



LEAVING NO YOUTH BEHIND IN TIMOR-LESTE

POLICY BRIEF # 3

*YOUNG PEOPLE NEITHER IN EDUCATION,
EMPLOYMENT NOR TRAINING*



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Introduction

Young people are key to achieving sustainable development. It is essential that all young people receive equal access to quality education, justice, health services, employment opportunities, chances to participate in society, and to be protected from violence. Through the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 and the approval of the new National Youth Policy in 2016 by the VI Government, Timor-Leste has committed to leave no youth behind.

In support of this national effort, the United Nations (UN) in Timor-Leste and the NGO Belun are, in a collaborative effort, launching a new policy series entitled 'Leaving no Youth Behind in Timor-Leste'. The objective of this series is to increase understanding of the situation and vulnerability of some specific youth groups and the particular challenges they face in benefitting from the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Each policy brief presents a situation analysis based on quantitative data from an independent analysis of the 2015 Timor-Leste Census and qualitative data from focus groups discussions (FGDs), as well as supporting evidence from studies and reports conducted in Timor-Leste. Findings illustrate the situation of young people in terms of healthy lifestyle, education, employment and employability, civic participation and violence and crime, as per the National Youth Policy pillars. The briefs also offer recommendations to Government, civil society, the private sector and development partners as to how to ensure equal opportunities for these groups in context of the development of Timor-Leste.

Background

This policy brief looks at the vulnerabilities of youth who are not currently engaged in employment, education, nor in training (NEET). These may be youth who have completed school but have not found work; youth who have left school early; or even youth who have never attended school. They might be unemployed and looking for jobs or be disillusioned and not be looking for any work at all. They might be inactive (i.e. not involved in the workforce) but not studying either.

NEET youth are often the most left behind and excluded from society, and were identified as a group of great concern within the National Youth Policy. Because they are a highly vulnerable group, Goal 8 of the SDGs specifically targets NEET youth: 'by 2020 substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET)'.

In Timor-Leste, more youth are attending school, and staying in school longer, than in the past. As a result, 56% of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 are currently in school, according to the 2015 Census. Additionally, some young people are already working. But Timor-Leste has very low employment rates, with only 31% of the working age population engaged in work and only 21% of 15 to 24 year-olds currently working. Every year, around 18,000 youth enter the workforce and many are unable to find work. So what are those neither in education or employment doing?

This report integrates an analysis of 2015 Census and 2010 Census data with responses from three focus group discussions (FGDs) held in Dili and Liquica as well as evidence from background literature.

Findings

The analysis of the 2015 Census data found that 47,505 youth aged 15-24 were not employed and not in school, or 20% of the youth population. Youth aged 15-19 are less likely to be NEET (14%) compared to youth aged 20-24 (28%).

More women (27,800) than men (19,705) were not in education, employment, or training: almost a quarter of women (24%) are NEET versus 17% of young men. However, the differences are minimal in younger youth—with 13% of young men aged 15-19 and 15% of young women aged 15-19 being NEET—and much higher in older youth: 34% of female youth aged 20-24 were NEET.

Percent of youth who are NEET

2015	Male	Female	Total
15 - 19	13%	15%	14%
20 - 24	21%	34%	28%
Total	17%	24%	20%

Since 2010, the percentage of youth who are NEET has not changed much (from 21% to 20%). However, the rates of NEET have increased for men and fallen for women, showing a reduction in the disparity between men and women. The percentage of NEET status for women fell from 29% in 2010 to 24% in 2015, and the rate of NEET status for men rose from 14% in 2010 to 17% in 2015. This can also be seen as an increase in the number of young men who are NEET, which has risen considerably from 13,464 in 2010 to 19,705 in 2015.

All Municipalities have more or less the same percentage of their young people who are NEET, with between 15 and 26% of their youth population being NEET, (SAR of Oecusse being the lowest and Liquica the highest). At the level of Administrative Posts, the differences are more noticeable, with NEET youth representing between 9% to 33% of the population. In terms of numbers, the variances are even more pronounced at Administrative Post level, with some hardly having any NEET young people (74 individuals) when others have thousands (Dom Aleixo for instance with 6,800 people), as can be seen in the map.

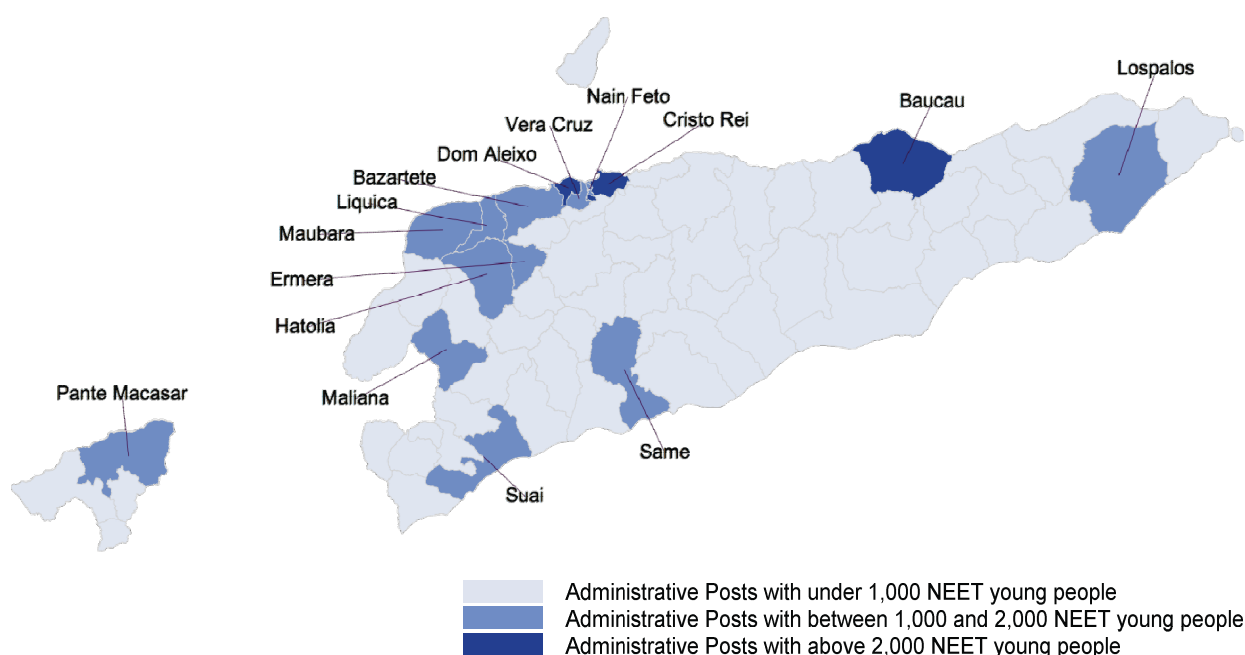


Figure 1: top Administrative Posts in terms of number of NEET young people – CensustL - 2015

It however is important to note that the measurement of NEET actually portrays a 'broad array of vulnerabilities among youth, touching on issues of unemployment, early school leaving, labor market discouragement, [resulting in] exclusion and marginalization'. Policy makers need to understand these various elements in the Timorese context and how it translate in young people being left behind in terms of education, employment and equal participation. Unfortunately, the data is not always available for a detailed analysis and more research is needed.

Left behind in education

The most excluded from education are the 15 to 19 year-olds NEET young people. They have already left school even though they are still of school-going age – but have not done so to take up a job. They represent 14% of young people of this age group, with no noticeable differences between boys and girls.

Twelve percent of all youth aged 15-24 in Timor-Leste have never attended school. Youth who are currently not employed or in schooling, however, were much more likely to have not attended any schooling: 29% of NEET youth never attended school while only 7% of non-NEET young people had never attended school.

The good news is that the percentage of people over the age of 25 in Timor-Leste who have never attended school is dropping. Between 2004 and 2010 it dropped from 49% to 33%, and again dropped in 2015 to 26%.

But while the national percentage of people who never attended school is dropping, some municipalities are lagging behind. 20% of young men and 26% of young women in Ermera never attended school, while in Oecusse, 19% of young men and 20% of young women never attended school .

The majority (71%) of NEET young people started school but dropped out before completion. Many NEET are illiterate and young people who are illiterate have more than double the chance of not being in employment, education or training (17.2 % of literate youth are NEET versus 36.6 % of illiterate youth).

Almost all FGD participants had dropped out of school, at either the pre-secondary or secondary level. They cited financial constraints, family issues (death of parents or living in a large family), or encountering threats, bullying, or abuse at or near schools as reasons for discontinuing school. These are consistent with reasons reported during the Youth Conferences conducted during the review of the National Youth Policy, where family attitudes (such as parents not understanding the importance of schooling or pushing youth to marry and have children early), family socio-economic situations (such as orphanhood, unemployment of parents, or multiple children), individual attitudes and behaviors (such as early marriage or lack of motivation), and structural elements (such as distance, lack of facilities in school, or lack of professionalism in teachers) were all identified as contributing factors toward low retention .

Left behind in employment

Among NEET young people, many are unemployed youth: these are young people who are available for work but have not found a job yet. In Timor-Leste, the youth unemployment rate, the percentage of youth who are not currently working out of all youth who are available to work, is 12%. This ranges from 5% in Aileu up to 27% in Dili.

There is a higher unemployment rate among men (14%) than women (10%) in Timor-Leste. Since individuals without a job but not available for work are not considered unemployed, the lower unemployment rate among young women can be explained by the fact that many do not seek work, being busy with housework. Conversely, the close to equality unemployment rates in some municipalities, such as Dili, may point to an equal percentage of young men and women actively looking for work.

Youth unemployment rates by municipality and sex

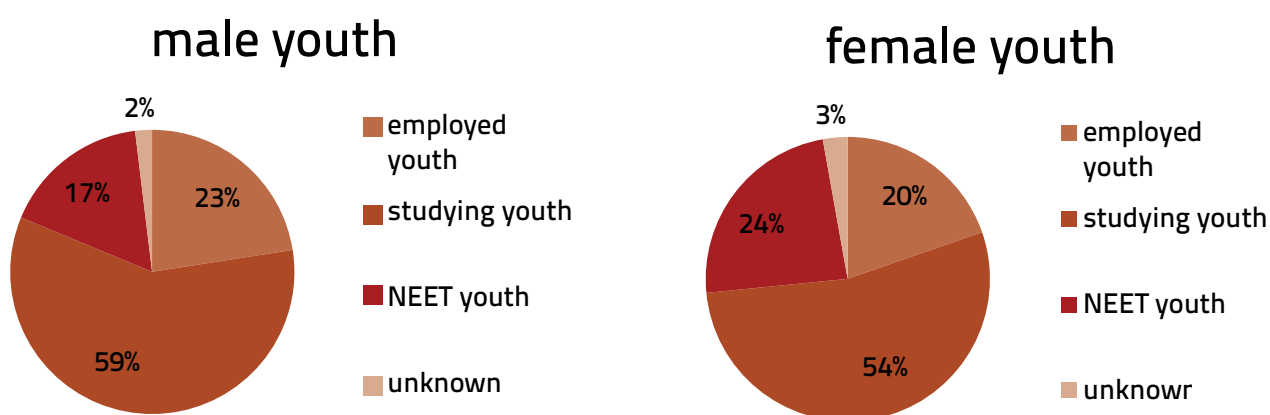
MUNICIPALITY	Male	Female	Total
Aileu	5%	4%	5%
Ainaro	10%	5%	8%
Bacau	15%	10%	13%
Bobonaro	8%	6%	7%
Covalima	15%	6%	11%
Dili	28%	26%	27%
Ermera	7%	5%	6%
Lautem	21%	15%	18%
Liquiça	12%	8%	10%
Manatuto	13%	8%	11%
Manufahi	7%	6%	7%
SAR of Oecussi	8%	4%	6%
Viqueque	9%	5%	8%
TOTAL	14%	10%	12%

The youth who participated in the FGDs said they were unable to find work: either they searched for work but could not find any or they were unsuccessful applicants for a position.

When youth in Timor-Leste do find work, it is typically in vulnerable employment, working in non-steady jobs or contributing to the family business, which in most cases will be small scale agriculture. Of youth who reported any employment in the 2015 Census, 81% are considered vulnerable and this percentage is higher for women (84%) than men (79%). Over 40,000 youth are engaged in vulnerable employment in Timor-Leste.

Inequality in participation

Among NEET young people, many are not seeking work because they have taken on responsibilities for housework. Far from being idle, they are nevertheless not considered part of the workforce. This is one reason NEET young women outnumber NEET young men: in the Census, at least half of NEET young women were identified as being primarily engaged in household work.



The percentage of young men and young women currently working is very similar. This points to increased gender equality in younger people, compared to older women who are less involved in the workforce than their male counterparts.

Among NEET young people, there are also a few idle discouraged youth: unemployed young people who are available for work but who are not looking for jobs because they feel they will never find one. Some participants of the FGDs said that when they saw their peers attending university, it made them sad because, while they wanted to do that too, they did not think they had the same capacity as the other youth. Others, however, seemed content to sit, and spend time with friends.

In many low-income and lower middle-income countries, these idle youth are few : without unemployment benefits and limited support from families, they have no other options but to find some ways of earning money. This seems to be confirmed by the data of the 2015 Census which only identified 806 NEET youth who reported not seeking work even if they were otherwise available to work.

Recommendations

There is no single pathway to NEET status. Both improving academic achievement and economic opportunities after school graduation is essential, and the National Youth Policy clearly outlines a priority for including improved skill-building during education with a focus on entrepreneurship. Additionally, socio-cultural factors influence NEET status, such as family or community values for early marriage, youth contributions toward family productivity or women's role in society. More research would be helpful to further understand how attitudes and practices in Timor-Leste restrict access to education, training, and employment for young men and women.

1. Increase access to and completion of schooling

- The Ministry of Education and Culture identifies Administrative Posts and Sucos with the highest rates of youth who have never attended school and take steps to address these gaps.
- The Ministry of Education and Culture enacts an early identification and intervention system for schools to prevent school dropout (including by teaching comprehensive sexuality education to prevent teenage pregnancies) and strives to bring school leavers back into the school system, especially young mothers, in line with the Inclusive Education Policy.

2. Bring educational content in line with economic demands and opportunities

- The Ministry of Education and Culture evaluates and improves existing curriculum to provide a more entrepreneurial skill set among youth, especially for girls and young women.
- The Ministry of Education and Culture works together with the Secretariat of State for Youth and Labour (SSYL) and the private sector to develop work experience opportunities for youth in their final year of secondary school.

3. Expand training opportunities for youth who have never attended or left school

- Suco authorities and youth representatives create and/or strengthen links with Training Centers to find information and opportunities for NEET youth.
- Develop re-training opportunities for youth who have never attended school, especially focused in Municipalities with the highest rates of young people who have never attended school.

4. Increase economic participation

- SSYL works with suco authorities and suco youth representatives to disseminate job and vacancy announcements, especially taking advantage of social media.
- SSYL, in collaboration with SEIGIS, supports women and young women's participation in the workforce.
- Support private sector to establish family friendly working environments through flexible working hours, provision of childcare, job sharing and managing off-site workers, enabling more women to balance employment with household duties.
- Invest in micro-enterprises as a means of providing employment.

5. Conduct further research and share lessons learned

- Share lessons learned from programs aimed at school-retention more effectively, especially actions that Municipalities and schools can take to reduce drop-out.
- Investigate the cultural obstacles and facilitators for young women to complete schooling and participate in the workforce.
- Improve data collection so that policy makers can know how many young people, among the NEET population, are idle, seeking work and involved in housework.

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