf>

2. World Bank. (2018). Youth as Agents of Peace in Somalia. Find more at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/463921526414702925/pdf/126251-WP-P152600-PUBLIC-Youth-As-Agents-of-Peace-Somalia.pdf>

3. Ibid.

4. National Bureau of Statistics. (2020). Somalia Facts and Figures. Accessed at: https://www.nbs.gov.so/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Somalia-facts-and-figures_2020.pdf

5. Karamba, Wendy. 2021. Improving Access to Jobs for the Poor and Vulnerable in Somalia. World Bank, Washington, DC. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/34983>

The creation of job opportunities and skills for the large and growing number of young people should be a top priority for government as it is a prerequisite for maintaining peace and growth. Somalia's National Development Plan (NDP9) lists security and peace; economic development; and human capital development as its three pillars of good governance and development. The second and the third pillars encompasses economic recovery and the expansion of job opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed, especially young people in urban and rural areas in both the formal and informal sectors.⁶



The presence of violent groups further complicates the problem of youth unemployment. For some scholars, conflict affects young people disproportionately and they are more likely to join armed groups

The presence of violent groups further complicates the problem of youth unemployment. For some scholars, conflict affects young people disproportionately and they are more likely to join armed groups.⁷ Simply put, the social system and the market are not able to offer meaningful economic opportunities to young people.⁸ The increased stress and feelings of hopelessness that young people face are indirectly linked to poverty, unemployment, and poor governance.⁹ This study examines the causes of the prevalent youth unemployment and the barriers to job creation. Based on survey research from 990 participants in seven cities, it explores the relationship between youth unemployment and the country's fragile security.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Examine the current state (nature and extent) of youth unemployment in Somalia;
2. Identify factors that contribute to persistent youth unemployment;
3. Understand the existing programs, policies, and laws that affect youth unemployment at the different government levels and in the private sector;
4. Investigate the nexus between youth unemployment and the country's instability and security risks; and
5. Provide innovative recommendations to concerned policymakers and wider employment stakeholders.

6. Ministry of Planning, Investment and Economic Development. (2020). Somalia National Development Plan-9. Can be accessed at: <https://mop.gov.so/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/NDP-9-2020-2024.pdf>

7. Ismail, O., & Olonisakin, F. (2021). Why do youth participate in violence in Africa? A review of evidence. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 21(3), 371-399. Accessed at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14678802.2021.1933035>

8. Ibid.

9. Karamba Wendy. (2021). Improving access to Jobs for the Poor and Vulnerable in Somalia. World Bank, Washington DC. Accessed at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/34983/Improving-Access-to-Jobs-for-the-Poor-and-Vulnerable-in-Somalia.pdf?sequence=5&isAllowed=y>

1.1 Methodology

In addition to reviewing the relevant literature and secondary data, this policy report is based on a survey conducted in October and November 2021 in seven major cities: Kismayo, Baidoa, Mogadishu, Baletweyn, Galkayo, Garowe, and Bossaso. These cities were chosen because of their accessibility and economic activities. Survey questionnaires were administered to gather youth perceptions regarding the causes of youth unemployment, their employment aspirations, attitudes regarding security, violence and conflict, and their views about the link between unemployment and insecurity. The researchers conducted the quantitative survey through the mobile data collection technique known as Open Data Kit (ODK). Additionally, the study consulted secondary resources and the literature available on the topic. Finally, the study contextualized the findings within the wider global discourse on youth unemployment and security.

This research was carried out in cities that are predominantly urbanized with significant economic and labor activities. They attract many young people seeking employment opportunities in the public or private sectors, and at non-governmental organizations. From October to November 2021, we collected survey data from 990 individuals selected randomly across the seven target cities of the study. Mogadishu had 391 respondents, Garowe had 103 respondents, Baidoa and Kismayo had 101 respondents, Beledweyn had 100 respondents while Bossaso and Galkayo had 97 respondents each. Under the supervision of HIPS researchers, enumerators visited and collected data from multiple restaurants, coffee shops, sports venues, and city markets.

Table 1: Respondent distribution across cities

Location	Distribution of the respondents	Percentage
Baidoa	101	10%
Beledweyn	100	10%
Bossaso	97	10%
Galkayo	97	10%
Garowe	103	10%
Kismayo	101	10%
Mogadishu	391	40%
Total	990	100%

One limitation was that the respondents may not fully represent all youth in Somalia and therefore the study may underestimate the full extent of youth unemployment. Therefore, caution should be exercised in drawing overly generalized conclusions on youth unemployment patterns. It is also essential to note that this report's findings draw primarily on descriptive statistics which limits the precise relationship between youth unemployment and security.

2. Background literature

2.1 Framing the concept of youth unemployment and security

Due to its complexity and scope, the concept of youth unemployment does not have a universally accepted definition. Different countries and regions have established different definitions and standards that are tailored to their own needs. The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines youth unemployment as follows: the percentage of the total labor force that consists of people between the ages of 15 and 29 years who are available for work and seek to work but cannot find a job.¹⁰ The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)¹¹ limits the age for youth unemployment at 24 years and to those who were actively looking for employment in the prior four weeks.

Generally, the word youth refers to the time when people transition from childhood to adulthood.¹² This can vary based on a country's cultural, political, and socioeconomic context, making it difficult to use a single, consistent age to define youth. For instance, the African Youth Charter (AYC) adopted a broader definition, encompassing people between the ages of 15 and 34. This description, which is adopted by many African countries, represents the reality of development in Africa as well as the issues faced by youth as a social group. This implies that the measurement of youth unemployment depends on the link between the development context and the demographic stages until adulthood in any given country.

Despite the different definitions, youth unemployment often refers to conditions in which young people are unemployed or unable to find work. Any young person who is fit and available for a job but cannot find a job can be called unemployed. The case of Somalia clearly shows the difficulty in defining youth for policy and research analysis. Somalia's 2017 National Youth Policy considers youth as people aged between 15 and 35.¹³ In this study, the key demographic and youth employment trends are analyzed using this definition.

The concept of security has also been defined in various ways. At the most basic level, it means freedom from any threats. Although the definition depends on different political,

10. ILO, Key indicators of youth labor markets: Concepts, definitions and tabulations (2009). Available at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_140860.pdf

11. OECD, Youth unemployment rate (indicator) (2022), doi: 10.1787/c3634df7-en (accessed January 18, 2022).

12. United Nations' Definition of Youth. Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>

13. The National Youth Policy of the Federal Government of Somalia, 2017. Available at: <https://somalia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA%20Somalia%20National%20Youth%20Policy%20Eng%20fa.pdf>

cultural, economic, and social realities, it generally means protection from external forces that employ large-scale violence to threaten a state's sovereignty, territorial integrity, or the physical safety of a significant share of its population, or a state with sufficient material power to protect itself from those threats.¹⁴ This description assumes that insecurity is understood as acts by a person or a group engaging in violence, usually for a cause, whether it is political, economic, social or related to a religious ideology. Other scholars have proposed varied security concepts depending on certain conditions or perspectives from international relations studies, psychology, sociology, and economics. For instance, Baldwin advanced a unique notion that contends a broad and more contemporary view that allows us to use security in any circumstance. He defined security as “a low probability of damage to acquired values”.¹⁵ Following this definition, Baldwin identifies two primary issues that may be used to narrow down the notion of security: “security for whom” and “security for which values”. However, depending on the research question or issue, answers to further questions such as “how much security,” “from what risks,” “by what means,” “at what expense,” and “in what period” to minimize misunderstanding and permit excellent propositions on the issues. For Somalia, elements of insecurity include violent extremism, clan violence, armed political militancy, armed robbery, and kidnapping, which lead to human suffering and death.¹⁶ It means a challenge to the safety of the individuals or state against criminal activities such as terrorism and other types of violent conflict. Following Jackson-Preece, national security refers to public policies that enable a nation state to ensure its survival as a separate and sovereign community and, in so doing, the safety and prosperity of its citizens.¹⁷



In Somalia, unemployed youth are fertile ground for political and clan violence, the armed militia of al-Shabaab, and armed robbery — all of which are on the rise and occur on a daily basis

At present, multiple movements are creating instability by employing violence to address their problems. Poverty, unemployment, poor health outcomes, and climate change, which all involve the lack of essential services to some degree, are examples of insecurity.¹⁸ Unemployment has become a national security concern, with youth bearing the brunt of the burden. In Somalia, unemployed youth are fertile ground for political and clan violence, the armed militia of al-Shabaab, and armed robbery — all of which are on the rise and occur on a daily basis. Some young people who are unemployed or underemployed have also turned to drug use, organized crime, sexual violence, and theft.¹⁹

14. E. Rothschild, What is security? *Daedalus*, 124(3) (1995), 53-98.

15. Baldwin, David A. (1997) The concept of security, *Review of International Studies* 23(1):5-26. <https://www.tau.ac.il/~daniel/pdf/37.pdf>

16. Ken Menkhaus. (2011). Somalia and the Horn of Africa. Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/494981468303085454/pdf/632040WP00WDR0009B0Somalia00PUBLIC0.pdf>

17. Jackson Preece, Security in international relations, University of London (2009). Available at: <https://london.ac.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/ir3140-security-international-relations-study-guide.pdf>.

18. See Musana Jafali's (2021) article on how unemployment in Uganda is a real threat to national security. Available at: <https://thecfma.org/how-unemployment-in-uganda-is-a-real-threat-to-its-national-security/>.

19. World Bank. (2018). Youth as Agents of Peace in Somalia. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/463921526414702925/pdf/126251-WP-P152600-PUBLIC-Youth-As-Agents-of-Peace-Somalia.pdf>



According to the 2019 Somali labor force survey, out of a youth population totaling 1,896,039, only 264,607 are employed, putting the youth unemployment rate at 86 percent



The high unemployment rate in this demographic is due to the lack of economic opportunities, as Somalia's growth rate has been slow and vulnerable to shocks, making job creation difficult



Employment creation for youth and appropriate training to make them employable are key challenges in Somalia

2.2 Overview of youth employment trends

Recent labor market statistics highlight the significance of the country's youth unemployment problem. According to the 2019 Somali labor force survey, out of a youth population totaling 1,896,039, only 264,607 are employed, putting the youth unemployment rate at 86 percent.²⁰ However, that may not be completely accurate because the survey was based on the estimated population in 2014.²¹

The data also showed that the youth unemployment problem is particularly prominent among 15-19 years old, as seen in Table 2, at about 95 percent. Youth unemployment among females in that age range stood at 58.3 percent, compared with a rate of 41.7 percent among males. The high unemployment rate in this demographic is due to the lack of economic opportunities, as Somalia's growth rate has been slow and vulnerable to shocks, making job creation difficult.²²

Table 2: Youth employment in Somalia, 2019

Age	Total Youth Population	Employed Youth	Female	Male	Urban	Rural	Employment to population ratio
15 to 19	853,253	43,696	18,240	25,456	30,743	12,953	5.1
20 to 25	585,124	92,207	32,120	60,087	76,647	15,560	15.8
25 to 29	457,662	128,704	42,431	86,273	100,853	27,851	28.1
Total	1,896,039	264,607	92,791	171,816	208,243	56,364	13.9

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

In an economy that is not generating many jobs, young people are likely to be the most affected, given that many do not have work experience, training or education. It might also be a signal that the education system, especially vocational education, is not producing graduates with the required skills.²³ Employment creation for youth and appropriate training to make them employable are key challenges in Somalia. According to the labor force survey in 2019, youth unemployment is not distributed evenly between urban and rural regions, with the rate in rural areas only about 25 percent. In general, where unemployment is high, poverty rates are also high, showing an unmistakable relationship. This clearly indicates that a key way to combat poverty and insecurity is employment creation. Employment creation also has the potential to reduce poverty by offering adequate wages. Understanding unemployment, especially among youth, is therefore critical for Somalia's development at this stage.

20. National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2019 Somalia labor force survey.

21. Ibid.

22. World Bank Report, Somalia Country Economic Memorandum: Towards an inclusive jobs agenda, 2021. Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/35943/>

23. Heritage Institute and City University of Mogadishu, Productive labor and employment in Somalia, 2020.

2.3 Dysfunctional labor market conditions constrain youth



In recent years, Somalia has experienced a nascent economic revival, with growth of between 2.9 and 3.2 percent. But this has not translated into employment creation for the increasing youth population

In recent years, Somalia has experienced a nascent economic revival, with growth of between 2.9 and 3.2 percent.²⁴ But this has not translated into employment creation for the increasing youth population. In 2020 and 2021, Somalia suffered four shocks: drought, flooding, locust infestation, and COVID-19.²⁵ As a result of COVID-19 containment measures such as travel restrictions and supply and value chain interruptions, the real gross domestic product (GDP) dropped by 0.4 percent in 2021, after a 1.5 percent decline in 2020.²⁶

Agriculture and services continue to play a significant role in Somalia's economy.²⁷ Construction, remittances, and telecommunication investment are also major drivers of growth.²⁸ Initially, agriculture was a major source of employment, but it has declined in recent years because of continuing insecurity in farming areas, inadequate and poor infrastructure, and high vulnerability to drought and flooding. According to the recent World Bank study on country economic conditions, the service sector and related activities comprised the largest employment share, around 76 percent of the active workforce.²⁹ Different types of entrepreneurship are mostly responsible for these types of activities. Cross-border trade, particularly near the border with Ethiopia, is a major source of employment. Manufacturing occupations account for a small percentage of total employment and are largely in the food-processing industry. Agriculture, livestock, and fisheries account for just around 26 percent of total occupations.³⁰ The public sector employs a small percentage of the workforce, about five percent.³¹ Another study by the World Bank found that more than two-thirds of the active labor force is self-employed because of the lack of formal employment opportunities.³² Only 39 percent of youth in the working-age population in Somalia are engaged in the active labor market.³³



Somalia's education system is largely to blame for the country's youth unemployment woes. It was designed to educate people for white-collar employment, with minimal emphasis on vocational or entrepreneurial skills

Somalia's education system is largely to blame for the country's youth unemployment woes. It was designed to educate people for white-collar employment, with minimal emphasis on vocational or entrepreneurial skills. That has been the case since the fall of the central government in 1991 and continues to be the case. A recent study by HIPS and City University of Mogadishu, as a part of a human capital project, found that the skills mismatch—that is, the discrepancy between the kind of skills sought by the productive sectors of the economy and what Somali graduates possess—is a profound challenge for youth unemployment.³⁴

24. World Bank. 2020. Somalia Economic Update, Fifth Edition: Impact of COVID-19: Policies to Manage the Crisis and Strengthen Economic Recovery. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/34239/Somalia-Economic-Update-Impact-of-COVID-19-Policies-to-Manage-the-Crisis-and-Strengthen-Economic-Recovery.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y>

25. Ibid.

26. World Bank, Somalia Economic Update, Sixth Edition: Investing in Health to Anchor Growth, 2021. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Somalia-Economic-Update-Investing-in-Health-to-Anchor-Growth.pdf>

27. Heritage Institute for Policy Studies and City University of Mogadishu 2020. Somalia's Agriculture and Livestock Sector: A Baseline Study and Human Capital Development Strategy. <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Agriculture-HCDM-REPORT.pdf>

28. National Economic Council, 2019. Somalia Vision for Private Sector Development Report. Working Paper. Available at: <https://nec.gov.so/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Somalia-Vision-for-Private-Sector-Development.pdf>

29. World Bank, Somalia Country Economic Memorandum: Towards an Inclusive Jobs Agenda, 2021. Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/35943>

30. Ibid, pg 59.

31. Ibid.

32. Karamba, Wendy. 2021. Improving Access to Jobs for the Poor and Vulnerable in Somalia. World Bank, Washington, DC. Page 27. Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/34983>

33. Ibid.

34. Somalia's education sector: Fostering skills through a demand-driven education system (2020). Available at: <https://heritageinstitute.org/somalias-education-sectorfostering-skills-through-a-demand-driven-education-system/>



Although the dysfunctional educational institutions produce fresh graduates, the majority are unprepared or unequipped to work for themselves

The upshot of this impediment is that Somalia places a high value on formal education while neglecting vocational and technical education. Therefore, although the dysfunctional educational institutions produce fresh graduates, the majority are unprepared or unequipped to work for themselves. Somalia's education system, especially at the university level, produces social sciences and humanities graduates in excess of the labor market's capacity to absorb such skills.³⁵ At the same time, the number of productive sector-related graduates fall short of labor market demand. One plausible reason for this conundrum is the negative perception by Somali youth of agriculture, livestock, fisheries, and other productive sectors.³⁶ The country's education provision has constantly failed to adequately prepare young people to acquire skills to help them find gainful employment. This points to the need for holistic government response to improve public education provisions and overwhelmingly private education by developing standardized certifications to actively improve labor market skills capabilities by both males and females in and out of school.

Persistent bad governance is another major challenge for Somalia's youth labor market. The country's current desperate socio-economic state has been attributed to corruption by politicians and public officials. A report by HIPS on good governance highlighted that misgovernance is central to the failure of creating viable economic development despite the country's abundant resources. This means that morally dishonest and corrosive self-serving politicians, together with almost total failure to meet sound governance principles, are at the heart of Somalia's inability to live up to its economic potential and create decent employment for its people.³⁷ The challenge of elite political corruption is acutely felt by young graduates. A recent study in Somalia found that widespread corruption and mismanagement of the country's resources profoundly affect young graduates in gainful employment.³⁸

2.4 Youth unemployment and insecurity



Unemployment fuels insurgencies, encourages youth to join violent gangs, and leads to extremism, making it the cause of violence and insecurity

Poverty and unemployment have long been seen as key determinants in violent conflict, according to conflict theory and empirical literature. This view gained new traction in the late 1990s, thanks in part to Paul Collier's empirical work on the economic dimensions of violent conflict. It argued that the high proportion of young men in society with limited earning opportunities had a strong correlation with the likelihood of violent conflict, particularly in places with fragile security conditions. Collier's argument was based on unemployment as a source of grievance—driving unemployed young people to engage in violence and join armed groups.³⁹ Unemployment fuels insurgencies, encourages youth to join violent gangs, and leads to extremism, making it the cause of violence and insecurity.

35. Ibid.

36. Heritage Institute for Policy Studies and City University of Mogadishu 2020. Human Capital Development Strategy for Somalia. Available at: <http://www.humancapital.so/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Strategy-English-Nov-4-.pdf>

37. Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, 2021. Impediments to Good Governance in Somalia. <https://heritageinstitute.org/impediments-to-good-governance-in-somalia/>

38. Gelle, L. Y., Abshir, A., & Ali-Salad, M. A. (2021). Graduate Unemployment in Somalia: Causes, Socio-Economic Consequences and Possible Solutions. *Journal of Economics*, 9(3), 14-21.

39. P. Collier, Doing well out of war: An economic perspective, in M. Berdal and D. Malone (eds.), *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000). Available at: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.475.2663&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

From a global perspective, the recent evidence shows that violent groups recruit under-privileged youth. The relatively rapid rise of the young population, particularly in parts of Asia, the Middle East and Africa, and the inability of labor markets to absorb them, provides violent groups with an opportunity for recruitment.

International development organizations have often raised these issues. For instance, a seminal report by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) on youth and conflict asserted that unemployment is an existential threat driving young people to join violent groups which provide immediate economic benefits as well as offering economic gains through indirect earning or robbery.⁴⁰ Further, a World Bank assessment on ISIS revealed that, even though the majority of the recruits had completed secondary school, many were young and had limited employment opportunities. The lack of jobs among young individuals encourages them to develop grievances and frustrations, which in turn drive them to engage in violent crime.⁴¹

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In addition to the overall lack of jobs, economic marginalization—driven by corruption and nepotism—profoundly impacts whether youths join violent conflicts

In addition to the overall lack of jobs, economic marginalization—driven by corruption and nepotism—profoundly impacts whether youths join violent conflicts. Poor economic governance that leads to grievances against governments and other social institutions could be a catalyst for most kinds of violent conflict.⁴² Although many of these grievances and resentments may not directly lead to violent extremism, they could raise the risk of violent upheaval. If the factors that cause large discontent are not addressed, a series of triggering events might make the situation violent, posing a threat to national security and stability.⁴³ For instance, the Arab Spring revolts in 2011 were initiated by frustrated young people as an expression of political grievances and a protest against the lack of economic opportunities.⁴⁴ In the same vein, Boko Haram, one of the world’s violent terrorist organizations, was founded in 2002 in response to economic and social backwardness in Nigeria’s northeastern region, as well as local discontent over government corruption. Violent groups often take advantage of this resentment among young people by offering them a channel for venting their frustrations.⁴⁵

40. USAID (US Agency for International Development), Youth & conflict: A toolkit for prevention, Washington, DC: USAID (2005). Available at: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnadb336.pdf

41. See World Bank report. Unemployment and violent extremism evidence from Daesh foreign recruits (2018). Accessed at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/29561/WPS8381.pdf?sequence=5/>

42. International Peace Academy Policy Report, 2003. Beyond Greed and Grievance: Policy lessons from Studies in the Political Economy of Armed Conflict. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/6765C3D3477FE91C8525742400689BD7-IPA_ArmedCoflict_Oct03.pdf

43. Adesoji Adelaja and Justin George, Is youth unemployment related to domestic terrorism? (2020). Accessed at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26940038.pdf>

44. Mulderig, M. C. (2013). An uncertain future: Youth frustration and the Arab Spring. Accessed at: <https://www.bu.edu/pardee/files/2013/04/Pardee-Paper-16.pdf>

45. Ibid.



The government has limited fiscal space and policies for providing viable opportunities for the young people, driving them to resort to alternative sources of livelihood

This widespread evidence acknowledges that violent extremist organizations take advantage of perceptions of disproportionate economic suffering or exclusion based on clannism, which is connected to the failure to achieve high and sustained levels of growth and job creation. As a result, economic factors are best understood as one of the many difficulties that drive individuals to join violent groups. The broader context of Somalia's underdevelopment is obviously linked to variables that might be proved to promote al-Shabaab's stronghold. Public services, such as providing employment and other social protection programs, are limited or nonexistent across the country. The government has limited fiscal space and policies for providing viable opportunities for the young people,⁴⁶ driving them to resort to alternative sources of livelihood.

A study conducted in Nigeria revealed that “youth unemployment and a lack of meaningful empowerment by the government, among others, are responsible for high crime rates among youth.”⁴⁷ This study cited Mohammed's view that bad economic conditions as result of poverty, youth unemployment, and inequality cause crime, as these problems prevent parents from sending their children to school, driving them to become juvenile delinquents and to think like criminals.⁴⁸ Although Mohamed's point of view could be correct, blaming crime on youth unemployment is controversial, with some scholars disagreeing. For instance, a quantitative study conducted by Mercy Corps in 2013 found no link between employment status and support for—or willingness to engage in—political violence.⁴⁹ Another qualitative study conducted by Mercy Corps in 2015 contradicted the argument that “youth unemployment is susceptible to capitalize or recruit by insurgent group or terrorist due to their economic condition.”⁵⁰ The Mercy Corps survey was carried out in Puntland and Somaliland, and it excludes the view of a majority of southern Somalia, which is a hotspot of conflict and war.

Moreover, in Afghanistan, Mercy Corps research also found that “increases in employment and income did not lead to significant changes in youth support for armed opposition groups.”⁵¹ At the same time, a survey by the ILO found that although employment does not have peacebuilding as a direct goal, it reduced support for violence among Somali youth beneficiaries, from 16 percent to six percent.⁵² This study indicated that less violence will occur if more young people find jobs.

46. World Bank, Somalia Country Economic Memorandum: Towards an Inclusive Jobs Agenda, 2021. Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/35943>

47. Janet Monisola Oluwaaleye, Youth unemployment, rising criminality and the challenge of sustainable security in Nigeria's South West region, *International Journal of Social Science Perspectives* 8, no. 1 (2021), 31-40.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Mercy Corps, Examining the links between youth economic opportunity, civic engagement and conflict: Evidence from Mercy Corps' Somali Youth Leaders Initiative (2013).

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*

52. Floriana Borino and Catherine Saget, Employment programs and conflict in Somalia, ILO, Research department, Working paper, No. 51 (2019).

Overall, violent groups, politicians and business competitors can take advantage of youth economic conditions and they use the young population to engage in violence. For example, a study conducted in Kenya on the community perception of extremism found that cash incentives are used by al-Shabaab recruiters as their primary method and asserted that these recruiters unequivocally target the unemployed or those who have already participated in criminal activity.⁵³ Furthermore, community-based reports on the recruitment mechanisms of Boko Haram point to the lack of employment opportunities as one of the significant drivers behind individuals' decision to join. These studies show that insurgent groups easily trick a majority of unemployed youths by capitalizing on their economic conditions to drive them toward extremism.

A study conducted by ILO in 2019 painted a clear picture of the nexus between the unemployment ratio and the number of people killed across Somalia due to violent conflict.⁵⁴ This reinforces the view that unemployment and decent work deficits form a “vicious circle of conflict”. Comparatively, that study found that those regions across Somalia with widespread unemployment experienced the highest number of fatalities, suggesting unemployment and poor employment conditions can be a catalyst for conflict.⁵⁵ A connection was also found between the “proliferation of armed groups, mainly al-Shabaab, and severe droughts in Somalia”. The insurgency has been successful in attracting Somali youth who have been devastated by food insecurity as a result of recurrent famine and persistent unemployment.

In short, evidence from the literature reviewed demonstrated that lack of economic opportunities due to underlying socio-economic and governance hurdles that youth face increases the risk of violent conflict – because they are frustrated by their lack of employment and educational opportunities. This in turn leaves young people alienated and susceptible to becoming a breeding ground for violent groups, whether by extremist groups or political rebels, to secure income. The following sections set out to empirically explore the personal perspectives of the Somali youth to shed light on what shapes widespread youth unemployment, its magnitude, and the security risk that emanates from lack of employment opportunities and nepotism practices.

53. Valeria Izzi, Promoting decent employment for African youth as a peace building strategy (2020), 17.

54. Borino, F., & Saget, C. (2019). Employment programs and conflict in Somalia. International Labour Office. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_790122.pdf

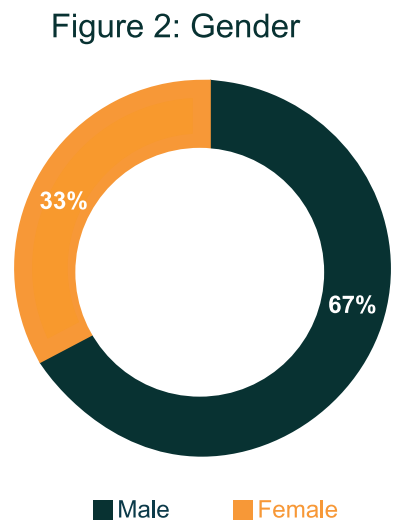
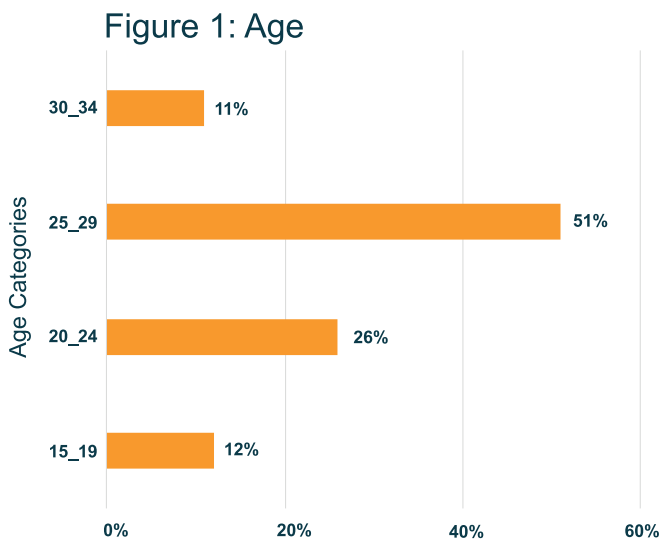
55. Ibid.

3. Survey findings and analysis

3.1 Demographic profile of participants

“The primary data was collected through distribution of a questionnaire to young people in Mogadishu, Kismayo, Baidabo, Baledweyn, Galkaio, Garowe and Bosaso

Participants for the study were youth aged 15 to 34. The primary data was collected through distribution of a questionnaire to young people in Mogadishu, Kismayo, Baidabo, Baledweyn, Galkaio, Garowe and Bosaso. As indicated in Figure 1, 51 percent of the respondents were 25-29 years old, followed by 20-24 years olds at 26 percent. The fewest participants were 30-34 years old, at 11 percent.



“The smaller number of female participation is primarily attributed to the youth survey being conducted in socialization places such as coffee places, teashops, restaurants and sports venues. The number of Somali women in public spheres remain limited due to sociocultural norms

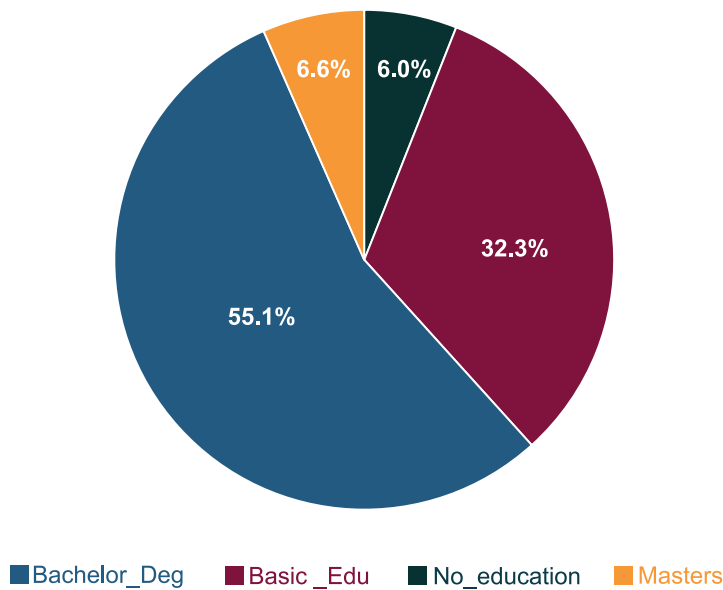
Sixty-seven percent of the respondents were male compared with 33 percent who were female. The smaller number of female participation is primarily attributed to the youth survey being conducted in socialization places such as coffee places, teashops, restaurants and sports venues. The number of Somali women in public spheres remain limited due to sociocultural norms. More importantly, young women’s preferences are critical in determining whether they will hang out at social places. However, this preference is mainly influenced by the social-cultural norms and the conformity to traditional gender roles such as house chores.

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Figure 3 shows the breakdown in levels of education with the majority of respondents holding a bachelor's degree, followed by those with a basic education (primary and secondary levels) at 32.3 percent, and 6.6 percent holding a master's degree.

Figure 3 shows the breakdown in levels of education with the majority of respondents holding a bachelor's degree, followed by those with a basic education (primary and secondary levels) at 32.3 percent, and 6.6 percent holding a master's degree. Only six percent of the respondents did not have any educational qualifications. This could be attributed to the fact that this study was conducted in urbanized cities with education opportunities compared to rural areas. This confirms the findings from previous reports that demonstrated a massive disparity between urban and rural areas when it comes to accessing both primary and tertiary education. However, the essence of quality education in Somalia is questionable. For instance, according to the 2017 assessment by Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP), a significant disparity exists between urban and rural areas in access to primary education, with 75 percent of students enrolled in urban schools while only 25 percent of students are enrolled in rural areas.⁵⁶ On the tertiary education front, the Ifitin Foundation's graduate survey noted that about 17,548 students graduated from 52 universities in Mogadishu, Puntland, Galmudug, Hirshabele and Jubaland in 2020.⁵⁷ The exponential growth of graduates contributes to pressure on a dysfunctional labor market and widespread graduate unemployment.

Figure 3: Education



56. 2017 Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education (MOECHE). Education Sector Strategic Plan. Available at: https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/federal_government_of_somalia_essp.pdf

57. Ifitin Foundation Report, 2020. Country Graduate Survey for Somalia. Accessed at: <http://iftinfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Country-Graduation-Survey-of-2020.pdf>



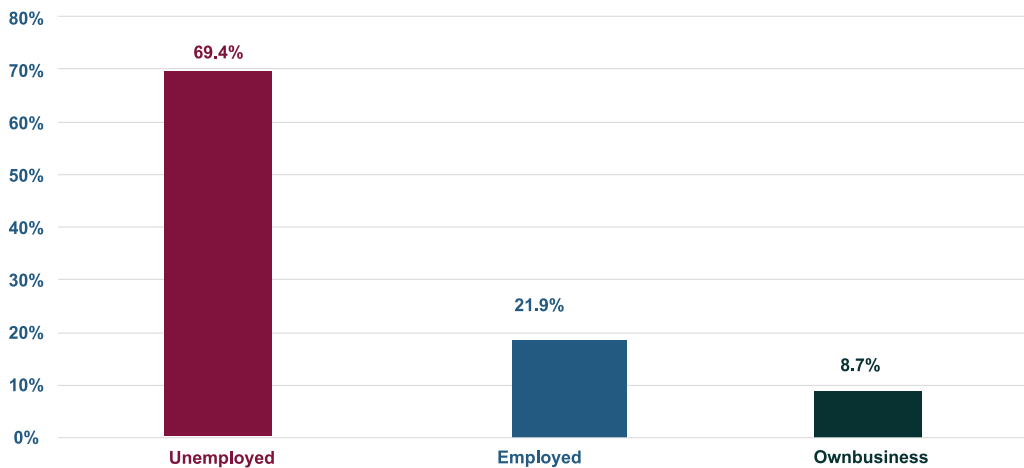
The level of unemployment among a significant proportion of the youth surveyed is a particularly worrying trend. The survey data indicated that 69.4 percent of youth surveyed are unemployed, compared with 21.9 percent who are employed

3.2 Status of youth unemployment

The level of unemployment among a significant proportion of the youth surveyed is a particularly worrying trend. The survey data indicated that 69.4 percent of youth surveyed are unemployed, compared with 21.9 percent who are employed (Figure 4). Although Somalis are enterprising people, only 8.7 percent are engaged in business as a source of employment. More than two-thirds of the sampled youth population are unemployed, suggesting that limited job opportunities could be identified as a potential risk factor that makes young Somalis more susceptible to violent conflict and, in particular, to recruitment by violent extremist groups.

These results also support the findings of the UNDP report in 2012, which found that 67 percent of Somali youth are unemployed, owing to the country’s inability to create gainful employment amid exponential growth of its young population.⁵⁸ In addition, an IOM assessment on youth unemployment estimated that 80 percent of Somali youth are unemployed. This reflects the magnitude of the unemployment among young people in Somalia.

Figure 4: Employment Status



58. UNDP Somalia, Human Development Report, 2012. Available at. https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/242/somalia_report_2012.pdf

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 Employment opportunities in the hospitality sector, particularly hotels and cafeterias, are increasing, but many young people are reluctant to take them. This has led employers to look for workers from neighboring countries

One of the most profound challenges is not only the lack of opportunities but young people’s negative perception of certain jobs that could be a source of employment. A recent study by HIPS and the City University of Mogadishu on productive labor found that young people frequently have a negative attitude about certain types of technical skills, which contributed to their inability to find gainful employment.⁵⁹ For example, employment opportunities in the hospitality sector, particularly hotels and cafeterias, are increasing, but many young people are reluctant to take them. This has led employers to look for workers from neighboring countries.

The disparity of youth unemployment also varied by the cities surveyed. Data extracted from this report’s survey confirmed that youth unemployment in Mogadishu was highest at 41 percent. Youth unemployment in Beledwayne and Baidoa was 11 percent. Bosaso and Garowe also recorded a similar pattern of youth unemployment at 10 percent, while in Kismayo and Galkayo youth unemployment stood at 9 percent and 8 percent respectfully. Mogadishu’s prevalent youth unemployment might be attributed to the exponential youth population structure compared to the other cities. Comparatively, a study by IOM in 2016 has painted a different picture on youth unemployment in three cities in Somalia. This study found that unemployed youth was higher in Baidoa (24%) than in Kismayo (13%) and Mogadishu (6%).⁶⁰

Table 3: Youth unemployment by city

City	Distribution of the respondents (youth)	Number of unemployed youths	Percentage of unemployed youth by city	Percentage of total unemployment
Baidoa	101	75	74%	11%
Beledwayne	100	79	79%	11%
Bosaso	97	66	68%	10%
Galkayo	97	56	58%	8%
Garowe	103	66	64%	10%
Kismayo	101	65	64%	9%
Mogadishu	391	279	71%	41%
Total	990	686	69%	100%

59. Productive labor and employment creation for Somalia: Key challenges and opportunities (2020). Accessed at: <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Labor-HCDM-REPORT-1.pdf>.

60. IOM youth employment and migration (2016), 43. Accessed at: <https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1486/files/country/docs/IOM-Youth-Employment-Migration-9Feb2016.pdf>.

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When setting priorities, policies also need to consider what kind of employment type can better address youth unemployment

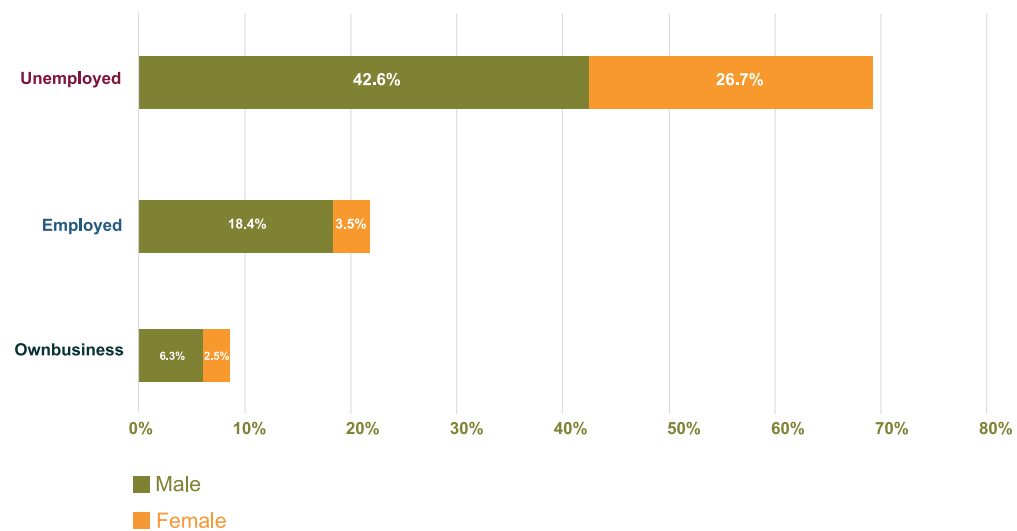
The preceding analysis reflects that any youth unemployment strategy should consider the particular conditions of each city. When setting priorities, policies also need to consider what kind of employment type can better address youth unemployment. Many of these differences between cities could be explained by a variety of factors including disparities in young people’s access to educational opportunities (delaying their entry into the labor market); youth population size; economic activities in that particular location; and inequalities in household income (allowing young people to live longer without working).

3.3 The gender gap in youth employment

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Young women suffer from the precarious labor market situation in general and gender-specific obstacles that impede their access to employment in particular. This includes persistent socio-cultural norms that place women in the domestic domain

In Somalia’s socioeconomic spheres, women are disproportionately disadvantaged and often struggle to find meaningful employment opportunities. Figure 5 illustrates that out of 21 percent who said they are employed, 3.5 percent were female compared to 18.4 percent male. Young women suffer from the precarious labor market situation in general and gender-specific obstacles that impede their access to employment in particular. This includes persistent socio-cultural norms that place women in the domestic domain. Unpaid care and household responsibilities are profound barriers women face in accessing employment in the current dysfunctional labor market. Women often engage in unpaid care and domestic work and low-wage or vulnerable employment.⁶¹ This impedes women’s participation in formal and well-paying jobs. Comparatively, men are more likely to be employed in formal sectors than women.

Figure 5: Distribution of job opportunities by gender



61. Karamba, Wendy. 2021. Improving Access to Jobs for the Poor and Vulnerable in Somalia. World Bank, Washington, DC. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/34983>

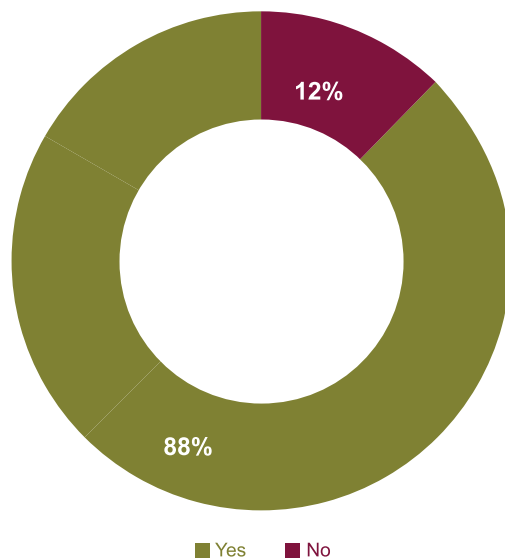


The absence of government interventions or lack of policy mechanisms further impedes women's participation in the labor market and has allowed men to dominate formal employment

Another critical factor impeding young women from finding suitable employment is lack of skills and education. Women lack the educational qualifications and skills required for formal work compared to men. A study by Oxfam found that women with little to no formal education are particularly prone to vulnerable forms of work with 88% self-employed.⁶² Moreover, the absence of government interventions or lack of policy mechanisms further impedes women's participation in the labor market and has allowed men to dominate formal employment.

When asked about their prospects for work, as shown in Figure 6, the majority of the participants (88%) said they are actively seeking employment, whereas 12 percent said they are not looking for a job. This could be attributed to the fact that many of the youth surveyed are still in school or pursuing higher education.

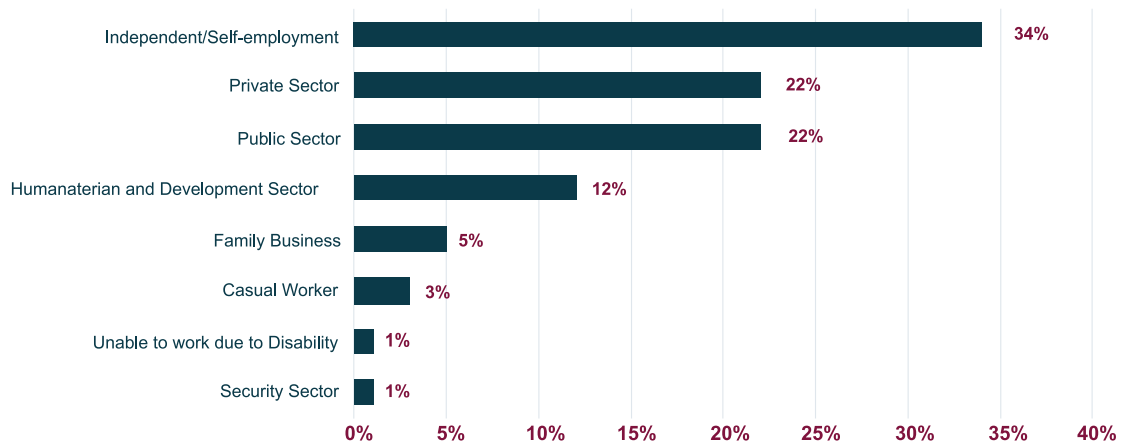
Figure 6: Percentage of participants looking for a job



The survey data on job preferences or most attractive sectors for young people to work indicated that the majority of the respondents (34 percent) preferred being independent or self-employed, followed by public and private sector jobs (22 percent), and humanitarian work (12 percent). Only five percent chose family businesses, and working in security was selected by the fewest respondents (See Figure 7).

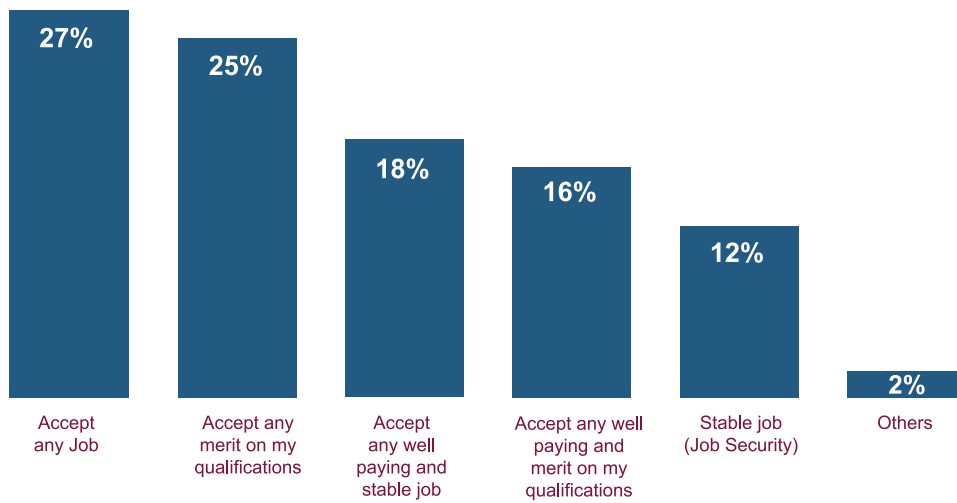
62. Oxfam and Save Somali Women and Children, 2021. Gender Gap Assessment in South Central Somalia and Puntland. [https://oi-files-cng-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/heca.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/Gender%20Gap%20Assessment\[1\].pdf](https://oi-files-cng-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/heca.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/Gender%20Gap%20Assessment[1].pdf)

Figure 7: Preferred employment sectors



The survey also inquired about the specific factors considered by youth when seeking employment (Figure 8). These included payment appropriate to qualifications, job security, job relevance to qualifications, interest in the field of work and willingness to take any job.

Figure 8: Factors in the choice of employment



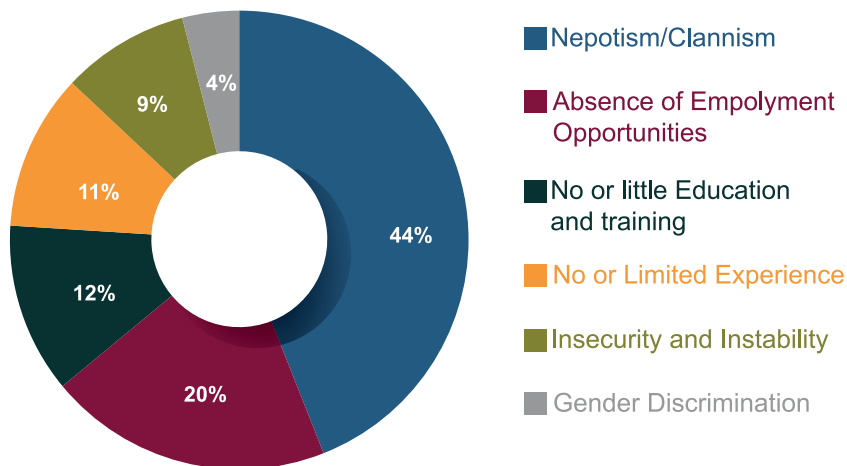
The majority (27 percent) of the respondents said that they would take any job, regardless of the working conditions or salary; 25 percent preferred jobs that matched their qualifications; 18 percent want good-paying jobs; 16 percent wanted good paying jobs that were consistent with their qualifications; and 12 percent were interested in a stable job.

3.4 Barriers to youth employment

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Young people surveyed face numerous challenges to finding employment including a lack of meaningful job opportunities, lack of skills, a negative perception of certain jobs, nepotism, security issues, and gender discrimination

Young people surveyed face numerous challenges to finding employment including a lack of meaningful job opportunities, lack of skills, a negative perception of certain jobs, nepotism, security issues, and gender discrimination. As shown in Figure 9, nepotism and the absence of employment opportunities are the chief concerns, at 44 percent and 20 percent respectively. Other significant barriers to finding employment were no or limited experience (11 percent) and having no or little training and education (12 percent). These issues were further exacerbated by gender discrimination and security issues.

Figure 9: Obstacles to finding employment



These realities reflect the current state of the economy: it cannot generate enough job opportunities for the growing youth population in the country. However, having insufficient job creation to absorb young people because private sector investment is too low and having acute demand-side challenges are not peculiar to conflict zones such as Somalia.



It is critical for policymakers to think about how to stimulate investment in the country by identifying and addressing the factors that contribute to poor economic opportunities such as weak institutions, which is a major barrier to private investment and job creation

Therefore, it is critical for policymakers to think about how to stimulate investment in the country by identifying and addressing the factors that contribute to poor economic opportunities such as weak institutions, which is a major barrier to private investment and job creation. A 2016 IOM assessment on youth employment and migration in Somalia also noted that lack of job opportunities is the biggest obstacle.⁶³

The central challenge in the unemployment of many young people involves nepotism and clan favoritism. The survey revealed clan preference in job prospects and selection, and the politicization of recruitment for public sector jobs is a significant impediment to youth employment. Among the respondents surveyed, 44 percent cited nepotism and clannism in employment practices as causing youth unemployment. Not surprisingly, evidence abounds in the literature. For Somalia, the IOM survey assessment found that lack of clan connection and political affiliations is an obstacle for youth finding jobs.⁶⁴ This suggested that how youth seek employment opportunities will depend not only on their competence and skills but how they are connected with their clan or political relationship. A report done by INCLUDE Knowledge Platform revealed widespread views of injustice in accessing employment opportunities, with numerous pieces of evidence of political patronage and nepotism. Finding employment appears to become “technical-know-who” rather than “know-how.”⁶⁵ The report further asserted that Africa’s dysfunctional labor markets help some young people to enjoy political privileges (favoritism) while they inevitably exclude others, leading to anger and resentment.

A recent study by HIPS and City University of Mogadishu found that nepotism is widespread in both public and private sector recruitment and selection.⁶⁶ This kind of employment malpractice creates frustration and grievance among young people in the country, suggesting that youths with no clan connections have much more difficulty in securing jobs than those who have relatives with political positions. Political affiliations, family pressure, and security concerns are the perceived major causes of nepotism in Somalia’s employment practices.⁶⁷ Moreover, labor markets are significantly affected and altered by insecurity and political instability, giving rise to security dynamics that need to be both understood and addressed. From a broader perspective, the country’s failure to guarantee stability and security creates a profound obstacle to youth unemployment: nine percent of the respondents to our survey cited the state of security as hampering youth employment programs.

63. IOM youth employment and migration (2016), 43. Accessed at: <https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/country/docs/IOM-Youth-Employment-Migration-9Feb2016.pdf>.

64. Ibid.

65. INCLUDE Knowledge Platform, 2020. Promoting Decent Employment for African Youth as Peacebuilding Strategy. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_744700.pdf

66. Productive labor and employment creation for Somalia.

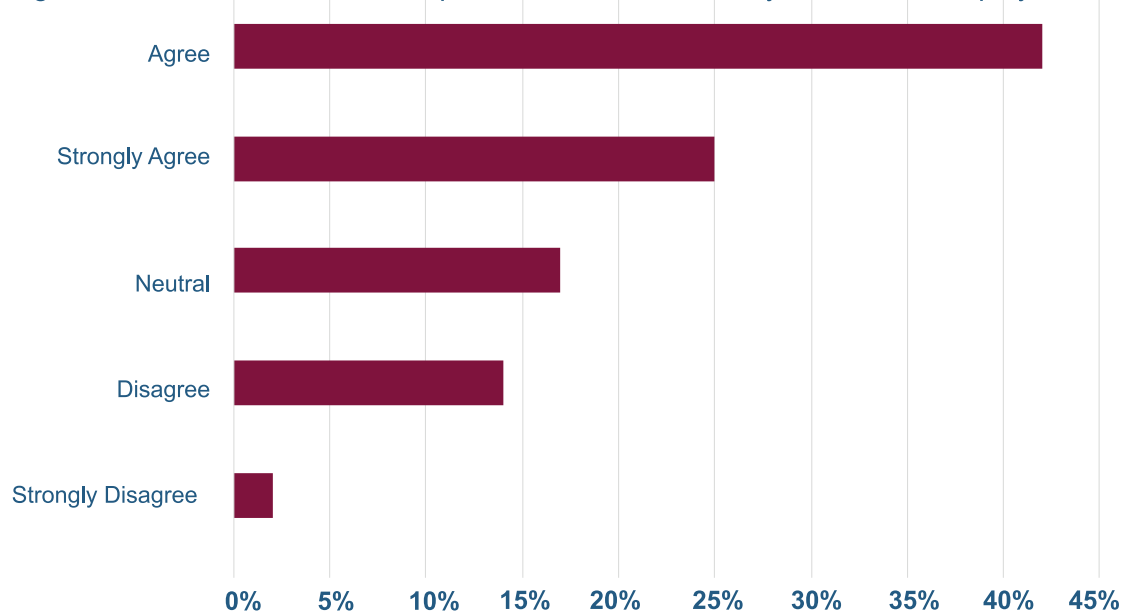
67. Hussein Jimale, Nepotism in the hiring process of the public sector in Somalia (2021), Jowhar. Accessed at: <https://www.jowhar.com/article/nepotism-in-the-hiring-process-of-the-public-sector-in-somalia.html>

3.5 Impact of the pandemic on youth employment

Youth have borne the brunt of the massive economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. Globally, the impact has been particularly severe for young people in three ways: increased challenges for job seekers and new labor market entrants, education and training disruption, and job and income losses coupled with the deteriorating quality of employment.⁶⁸ In Somalia, the pandemic has disproportionately affected youth, with roughly two-thirds of the survey respondents (67%) saying that it affected their chances of employment (Figure 10).

A recent report by the World Bank found that the pandemic exposed structural weaknesses in Somalia’s job market: employment contracted by 37 percent, with large and medium-size enterprises losing the majority of their employees.⁶⁹ This reduced the prospects of youths obtaining gainful employment. Governments and international partners must respond to the reduced employment opportunities caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 10: I believe the Covid-19 pandemic has affected my chances of employment



68. ILO, Preventing exclusion from the labour market: Tackling the COVID-19 youth employment crisis, ILO Policy Brief, 2020a, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_746031.pdf

69. World Bank.2021. Somalia Economic update: Investing in Health to Anchor Growth. Accessed at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/926051631552941734/pdf/Somalia-Economic-Update-Investing-in-Health-to-Anchor-Growth.pdf>

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No region or city within Somalia is considered totally safe. Although those in northern Somalia continue to grapple with recurrent clan conflicts and other violent crimes, those in the southern and central parts of the country live in “utter terror”, not knowing where and when the next set of bombs will explode

3.6 Security challenges

Somalia has faced numerous security challenges for more than three decades including clan conflicts, armed militias, robberies, and insurgency by the al-Shabaab militants.⁷⁰ Hundreds of thousands of Somalis have been killed and millions displaced because of violence. No region or city within Somalia is considered totally safe. Although those in northern Somalia continue to grapple with recurrent clan conflicts and other violent crimes,⁷¹ those in the southern and central parts of the country live in “utter terror”, not knowing where and when the next set of bombs will explode.⁷² The country has several clan conflicts that appear to be escalating. Moreover, the rise of extremism also poses security challenges. These crises and criminal activities create insecurity and instability that are likely to affect social and economic development initiatives in the country.

Figure 11: Main security issues

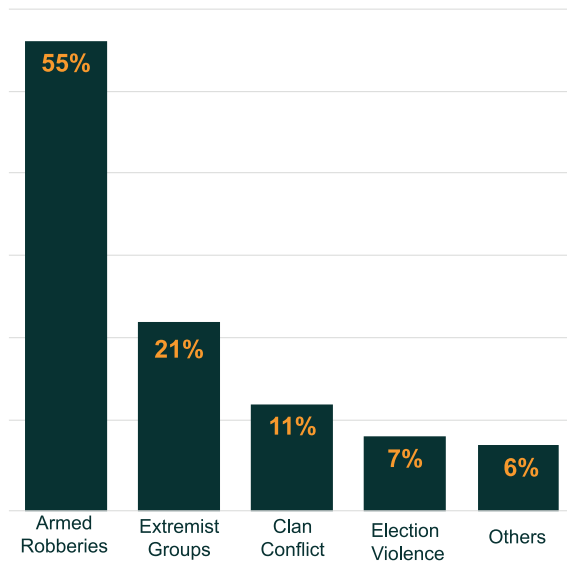
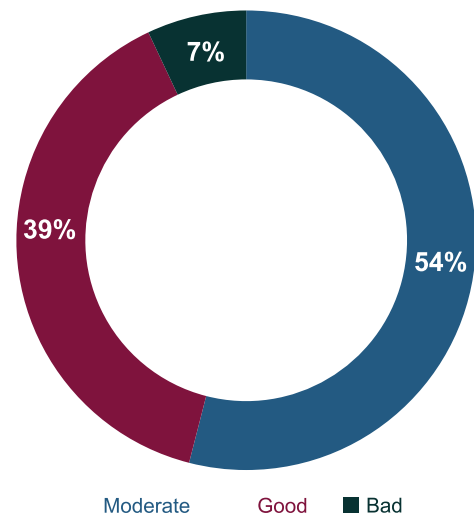


Figure 12: Security situation



Most of the survey respondents see criminal gang activities as the key security challenge (Figure 11). About 55 percent cited criminal gangs engaged in armed robbery as the main security challenge in their city, followed by 21 percent who cited extremist groups. In all the cities surveyed, 11 percent reported clan conflict as a major security issue, because clan conflicts are prevalent in rural areas due to water scarcity, pastures, and land disputes. However, the intensity and frequency of armed clan conflict has declined in recent years. Only six percent of the respondents cited election violence as the main security challenge.

70. Vanda Felbab-Brown, “The Problem with Militias in Somalia: Almost Everyone Wants Them Despite Their Dangers,” in Hybrid Conflict, Hybrid Peace: How Militias and Paramilitary Groups Shape Post-conflict Transitions, ed. Adam Day (New York: United Nations University, 2020). <https://i.unu.edu/media/cpr.unu.edu/post/3895/HybridConflictSomaliaWeb.pdf>

71. International Crisis Group, 2018. Averting War in Northern Somalia. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somaliland/141-averting-war-northern-somalia>

72. The Danish Immigration Service Brief Report, 2020. South and Central Somalia security situation, forced recruitment and conditions for returnees. <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1309016/download>

This survey data reinforced the previous assertion that lack of employment has pushed many young Somalis into crime-related activities that constitute existential threats to the country's security. Most of the survey respondents attribute this to unemployment. For example, a study by the ILO in 2019, titled "Employment Programs and Conflict in Somalia," stated that the high level of unemployment is significantly linked to conflict and insecurity.

The survey also asked respondents about the security conditions where they live (Figure 12). Although al-Shabaab continues to pose a security threat in the cities surveyed, more than half (54 percent) think that the security level is moderate, whereas 39 percent said security is good. Only seven percent said that security conditions were bad. As a whole, security conditions in Somalia remain fragile, as al-Shabaab regularly launches bombing attacks and assassinations targeting civilians and government officials.

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These pervasive security incidents have undermined efforts to reconstruct the country's economy by discouraging investment and reducing the propensity for job creation

Clan conflicts are also continuing, with a rising level of casualties over time.⁷³ Clan fights over resources often escalate to armed confrontations. These pervasive security incidents have undermined efforts to reconstruct the country's economy by discouraging investment and reducing the propensity for job creation.⁷⁴ Challenges and threats abound, particularly in achieving a lasting peace. The persistent political crisis in the country, especially the weak policy and institutional environment, hampers efforts toward peace building and economic development.

3.7 Precursor to insecurity and violence

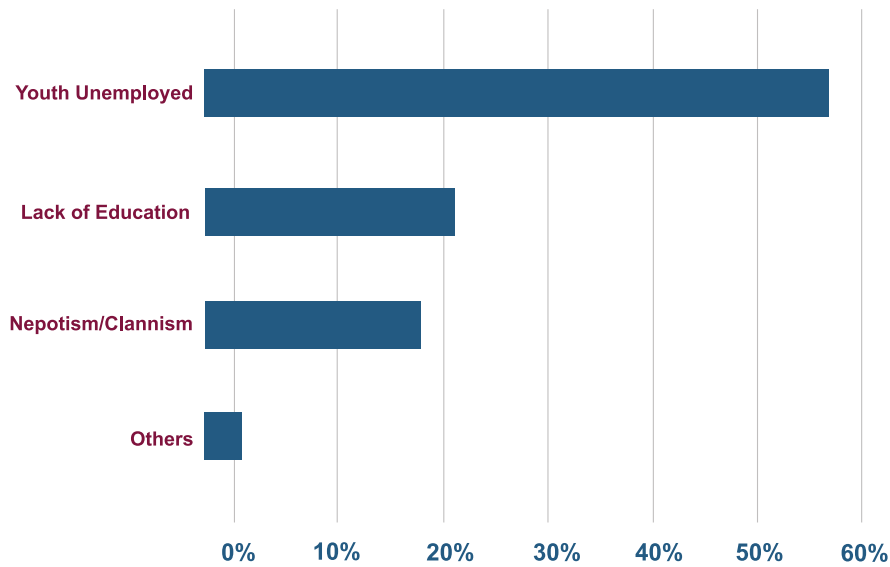
The fundamental element in framing youth unemployment as a key threat to Somalia's stability and security is the link between the lack of economic opportunities for young people, labor market exclusion, and the potential for violent conflict and insecurity. The absence of decent employment has led many young people to look for alternative sources of income through violent activity, such as theft and joining extremist groups, clan militias and political groups. Economic marginalization of certain groups and grievances emanating from the scarce opportunities in the country have also driven young people to resort to violence. These economic conditions are exploited by armed groups and militias, contributing to insecurity and instability.⁷⁵

73. Hiraal Institute, Monthly Incident Report (October 2020).

74. ILO, Employment programs and conflict in Somalia (2019). Accessed at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---inst/documents/publication/wcms_734237.pdf

75. Ibid.

Figure 13: Factors encouraging youth to engage in violence



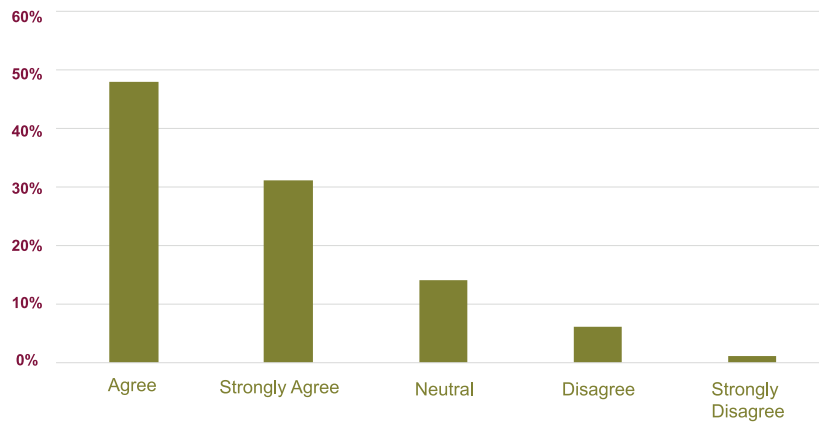
In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that more than half of the respondents surveyed (58 percent) list youth unemployment as a significant security risk, because it drives them to engage in violent activities (Figure 13). Moreover, a lack of education is among the many drivers of violence and insecurity in Somalia: 22 percent of the respondents cited the lack of access to schooling as exacerbating insecurity. Exclusion driven by clan nepotism is another contributing factor which worsens feelings of marginalization and impede Somalia's stability and security.

The saw unemployment as a precursor to criminal activities such as armed robbery, drug use, and rape. They were asked to state their perceptions of the link between unemployment and security using a Likert scale to rank the likelihood that unemployed youths will engage in criminal activity. As shown in Figure 14, 79 percent of the respondents indicated that they either agree or strongly agree that unemployed youth are prone to engage in crimes that undermine the country's security. Fourteen percent of the respondents were neutral, and seven percent said they disagreed or strongly disagreed. These results confirmed that various security challenges faced by country are attributed to unemployment. An assessment by the Mercy Corps in Somalia highlighted that the high level of instability in the country is undeniably created by the fact that the majority of the population is poor and hungry, and many young people are jobless.⁷⁶

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79 percent of the respondents indicated that they either agree or strongly agree that unemployed youth are prone to engage in crimes that undermine the country's security

76. See Mercy Corps, Youth and consequences: Unemployment, injustice and violence (2015). Accessed at: https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/MercyCorps_YouthConsequencesReport_2015.pdf

Figure 14: I believe that criminal activities in the country are due to unemployment



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The lack of employment opportunities for young people makes them vulnerable and predisposes them to criminal activity as an alternative way to earn a living

The lack of employment opportunities for young people makes them vulnerable and predisposes them to criminal activity as an alternative way to earn a living. In other words, in the absence of meaningful economic opportunities for earning wages, many young people resort to violent crime such as armed robbery. For instance, in recent years, the number of armed robberies in Mogadishu involving gangs who steal mobile phones at night increased. The latest victim was a young man who was killed in December 2021 by an armed gang who took his mobile phone.⁷⁷ This kind of crime is due in part to the growth in Mogadishu of young people who are struggling to make ends meet.

Furthermore, a World Bank report stated that the economic misfortune of young Somalis is evident in their high rate of involvement in terrorist militias, violent conflicts, robbery, and rape. However, an important implication drawn from our survey findings was that degree of joining violent extremist groups is relative (21 percent) compared to the previous research. This is partly because extremist groups recruit young people in rural areas with limited or non-existent educational or employment opportunities. In other words, in areas with economic opportunities problems, young people may be forced to pursue unlawful or violent income-generating activities.

76. See Mercy Corps, Youth and consequences: Unemployment, injustice and violence (2015). Accessed at: https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/MercyCorps_YouthConsequencesReport_2015.pdf

77. See Hiiraan, Young man shot and killed during robbery in Mogadishu (2021), accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2021/Nov/184440/young_man_shot_and_killed_during_robbery_in_mogadishu.aspx.

With a lack of livelihood opportunities, young people may choose criminal activities to generate income, thus contributing to potential conflict and instability. If youth unemployment remains unaddressed, the country’s future development is jeopardized by the increasing number of young people who have no hope of ever earning a decent income. The chances of attaining genuine peace, stability, and development will remain slim until this problem is addressed.

3.8 Unemployed youth joining violent groups

In recent years, violent extremism in Somalia has expanded as many young Somalis join extremist groups, with serious implications for the country’s security. The country’s high unemployment rate, worsened by poor governance, has facilitated the rapid growth in insurgency groups. Marginalized youth seeking economic prospects have often joined al-Shabaab just to meet their economic needs (27 percent joined the organization for economic reasons).⁷⁸ A 2017 study by the United Nations University found that two-thirds of al-Shabaab members joined for economic reasons due to a lack of legal economic prospects, because of clan prejudice or in protest against government abuses of authority and corruption.⁷⁹ This argument is in line with our survey findings, which showed that poor economic opportunities such as lack of employment lead young people carrying out violent activities. Although people join violent groups for different motives, al-Shabaab—a combination of Islamic extremists and “economic opportunists” lacking alternatives or seeking to keep the conflict going for economic reasons—undoubtedly consists of youth recruited from local networks, given by clans or born in areas under al-Shabaab control.⁸⁰

Figure 15: I believe that unemployed youth are highly susceptible to recruitment by violent groups

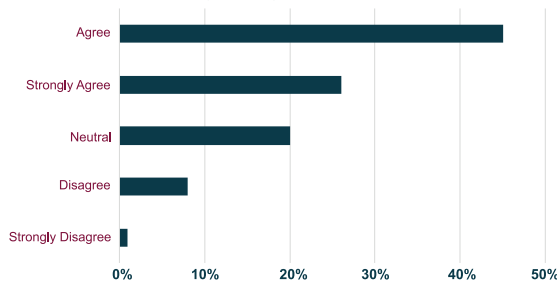
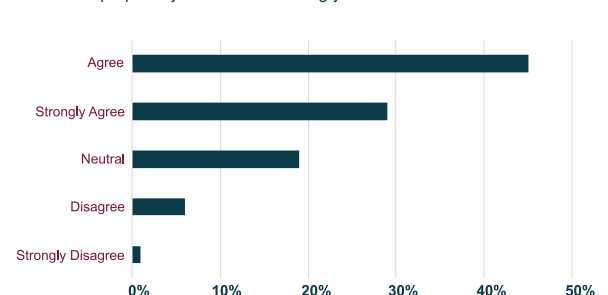


Figure 16: I believe that employment programs reduce the propensity for violence among youth



78. Anneli Botha and Mahdi Abdile, *Radicalisation and al-Shabaab recruitment in Somalia*, ISS Paper 266, Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria (2014).

79. See also United Nations Development Programme, *Journey to extremism in Africa: Drivers, incentives, and the tipping point for recruitment* (New York: UNDP, 2017). Accessed at: <http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/content/downloads/UNDP-JourneyToExtremism-report-2017-english.pdf>

80. Vanda Felbab-Brown, “The problem with militias in Somalia: Almost everyone wants them despite their dangers,” in *Hybrid Conflict, Hybrid Peace: How Militias and Paramilitary Groups Shape Post-Conflict Transitions*, ed. Adam Day (New York: United Nations University, 2020). Accessed at: <https://i.unu.edu/media/cpr.unu.edu/post/3895/HybridConflictSomaliaWeb.pdf>

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More than 70 percent of the respondents thought that unemployed youth were highly susceptible to joining violent groups, indicating they agreed or strongly agreed.

The respondents were asked about their perception of whether unemployed youth are susceptible to recruitment by violent groups. More than 70 percent of the respondents thought that unemployed youth were highly susceptible to joining violent groups, indicating they agreed or strongly agreed. Only nine percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with this view (Figure 15). This unequivocally highlights the significance of employment factors in driving Somali youth to join violent groups such as al-Shabaab. This is consistent with previous findings. A 2017 report by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) accentuated the economic dimensions: people living with multidimensional poverty (and those in poor socioeconomic conditions) are exploited by violent groups to justify resorting to violence.⁸¹ This is a crucial aspect of young people’s receptivity to narratives that encourage them to channel their grievances and despair into violent causes. Moreover, in theory, Collier and Hoeffler argued that when countries fail to create viable economic opportunities with a large percentage of unemployed and uneducated young individuals, they become a conflict or war-prone state. As indicated in our survey findings, most past research on the consequence of youth unemployment does not account for various violent conflict patterns. These existing reports in Somalia only assume that unemployed young people are susceptible to violent extremist groups. Such assumptions ignore that other consequential violent conflicts induced by youth unemployment exist in Somalia, including violent robbery, clan, and political conflicts.

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Youth employment programs have become a crucially important mechanism in countries recovering from prolonged conflict and instability or dealing with various forms of fragility and violence

Youth employment programs have become a crucially important mechanism in countries recovering from prolonged conflict and instability or dealing with various forms of fragility and violence. Although the focus and the scope of these employment programs differ, they all operate under the assumption that unemployed young people are more likely to engage in violence and that providing them with employment opportunities might increase their resilience and promote peace. However, promoting employment opportunities for young people is generally absent from security and peacebuilding efforts in Somalia.

Most of the young people surveyed for this report believed that employment programs reduce young people’s propensity to engage in violence. As indicated in Figure 16, most (74 percent) of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that employment is a means of discouraging youth from joining violent groups. Very few disagreed or strongly disagreed with that view. This demonstrated the employment dimension in confronting violent conflict, insecurity, and instability and showed that military security responses alone are insufficient for addressing the immense task of increasing security in Somalia.

81. Ibid.

4. Conclusion

Despite the nascent state-building gains over the past two decades, Somalia still faces multifaceted threats due to persistent underdevelopment. The federal government and federal member states, with the support of international partners, have made considerable efforts toward making the country more secure but face larger hurdles to a sustainable peace and economic recovery. As the country is slowly recovering from prolonged conflict and fragility, the lack of economic opportunities for young Somalis is a key impediment to security and development. Among other things, the obstacles they face in finding employment are lack of experience, limited education and training, gender discrimination, and overall security issues in the country.

Nearly 70 percent of the respondents to our survey are unemployed, because of the absence of jobs and poor skills. Limited job opportunities are a significant obstacle, but nepotism is becoming an overwhelming challenge to employment as well. Recruitment practices are driven by a sense of clannism and political connection, and this has led to a sense of marginalization and exclusion from economic opportunities. Youth unemployment was deepened by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, as the chances for employment worsened further, threatening to widen the unemployment gap even more.



Clearly, armed robberies, extremist groups, and clan conflicts remain major security concerns that require a dedicated economic response from the federal government and its member states and international partners to prioritize employment creation

Clearly, armed robberies, extremist groups, and clan conflicts remain major security concerns that require a dedicated economic response from the federal government and its member states and international partners to prioritize employment creation. The lack of economic opportunity forces many young people to rely heavily on income from illegal activity such as armed robbery and joining al-Shabaab. Violent groups recruit young people by exploiting their economic vulnerability. Somalia needs to shift its focus from a militarized response to substantive securitization and attention to the structural drivers of instability and insecurity. At the same time, the findings of this policy report showed that unemployed youth are highly susceptible to violent groups because of economic marginalization and exclusion, which create fertile ground for recruitment.

5. Policy recommendations

Attempts to create greater security through armed intervention will not enable Somalia to achieve sustainable peace and stability unless they are accompanied by economic policies that visibly address the roots of insecurity in the country. This report showed the need for five distinct but interlinked policies for addressing the prevalent youth unemployment in order to deal with the long-term implications of security and stability. They are as follows:



First, Somalia is making nascent strides in rehabilitating public infrastructure, such as roads and institutional buildings in many parts of the country. **Public works jobs should be geared toward low-skilled youth.** This kind of targeted employment creation can pragmatically take advantage of the growing number of unskilled youths as well as development programs focused on intensive short-term capacity. The ongoing public works projects should rely on local capacities and inputs rather than imported ones.



Second, diversification of Somalia's economy is crucially important for creating long-term jobs and providing adequate work at the macro level. Interventions aimed at developing industrial structures, supporting the local private sector and labor markets, attracting foreign investment, and bolstering intersectoral partnership would support the broader goal of economic transformation, at the same time creating job opportunities for the growing youth population. **It is vital to diversify economic activities away from the current high concentration in traditional low-value-added agriculture to more modernized agribusinesses, digital economies and high-added-value services.**



Third, 34 percent of young people surveyed indicated independent or self-employment as their preferred type of employment. The FGS and the FMS should devise institutional mechanisms to provide access to finance, given the likelihood that young Somalis face credit constraints. **Improving access to finance could be an effective strategy for funding productive self-employment.** The need to link access to financial services with capacity-building programs such as skills development and training programs is vital in enabling young people to generate and sustain productive employment in post-conflict conditions. Improving access to finance could reduce the propensity of young people to engage in violent crime as it will alleviate poverty through creating more economic opportunities. The current expanding network of innovation hubs should be strengthened and leveraged to promote entrepreneurship and innovations.



Fourth, the federal government and federal member states should reinstitute civil service employment programs to accommodate the increasing number of graduates. In recent years, the federal government has not hired civil servants because of fiscal constraints and the lack of commitment to reform in the civil service sector. Many of the respondents we surveyed saw the public sector as an attractive source of jobs. Despite having limited fiscal space, **the FGS should hire a new cohort of young Somalis for positions in ministries and agencies with the long-term goal of increasing their capacities and competence.** These efforts could also be complemented by internship programs to train youth and prepare them for future jobs in the private sector and non-governmental organizations.



Fifth, Job creation should embrace the principles of placing all Somali youth on an equal footing, regardless of their gender and clan. The FGS and the FMS should design objective affirmative-gender policy guidelines for the employment of women in the public sector. Women are a key sociopolitical and economic asset in Somalia's post-conflict recovery and development. The findings of this report showed that the existence of marginalization in employment practices predisposes youth to violent conflict. **Therefore, it is imperative to promote an inclusive, transparent and rigid recruitment system to reverse the exclusion of certain segments of Somali society,** as this can fuel grievances and become an immediate threat to the security and stability of the country. Mechanisms should also be put in place to allow for reporting grievances and for overseeing recruitment processes to ensure fairness.



Sixth, the FGS and the FMS, with the support of international partners, should broaden access to education and training programs for youth. **Increased investment in human capital is key to addressing youth unemployment** and mitigating associated threats to the country's national security and instability. Many young people are constrained in finding employment by a lack of skills, training, and education. This includes reforming technical schools to diversify the skillsets of potential young workers, revising the curriculum to provide skills that are more in line with labor market demand as well as reducing structural barriers to quality education such as policies and costs associated with the country's privatized education system which often hinder accessibility and affordability of quality education.

Finally, governments at all levels as well as private sector employers should urgently make concrete efforts to address youth unemployment in order to overcome Somalia's insecurity and instability and thus achieve sustainable peace. Failure to do that would jeopardize the country's nascent state-building process and security. It is, therefore, crucially important for wider stakeholders to prioritize job-creation opportunities for young people.

HERITAGE

I N S T I T U T E