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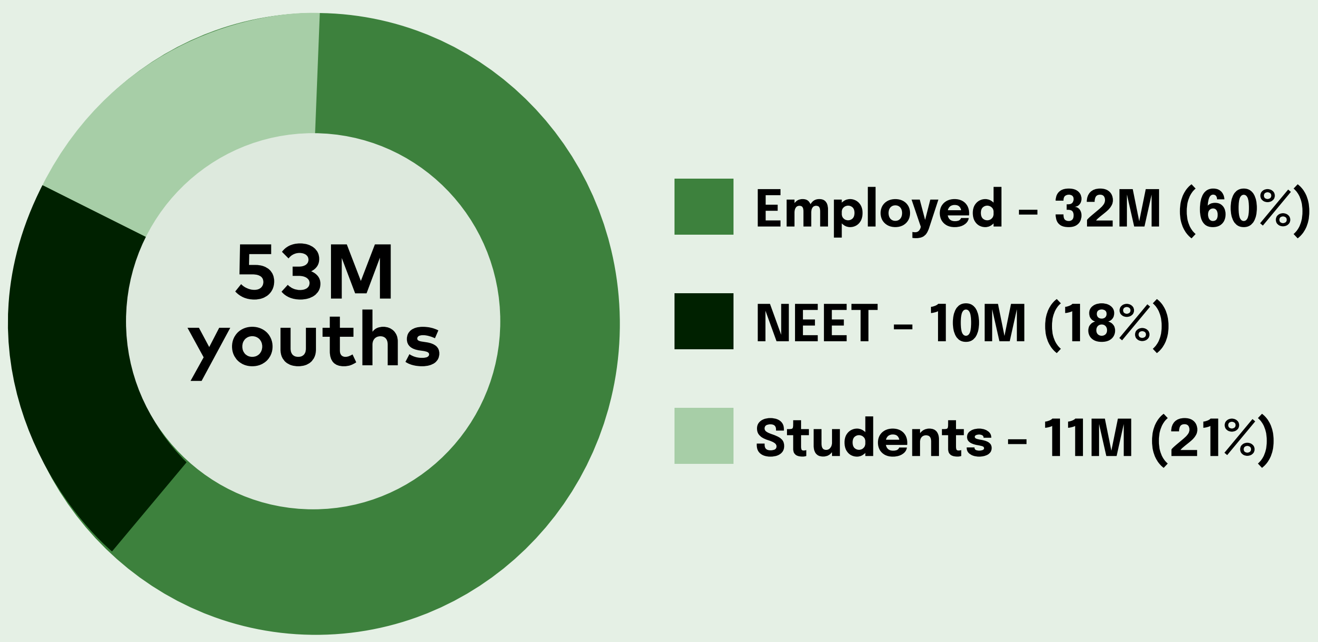
53M

young people aged 15 to 35 live in the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) region, representing 36% of its total population.

Projected to add **27.9 million** more by 2040, WAEMU's youth population is among the fastest-growing in the world, yet quality jobs are not keeping pace.

YOUTH POPULATION BREAKDOWN



8
countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo

96%
of employed youth work informally

52%
of employed youth work in agriculture

18%
of youth are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)

Source: Africa Youth Employment Clock. WDL estimates based on the national labor force surveys, and data from ILO and IIASA

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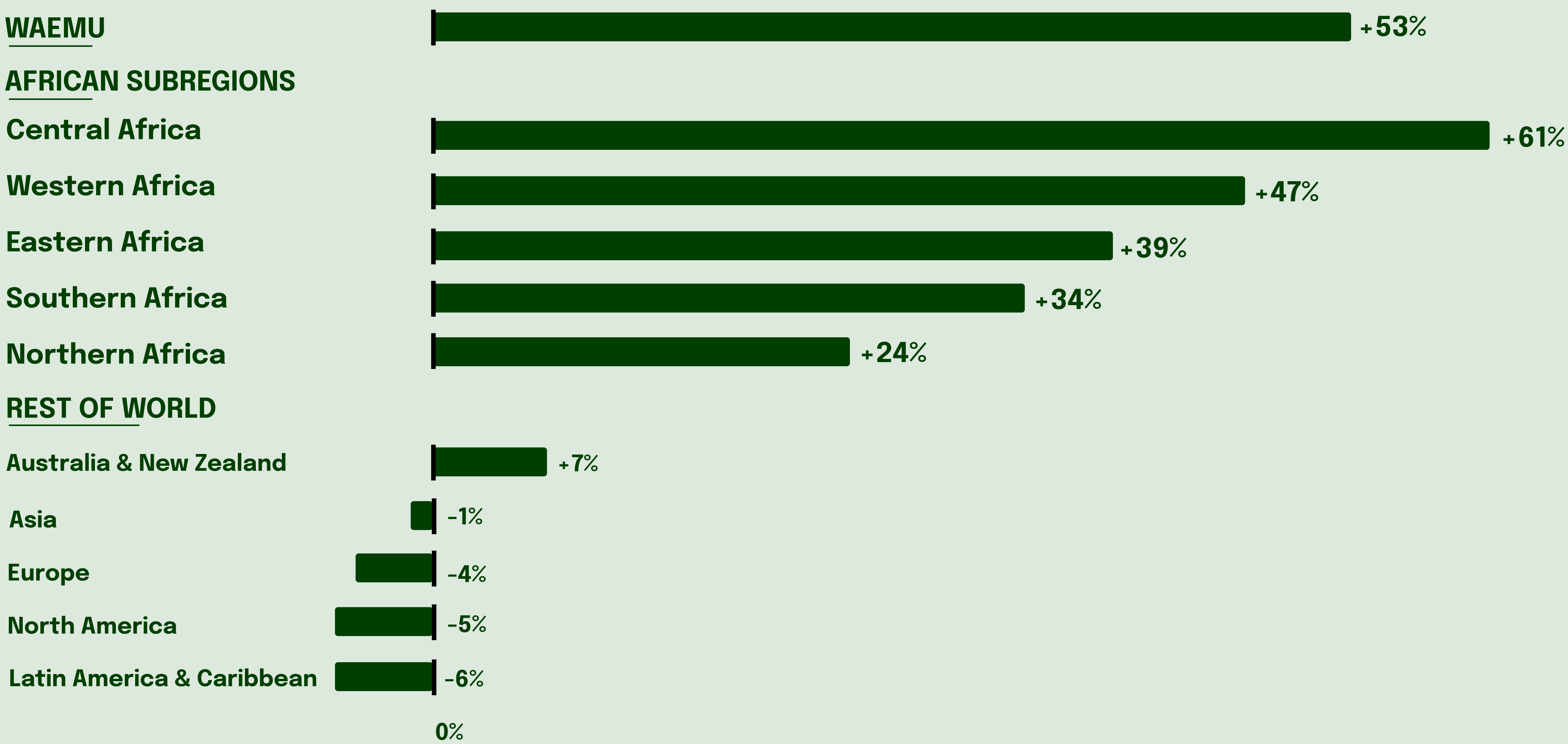
WAEMU's youth population is among the fastest-growing globally, with a projected +53% increase by 2040, outpacing the Africa-wide average of +41%.

The Alliance of Sahel States (AES), **Mali**, **Burkina Faso**, and **Niger**, which exited ECOWAS in 2025, account for **61% of all youth added** across WAEMU by 2040, meaning most of the region's youth population growth will occur in the subregion facing the most acute security challenges.

YOUTH POPULATION GROWTH RATE, 2025 TO 2040



YOUTH ADDED BY COUNTRY, 2025 TO 2040 (27.9M TOTAL)

Niger	AES	7.5M	Senegal	2.8M
Mali	AES	5.3M	Benin	2.4M
Burkina Faso	AES	4.2M	Togo	1.3M
Côte d'Ivoire		4.1M	Guinea-Bissau	0.3M

AES Alliance of Sahel States (AES)

Source: Africa Youth Employment Clock. WDL estimates based on the national labor force surveys, and data from ILO and IIASA

2025

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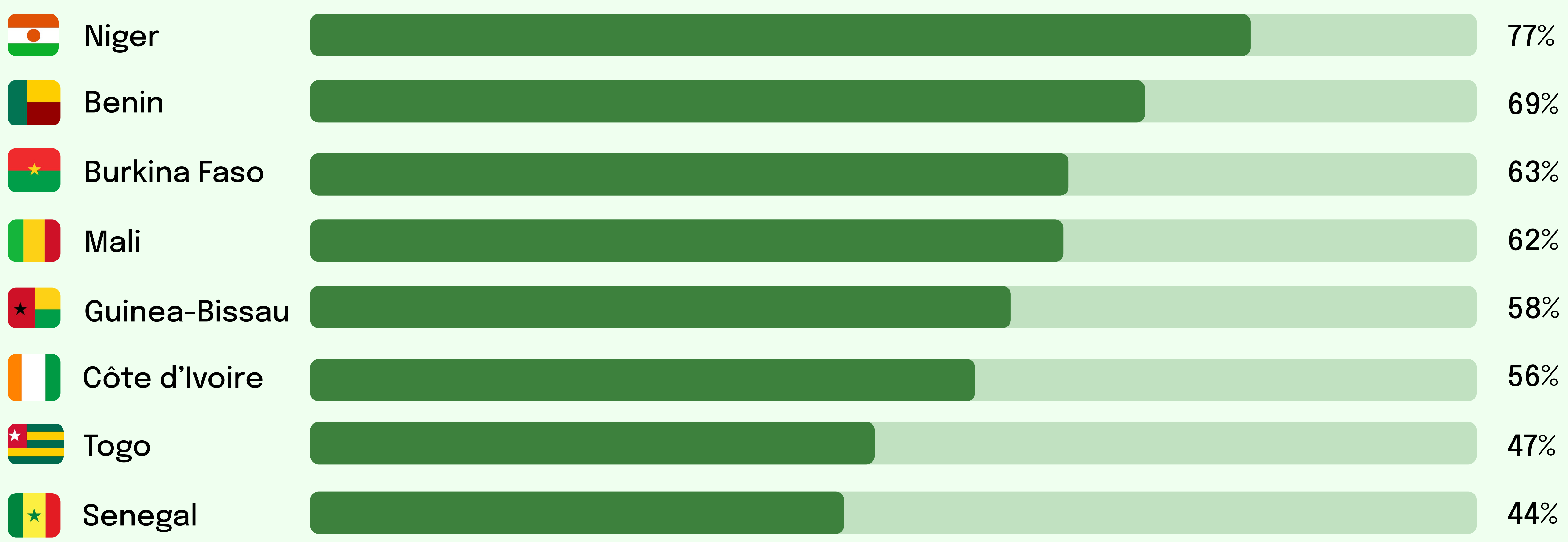
WAEMU has a high youth employment share of 61%, but 11 million young people who are employed live in extreme poverty.

Countries with lower daily spending per capita tend to have higher youth employment rates. **Niger**, where average daily spending is among the region's lowest, has the highest employment rate at **77%**, while **Senegal**, with higher average spending, has the lowest at **44%**. High youth employment in the region reflects subsistence agricultural work rather than economic opportunity: being employed does not mean escaping poverty

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT RATE BY COUNTRY



Nearly one in three young workers in WAEMU lives on under $2.15/day

46% Not poor
Over $3.65/day - 15M youth

22% Moderately poor
$2.15 to $2.65/day - 7M youth

32% Extremely poor
Under $2.15/day - 11M youth

Daily consumption (or income) per person in a household measured at 2017 International prices adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP). Economic class based on the World Bank's International poverty lins, such as $2.15 (2017 PPP) per day for extreme poverty.

Source: Africa Youth Employment Clock. WDL estimates based on the national labor force surveys, and data from ILO and IIASA

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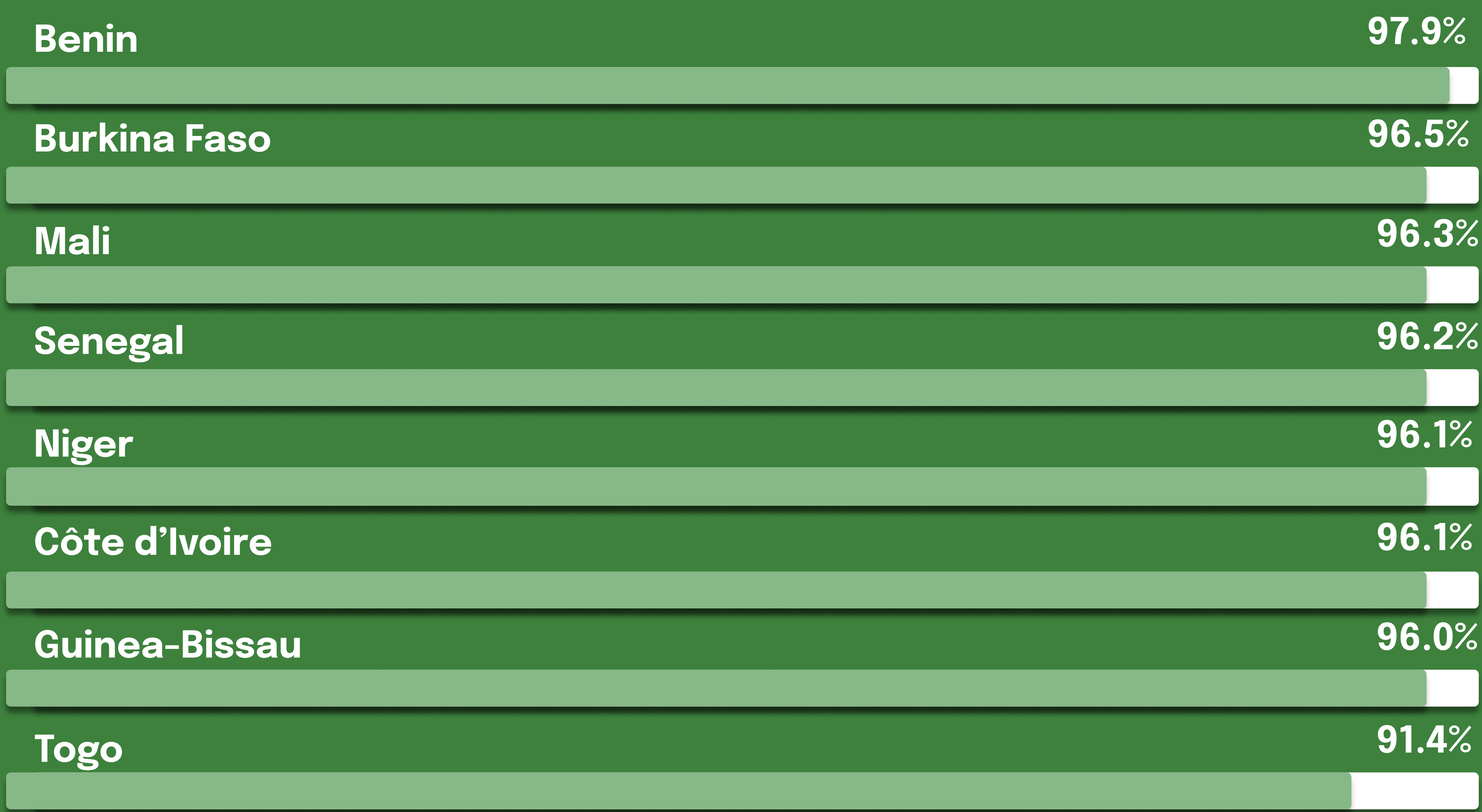
96% of employed youth in **WAEMU** hold an informal job, higher than the Africa-wide share of **90%**.

Informality is high across all WAEMU countries, **limiting income stability and access to social protection** for **31 Mn** young workers. **Togo** records the region's highest share of formal youth employment at **8.6%**. This data points to an opportunity to **support informal workers** on one hand and **improve pathways to formal work** on the other. **Togo**, for instance, is aligning youth skills training with expanding port activities to create direct pathways into formal employment. Meanwhile, **Benin** is leveraging its National Youth Employment Strategy to upgrade informal enterprises through targeted microfinance loans and business incubation programs.

INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT RATE BY COUNTRY



Source: Africa Youth Employment Clock. WDL estimates based on the national labor force surveys, and data from ILO and IIASA

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Agriculture employs 52% of WAEMU's working youth. Services are gaining ground but agriculture remains the primary employer through 2040.

AES countries (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger) rely most heavily on agriculture for youth employment while facing high insecurity and accounting for the largest increase in youth population in **WAEMU** by **2040**. **Senegal** and **Togo** have the most diversified youth employment structures, where **services** exceed agriculture's share. **Senegal**, **Togo**, and **Benin** also record the strongest youth employment shares in industry with **WAEMU**, reflecting relatively more diversified economic structures beyond **agriculture**. The data highlights a dual opportunity to upgrade agricultural roles and diversify youth employment. Programs in **Togo**, **Niger**, **Senegal**, and **Côte d'Ivoire** are advancing higher-value agribusiness, while initiatives in **Burkina Faso**, **Benin**, and **Mali** are expanding pathways into **services** and industry.

How employed youth are distributed across sectors, by country

AGRICULTURE SERVICES INDUSTRY

COUNTRY	AGRICULTURE	SERVICES	INDUSTRY
Niger	71%	18%	11%
Mali	60%	31%	9%
Guinea-Bissau	60%	29%	11%
Burkina Faso	50%	32%	18%
Côte d'Ivoire	44%	41%	15%
Benin	41%	40%	19%
Togo	36%	46%	19%
Senegal	31%	45%	24%

Source: Africa Youth Employment Clock. WDL estimates based on the national labor force surveys, and data from ILO and IIASA 2025

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6.5 million young women in **WAEMU** are not in employment, education, or training, representing two-thirds of all **NEET** youth.

Across **WAEMU**, **9.7** million young people are **NEET**, and **67%** of them are women. The gap is sharpest in Mali and Niger, countries which face high insecurity, where **75%** and **72%** of **NEET** youth are women respectively. In Sub-Saharan Africa, **28%** of women outside the labour force cite care responsibilities as their reason for not working, compared with just **3%** of men. Additionally, norms around care lead to a double time burden for employed women, who must perform unpaid care work in addition to their paid work. For instance, in **Mali** and **Benin**, research shows women put in over **140** more minutes each day in total productive activity than men once both paid and unpaid work are considered. Women are working, just not always in the labour market.

COUNTRY	TOTAL YOUTH (Millions) Females	EMPLOYED (Millions Female%	STUDENT (Millions Female%	NEET (Millions) Female%
Mali AES	8.4 (49%)	5.2 (40%)	1.3 (49%)	1.9 (75%)
Niger AES	9.5 (49%)	7.3 (45%)	0.9 (49%)	1.3 (72%)
Côte d'Ivoire	10.9 (49%)	6.2 (44%)	3.0 (50%)	1.7 (67%)
Senegal	6.6 (50%)	3.0 (35%)	1.7 (61%)	1.9 (63%)
Burkina Faso AES	8.6 (50%)	5.4 (45%)	1.4 (52%)	1.8 (63%)
Togo	3.3 (49%)	1.6 (50%)	1.4 (46%)	0.4 (60%)
Benin	5.0 (49%)	3.4 (49%)	1.0 (44%)	0.6 (59%)
Guinea-Bissau	0.8 (50%)	0.5 (47%)	0.2 (52%)	0.1 (58%)
WAEMU total	53.1 (49%)	32.5 (44%)	10.9 (51%)	9.7 (67%)

Gender disparity ⟶ Gender parity

Recent initiatives to expand women's economic opportunities in WAEMU

Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger: The 2026-2031 **World Bank Country Partnership Frameworks** aim to create jobs for women and youth by boosting infrastructure, private sector development, and agricultural productivity.

Mali : The International Finance Corporation and Orange Mali have signed a financing agreement to expand digital connectivity into rural areas, a project that seeks to narrow the digital gender divide and **empower more women to enter the digital economy.**

Côte d'Ivoire: The International Labour Organization and the Japanese government are funding initiatives that **employ women and youth to produce biochar** from agricultural residues.

Togo: Plan International Togo launched a 574 million CFA project in Blitta to **build economic resilience for women and youth.**

Guinea-Bissau: Industrializing cashew processing establishes structured rural employment, particularly benefiting y**oung women who already dominate roles in pilot facilities**.

NEET: Not in Employment, Education or Training

AES: Mali, Burkina Faso & Niger, which exited ECOWAS in 2025

Source: Africa Youth Employment Outlook 2026 Report, Africa Youth Employment Clock. WDL estimates based on the national labor force surveys, and data from ILO and IIASA

2025