

# Skills training in Uganda: mapping programmes and exploring young people's experiences

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# Skills training in Uganda: mapping programmes and exploring young people's experiences

## Executive summary

Skills training programmes have the potential to equip young people with the skills and knowledge to support their transition into decent work. We conducted a study to examine the relationship between violence in childhood and adolescence and skills training.

### Key findings

- There are gender differences in the transition into work and in skills training
- Young people enrol in skills training for different reasons, but negative perceptions of skills training exist in society
- Few skills training programmes address violence in their design, though there are examples of good practice
- Positive training environments support trainees' safety and wellbeing, provide vocational and life skills, and offer hope
- Negative training experiences can arise from a lack of practical training and poor quality of trainers



### Policy recommendations

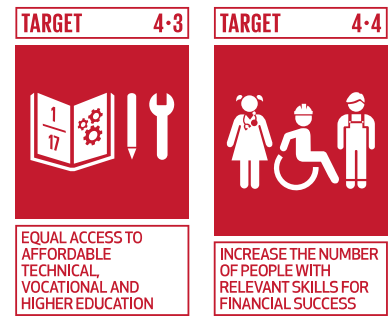
- **Reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training** by supporting young people to complete education or training, and providing support after training. Special attention should be paid to girls and those who are more vulnerable.
- Prioritise interventions to **increase awareness and improve perceptions** of skills training, and incorporate information around different employment pathways into school curricula.
- **Create supportive training environments** by incorporating psychosocial elements and life skills training into programmes, building capacity of trainers, providing more practical sessions, developing guidelines for supporting those exposed to violence, and ensuring policies to address violence within centres are enforced.



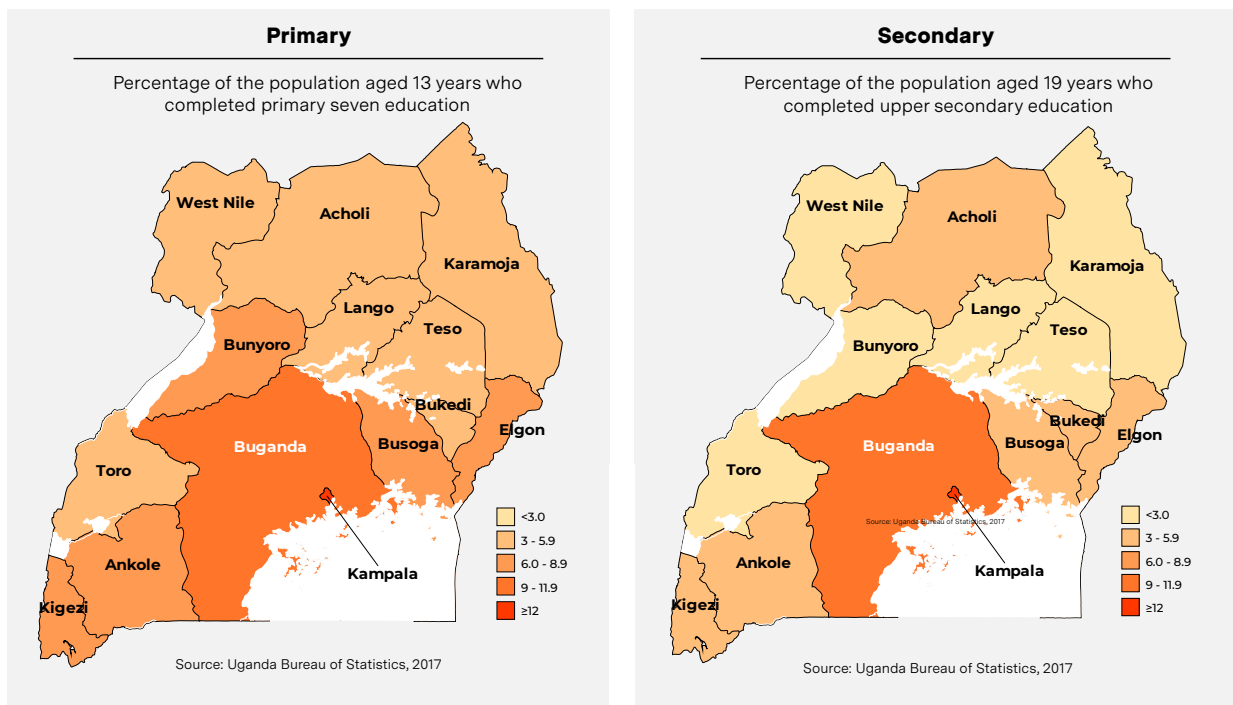
# Introduction

Providing good quality education and training is central to creating knowledge, skills and innovation for sustainable development<sup>1</sup>, and is a key element of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Human capital development also plays a critical part in the Uganda Vision 2040 to accelerate the country’s transformation.

Young people in Uganda face challenges to completing education. Completion rates vary substantially across regions, with particularly low rates in rural areas. Vulnerable children, including those who have experienced violence<sup>2,3</sup> are less likely to complete both primary and secondary education, and find it more difficult to transition into decent work.



**Figure 1. Maps showing the net completion rates of primary and secondary schools by sub-region**



Skills training is widespread in Uganda with both formal Business Technical Vocational Education and Training (BTVET) and non-formal programmes. There are numerous organisations and training institutions that provide a range of vocational skills, and some also provide soft skills including effective communication, critical thinking, adaptability and teamwork. Participation in programmes has expanded considerably since 2015, following the introduction of a nationwide programme, ‘Skilling Uganda’. Yet, we know little about the geographical distribution of skills training programmes, the nature and characteristics of individuals attending them, and people’s experiences of programmes.

This brief shares findings from a study examining the relationship between **violence in childhood and adolescence** and **skills training**. The brief explores:

- The coverage and distribution of skills training institutions in Uganda
- Available information on who is accessing these institutions
- The types of skills provided
- Young people’s experiences of skills training and barriers and facilitators to participation

In this study, we analysed data available online from sources including the Ministry of Education and Sports' Education Management Information System (EMIS), Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), UNICEF, Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT) and Uganda Association of Private Vocational Institutions (UGAPRIVI); and collected new data from organisations providing skills training who were within our project network, or identified through online searches. We also analysed existing data from international and Ugandan surveys, and interviewed young people and others involved in employment and skills training in Uganda. A full description of the study methods can be found in a separate [methods brief](#).

### Definitions:

- **Skills development:** the productive capabilities acquired through all levels of learning and training, occurring in formal, non-formal, and on-the-job settings (SIDA, 2018)<sup>4</sup>
- **Formal skills training:** Structured training in an academic setting, seminars, in-service instruction, or by other means of substantive distance, learning<sup>5</sup>
- **Non-formal skills training:** Learning that is not provided by an education or training institution and does not typically lead to certification<sup>6</sup>. Includes on-the-job training whereby individuals gain hands-on experience and practical skills while working in technical and business enterprises.

## Results

### 1. There are gender differences

**In the transition into work:** Data from a cohort in Luwero district revealed that many young people are not in employment, education or training (NEET). There are also clear gender differences. We found that:

- There was a similar percentage of boys and girls in school at ages 15 and 16 years, but this percentage decreased more quickly for girls as age increased
- A much higher-percentage of young women than men were NEET, particularly at older ages
- Among those who had left school, 68% of young men were in paid work and 14% in decent work, compared to only 34% of young women in paid work, and only 6% in decent work<sup>i</sup>.

National survey data from Uganda also showed that, in the past year, 8% of boys compared to 1% of girls (13-17 years) worked in a hazardous sector, either paid or unpaid.

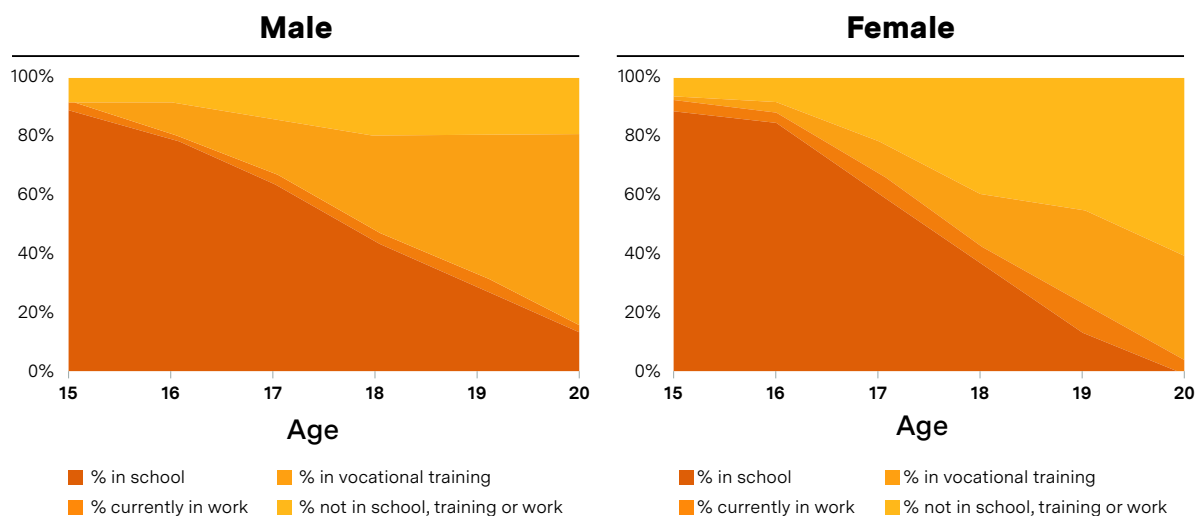
Not all relevant information, particularly for the informal sector, was available limiting the scope of this brief.

We were unable to access information on:

- Rural/urban comparisons
- Enrolment and completion rates by socio-demographic characteristics, including those with vulnerabilities, such as people with disabilities or those previously exposed to violence.
- Access to programmes among young people with previous experiences of violence.

<sup>i</sup> We defined decent work as being in paid work, not working excessive hours (>8hours per day), and not experiencing workplace violence. These were the best dimensions of decent work that we could capture with the available data.

**Figure 2. Proportion currently in school, vocational training (formal and non-formal), work by age**

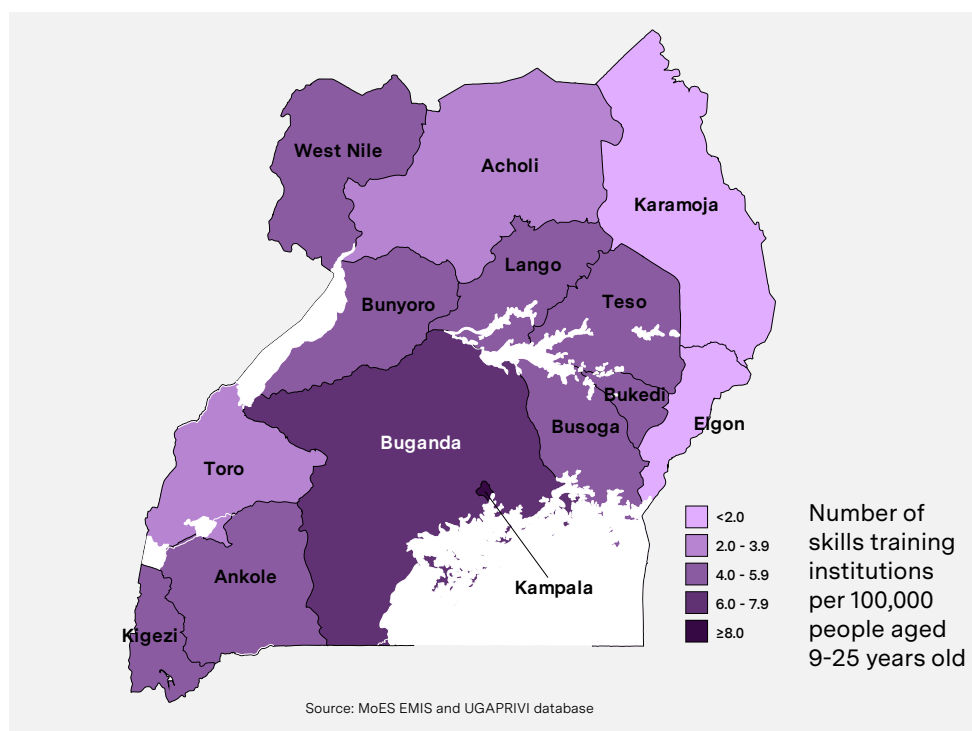


In formal skills training: The 2016 education census found that boys make up three quarters of students in primary-seven enrolling BTVET institutions. The gender disparity was even larger in the O’level-enrolling BTVET institutions with boys making up 82% of students<sup>7</sup>.

## 2. Formal skills development programmes are unevenly distributed across the country

BTVETs are not evenly distributed across the country. This is illustrated in Figure 2 where darker shades of purple represent areas with higher numbers of formal skills training institutions after accounting for the numbers of 9-25 year olds in each region. There is no data on the rural/urban distribution of these skills training institutions.

**Figure 3: Geographical distribution of government-aided and private BTVETs**



By 2022, there were 128 government-supported BTVET institutions, concentrated in Western (30%) and Eastern regions (28%). The 585 private BTVET institutions are mainly in the Central region, where nearly half are located.

### 3. Non-formal skills training targets more vulnerable young people

Non-formal skills training programmes mainly target young people who have not attended formal skills training, and are often provided by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) or development partners. These programmes generally target both males and females, usually aged 9-25 years, and more vulnerable young people, including school dropouts, those living in slums, victims of sexual exploitation, drug abuse and trafficking, and refugees. Most programmes do not require specific qualifications beyond reading and writing.

Non-formal training can also be provided through on-the-job training by informal business owners who teach practical skills to young people who may be excluded. However, we know little about gender disaggregation, patterns of recruitment and modalities of work for on-the-job training.

### 4. Young people enrol in skills training for different reasons

There are many factors that explain why young people enrol in skills training. Experiencing challenging circumstances during childhood may lead young people to drop out of school and enrol in skills training. Young people also highlighted factors that facilitate their journeys into skills training, including: their own interest, inspiration from role models, parental support, the desire to become financially independent, awareness of opportunities through social capital, and scholarships (provided by government, CSOs, religious institutions, development partners, political actors and relatives).

*“Skills training unfortunately is the second choice or last option in this country... However, there are few young people who are inspired either by parents or neighbourhoods or they have heard from some circles of their families and they really want to join or acquire specific skills for future employment.” (Key informant)*



Social networks play an important role in young people’s access to skills training. Young people talked about the importance of family and friends in both their awareness of skills training and recruitment into non-formal skills training in particular.

*“I think some of them already have contact persons in those places and they are easily recommended which makes it easy for enrolment but when you don’t have any contact person in that place, it is easy for one to bypass that place because you are ignorant about it.” (Young person)*



*“Also friends. You may have a friend who is skilled and he/she tells you that come and I train you.” (Young person)*



Lack of information can prevent young people from enrolling. Many young people were not aware that skills training, such as publicly-funded formal training, could be an alternative to mainstream education.

## 5. Some young people have negative perceptions and experiences of skills training

There are negative perceptions of skills training programmes in society, which can discourage young people from enrolling. Young people also believed that programmes only provide training for blue collar jobs, whereas many are interested in white collar jobs, and believe programmes will lead them into hard manual work.

*“They think skills training institutions are for low achievers, low grades and dirty job prospects in the world of work. That’s the thinking in our communities and relatives in the country” (Key informant, policy level)*



Some young people felt that skills training did not meet their expectations. They felt trainers lacked commitment, particularly in private institutions which sometimes lacked professionalism and ethical conduct. In some cases, there was also inadequate practical experience, a key attraction of skills training, due to shortages of equipment, user materials or customers, and there was little value for money.

*“I mean private centres, people tend to recruit their own relatives as bosses, administrators and trainers who lack experience and skills. So, they should stop recruiting or running the centre basing on technical know ‘who’ but recruit basing on technical know-how” (Young person)*



*“Vocational centres lack enough materials to occupy the students all the time, lack sites to practice from, so they end up lacking the practical bit but go with the theory. So they end up going somewhere else to learn better outside the training centre. Like mechanics...some of the vocational centres even lack a single car for the mechanics to train from.” (Key informant)*



Young people described the potential value of life skills which are rarely provided by skills training programmes.

*“Although I never received training in life skills, I am aware that in our everyday life, we meet challenges, but how do you overcome them? Say, you are abused by another young person, how do you respond?... In the institutions where we normally train from, such skills are not there but you can use your level of judgement and your home training to handle such situations”*



## 6. There are examples of good practice in addressing violence

Many of the young people that we spoke to who have been involved in skills training mentioned experiences of different forms of violence at different stages of their lives. However, exploring different skills training programmes revealed that the majority of programmes do not consider the prevention and response to violence in their design.

The Building Resilience in Crisis through Education (BRiCE) Project, provided by AVSI Foundation, was an exception to this and illustrates how a skills training programme can incorporate elements to:

1. Support those who have previously experienced violence
2. Prevent violence from occurring in skills training facilities

### **Case study: Building Resilience in Crisis through Education (BRiCE) Project, AVSI Foundation**

**Aim of programme:** To improve access to quality primary education for learners aged 6-18 years in both non-formal and formal education systems, building their resilience and providing them with life skills

#### ***To support those with previous experiences of violence:***

- The programme included a tool for the identification of distress among participants administered at the start, middle and end of the programme
- There was a mechanism to make appropriate referrals through individual home visits and engagement in group-based activities

#### ***To prevent violence from occurring in the skills training facility:***

- Learners and caregivers signed consent forms and commitment forms for discipline, cyber bullying and dismissal for any pornographic exposure.
- Learners were restricted from accessing certain websites
- Learners prevented from viewing pornographic videos
- Learners cautioned not to engage in cyber acts
- Trainers blocked all dangerous sites on all computers in the training room

## **7. Young people also described positive skills training environments**

Young people described positive training environments which had structures to ensure their safety and wellbeing. These were common to formal institutions. They mentioned safe relationships with peers, trainers, potential employers and sponsors. They experienced positive affirmation, gained vocational skills, and had the opportunity to acquire life skills. At their best, these environments offered hope and positive expectations, with young people able to embody new identities as learners.

## **Policy recommendations**

The following recommendations are derived from both study findings and discussions with members of the network which was formed to promote study ownership and uptake of findings.

### ***Address the NEET challenge***

- Training institutions and employers need to continue to support young people, particularly girls and those who are vulnerable, after training to help them transition into work with particular needs. This should include strengthening relationships between training institutions and potential employers by offering placements at potential workplaces and running exhibitions at training institutions to help young people secure work or financial support for their future business.

### ***Improving perceptions and knowledge of skills training***

- Prioritise interventions that aim to change the mindset of communities towards formal and non-formal skills training programmes. Skills training must be seen in the same light as other forms of education, with stricter government supervision of training institutions.



- The MoES should consider incorporating career guidance and co-curricular activities within the school curriculum to address the different pathways that young people can take into employment.

### **Creating supportive training environments**

- Skills training programmes should incorporate psychosocial elements to help young people to cope with previous adversity and support them in developing resilience, in addition to life skills training to support young people to protect themselves against abuse.
- The MoES should audit skills training programmes to ensure that they have the necessary equipment to provide practical training, and where lacking, should provide equipment to institutions and provide refresher training to trainers.
- The Ministry of Gender and MoES should collaborate to produce guidelines for skills training providers to identify and support trainees who have experienced violence

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