



Work and Family Lives:

Preliminary Findings from the 2023–24 Young Lives Survey (Round 7): Ethiopia

Introduction

For more than 20 years, Young Lives has followed two cohorts, born seven years apart, from infancy into early adulthood in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam.¹ This factsheet presents preliminary findings from Round 7 of the Young Lives survey carried out in Ethiopia in 2023–24, when the Younger Cohort was 22 years old and the Older Cohort was 29. It provides an overview of the key labour market, marital and fertility indicators underlining changes over time by comparing the Younger Cohort at age 22 with the Older Cohort at the same age but seven years ago, in 2016, and documenting the Younger Cohort's progression from age 15 to 22. The factsheet also reflects on the implications of the findings for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Headlines

- The proportion of the Younger Cohort not in employment, education or training (NEET) at age 22 was 16%, 9 percentage points higher than the Older Cohort at the same age in 2016 (7%).
- Most young people who are working are engaged in poor-quality jobs, without a written contract and working long hours.
- Compared to other regions, more young people born in Tigray, a region significantly affected by the armed conflict, are employed (64%), but only 3% have a formal written contract.
- There is a gender employment gap with more men than women employed. In contrast, young women spend 3.2 hours more per day on unpaid care work than men.
- Women are more likely to be married and/or have a child at age 22 than men at the same age.
- Early-life inequalities predict employment, marital and fertility outcomes at age 22.

¹ Round 7 took place in the Young Lives study sites in Ethiopia, India and Peru. On this occasion, data was not collected in Vietnam due to a change in government procedures for the international transfer of personal data.

Key Findings

- **The proportion of the Younger Cohort not in employment, education or training (NEET) at age 22 was 9 percentage points higher than the Older Cohort at the same age in 2016 (16% vs 7%).** Among the rest of the Younger Cohort, 51% were working only, 14% were working and studying, and 18% were studying only in the last year.
- **Young people typically work in poor-quality jobs, measured as jobs without a written contract and jobs with long working hours.** About nine out of ten of the employed Younger Cohort participants do not have a written contract, and about two in five work long hours (more than 48 hours per week).
- **Young people born in Tigray, a region significantly affected by the armed conflict, had the highest proportion employed at 64%,** but only 3% had formal written contracts.
- **There is a clear gender difference in the distribution of work. More young men than young women are employed, with the gender employment gap starting at least as early as age 15.** By age 22, the gender employment gap is 28 percentage points and men also spend 1.1 hours more per day than women on paid work. In contrast, young women spend 3.2 hours more per day on unpaid care work than men at the same age.
- **Women are more likely than men to be married and/or have a child at age 22.** There was a 16 percentage point difference in marriage rates at age 22 between Younger Cohort women and men and a 14 percentage point difference in fertility rates. Young women who are married and/or have a child are less likely to work or to have a written contract than their unmarried and childless counterparts.
- **Early-life inequalities predict employment, marital and fertility outcomes at age 22.** Young people whose childhood caregiver had lower formal education and those born in Amhara and SNNP were more likely to be working. Young people born in the poorest households were more likely to be married and/or have a child.

The policy context of work and family lives in Ethiopia

Ethiopia has made significant strides in economic and social development in the last two decades. In 2023, the GDP growth rate was 6.5% (World Bank 2024) and the number of productive jobs increased by 13 million between 2005 and 2015 (Ronnås and Sarkar 2019).² However, progress towards SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth) has been sluggish due to slow structural transformation and limited growth in decent work compared to the fast rise in the working-age population (by 17 million between 2005 and 2015) (World Bank 2024). Gender and other socio-economic inequalities are also widespread, for instance informal jobs made up a larger proportion of women's employment at 51% in 2022, compared to 41% for men (Danish Trade Union Development Agency 2024). This also raises concerns about achieving SDG 5 (Gender equality).

The economy and people's livelihoods have suffered multiple shocks since 2020, including the COVID-19 pandemic, severe droughts and ongoing conflict in northern Ethiopia and Oromia. Ethiopia launched a ten-year development plan for 2021 to 2030 (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2020), based on its 2020 Home-grown Economic Reform Agenda, to sustain high economic growth and ensure inclusive development. It focuses on promoting youth employment (including by enhancing skills training and entrepreneurial support) and gender equality (by ending early marriage by 2030 as well as promoting women's economic participation). A new Ministry of Labor and Skills was also established in 2022 to oversee job creation, skills development and other labour concerns.

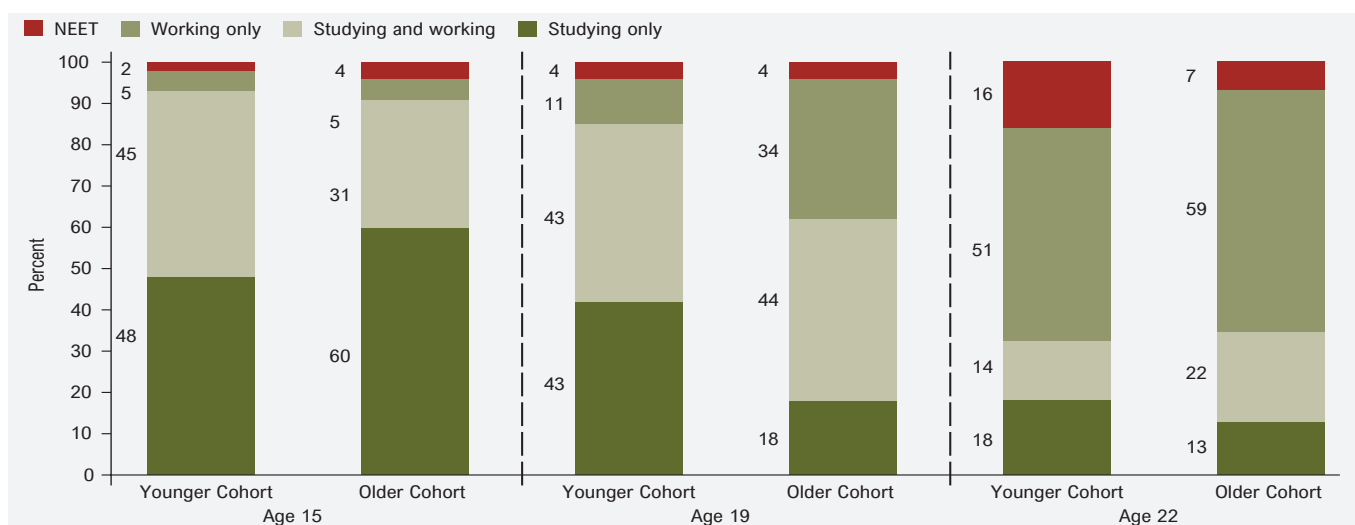
Methods

This factsheet uses preliminary data from the Young Lives Round 7 survey. Young Lives participants in the Younger Cohort and the Older Cohort have been followed since 2002, when they were around one and eight years old respectively. In Ethiopia, Round 7 data was collected between October 2023 and April 2024. A total of 2,231 interviews were completed (1,535 with the Younger Cohort and 696 with the Older Cohort), which represents 74.4% of the original sample in Round 1 (Younger Cohort: 76.8%; Older Cohort: 69.6%) (Molina et al. 2025). Most of the interviews were carried out in person, but 8.7% of participants were interviewed using a phone survey due to the ongoing conflict in the Amhara region during the period of data collection. Participants from previous rounds who were not interviewed in Round 7 were excluded from the analysis. Participants are classified by gender, area of residence (urban or rural) at the time of the data collection, household wealth (top, middle or bottom wealth tercile in 2002) (Briones, 2017), region of origin and childhood caregiver's level of formal education.

What do Young Lives participants do?³

The proportion of 22-year-olds working in 2023 was lower than in 2016, alongside an increase in those not in employment, education or training (NEET), and an increase in those studying only. In 2023, 51% of 22-year-olds were working only, 14% were working and studying, 18% were studying only and 16% were not in employment, education or training in the last year (Figure 1). A cross-cohort comparison shows that more 15-year-olds were working in 2016 (50% of the Younger Cohort) than in 2009 (36% of the Older Cohort).⁴ However, this pattern was reversed by ages 19 and 22, with lower rates of Younger Cohort participants working compared to Older Cohort participants at the same age.

Figure 1. Working and studying status by age and cohort (%)



Notes: Working status is defined based on at least one hour of work in labour market activities in the last 12 months; studying status is defined based on enrolment in the ongoing academic year (for studying) prior to the interview; NEET refers to those who have not worked, are not in training and are not enrolled in education.

² Productive jobs are defined as jobs yielding an income sufficient for a worker and their dependants to maintain a consumption level above the poverty line.

³ Note that statistics in this section exclude Young Lives participants interviewed by phone in Round 7.

⁴ The statistics for working include those who were 'working only' and those who were 'working and studying'.

The COVID-19 pandemic and armed conflict both started when Younger Cohort participants were 18–19 years old, and could be underlying causes of the fall in the proportion of young people working and the increase in those not in employment, education or training. The rate of 22-year-olds not in employment, education or training increased by 9 percentage points between 2016 to 2023 (from 7% of the Older Cohort in 2016 to 16% of the Younger Cohort in 2023), while the rate for the 29-year-old Older Cohort in 2023 was also high at 26% (Annex 1). Those not in employment, education or training were primarily women, due to a larger proportion being solely engaged in unpaid care and domestic work (Figure 2b). The most common reasons given for not working among those not in employment, education or training were domestic and childcare responsibilities (57%) and having a disability or being ill (11%). Interestingly, the proportion of young people not in employment, education or training has increased for both women and men. In 2023, 24% of Younger Cohort women were classified as not in employment, education or training, up from 12% of Older Cohort women in 2016; while 9% of Younger Cohort men were classified as not in employment, education or training in 2023, up from 2% of Older Cohort men in 2016.

Employment and types of jobs

In 2023, the proportion of young people employed in the week prior to the interview was 54% and 64% for the Younger Cohort and Older Cohort, respectively. In Round 7 we asked participants about the work they had done in the last week. Overall, a higher proportion of those whose childhood caregivers had no formal education were employed (57%) compared to those whose childhood caregivers had completed primary education (37%). There was also sizeable geographical variation; fewer than half of the young people originally from SNNP and Amhara were employed. About three in five employed people work in non-agricultural activities: 31% in rural areas and 89% in urban areas. Non-agricultural jobs are concentrated among those from the wealthier households and those whose childhood caregivers had more years of formal schooling.

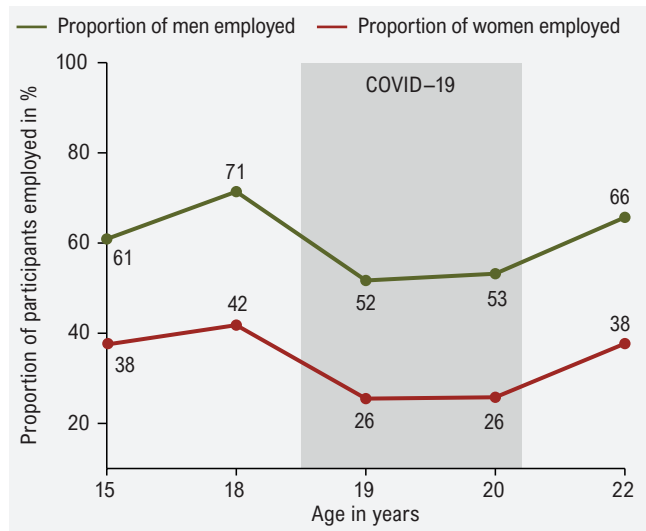
Overall, the quality of jobs available to young people – measured by having a written contract and number of working hours – is poor, with substantial variation by socio-economic factors. On average, participants in the Younger Cohort worked 44 hours per week in their main employment activity, with 37% working long hours (more than 48 hours). In addition, 48% of all employed people reported not being satisfied with their job. Only 10% of those who were working had a written contract, with a higher proportion among those in non-agricultural work activities, women, and those whose childhood caregivers have higher levels of education. Although urban and rural areas do not have substantially different proportions of young people employed, job quality indicators varied by location and were not always worse in rural areas. Rural residents had lower rates of work with a written contract (6%) compared to urban areas (14%) but also lower rates of long working hours (22% vs 51%).

In 2023, Tigray had the highest proportion of participants employed and lowest proportion of employment with a written contract. At age 22, Younger Cohort participants originally from Tigray had the highest proportion employed (63%) across all study regions, and 29-year-old Older Cohort participants from Tigray had an above-average proportion employed (68%). At the same time, the proportion of young people with a written contract was lowest among participants originally from Tigray 3% for the Younger Cohort, 15% for the Older Cohort).

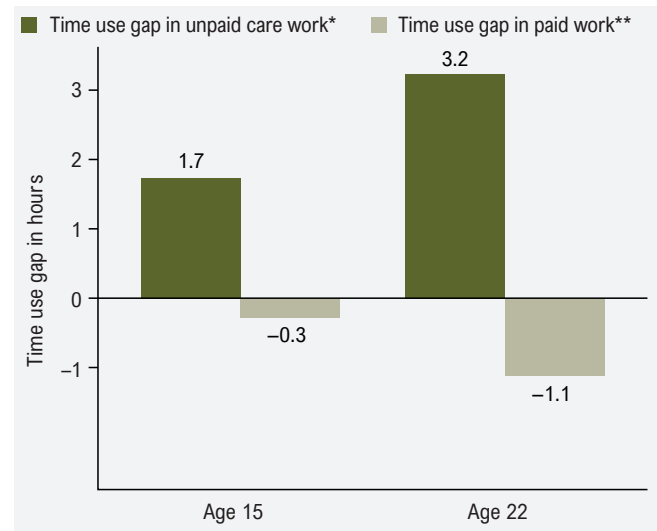
Gender distribution of work

There has been a persistent gender gap in employment, favouring men, since at least age 15 for the Younger Cohort. This gap increased from age 15 (23 percentage points) to age 18 (30 percentage points) and remained constant at age 22 (Figure 2a). Both women and men experienced a fall in employment during the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by a modest recovery, but the gender employment gap remained unchanged. Gendered differences in employment are mirrored in the number of hours worked per day (Figure 2b). At age 15, boys spent about 15 minutes more on paid work each day than girls.⁵ However, by age 22, men spent about 1.1 hours more per day on paid work than young women.

⁵ Paid work refers to paid (remunerated) work or activities outside of the household or for someone not in the household.

Figure 2. Gender gaps in employment and time use**2a. Proportion of Younger Cohort participants employed**

Notes: The proportion of participants employed at age 15 and 18 refers to a recall period of last year, while the proportion employed at age 19, 20 and 22 refers to a recall period of the last week. The proportion employed here do not include those not working in the recall period but who have a job. This variation is due to differences in data availability.

2b. Time use of Younger Cohort participants

Notes: * Women's time per day in unpaid care work – men's time per day in unpaid care work; ** Women's time per day in paid work – men's time per day in paid work.

The time-use gap is even more pronounced for unpaid care work, which includes direct care for the elderly, ill people, people with disabilities, and children, as well as indirect care or domestic responsibilities. Although this work is not officially counted as economic activity, it is important because it supports the functioning of society and enables others to participate in the workforce. By age 15, girls already spent 1.7 hours more per day on unpaid care work, and by age 22, this increased to 3.2 hours more per day (Figure 2b).⁶ There was also a similar gender gap in unpaid care work between Older Cohort women and men at age 22. A significant time-use gap exists even among employed men and women, with employed women spending 2.2 more hours more per day on unpaid care work. Taken together, this evidence suggests that gender norms and social expectations play an important role in how work is divided both within and outside the household.

Family formation

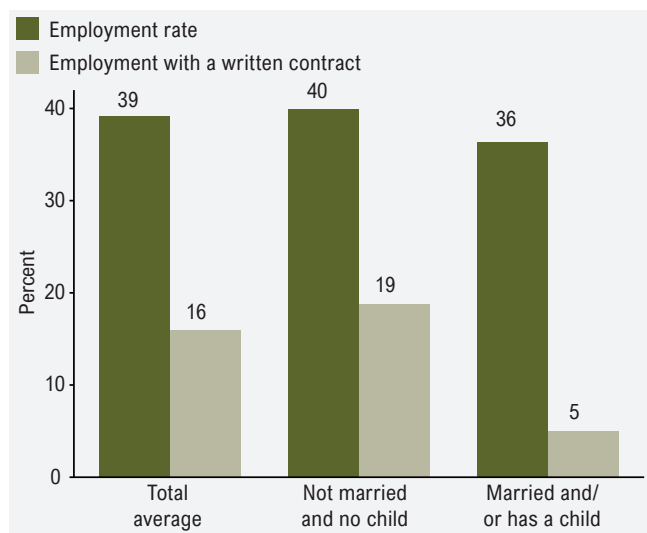
Young women are much more likely than young men to be married and have a child by age 22. In 2023, 21% of Younger Cohort women were married and 16% had a child at age 22, while only 5% of men were married and 2% had a child at the same age. Moreover, more than 90%

of those who married early (before age 18) and/or had a child early (by age 19) were women. On a more promising note, the prevalence of early marriage among women and early motherhood is decreasing: about 5% of women in the Younger Cohort married early and 7% had a child early, compared to 13% of Older Cohort women who married early and 18% who had a child early.

Early-life inequalities predict the probability of being married and having a child by age 22. The same socio-economic factors are relevant to both marriage and parenthood rates and therefore combined results are presented here. The rate of young people who were married and/or had a child by age 22 was 16% among Younger Cohort participants born in the poorest households, compared to 5% among those born in the wealthiest households. Among Younger Cohort participants born in rural areas, the rate of young people married and/or with a child by age 22 was 16%, compared to 8% in urban areas. Wealth and area of residence also predicted the probability of being married and/or having a child for the Older Cohort by age 22 in 2016. Young women who were married and/or had a child were less likely to work (36% vs 40%) or to work with a written contract (5% vs 19%) compared to their unmarried and childless counterparts (Figure 3).

⁶ The statistics on time use exclude Young Lives participants interviewed by phone in Round 7.

Figure 3. Labour market characteristics of Younger Cohort women by marital and parenthood status (%)



Conclusions and looking forward

The proportion of young people not in employment, education or training has substantially increased over time, when comparing the Younger Cohort at age 22 in 2023 to

the Older Cohort at the same age in 2016. Approximately two out of three 22-year-olds were employed, with no significant difference between rural and urban residents. Early-life inequalities are closely linked to employment outcomes later in life. This suggests that reducing inequalities in access to economic opportunities, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, remains vital to achieving SDG 8. Further research is needed to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and conflict on the work opportunities of Young Lives participants.

There are significant gender differences in the distribution of work. Fewer women are employed, they are taking on a higher share of unpaid care work, and more are married and/or parents at a younger age, compared to men. Taken together, the evidence suggests that gender norms and social expectations play an important role in how work is divided within and outside the household. Regional and socio-economic factors also play a significant role; young people born in the poorest households and those born in rural areas are more likely to be married and to have a child by age 22. Targeted policies are required to address structural inequalities faced by women and to make progress towards SDG 5.

Annex 1. Work and family lives outcomes, Younger Cohort and Older Cohort

	Not in employment, education or training (NEET) (%)			Employment in the last week (%)		Employment with a written contract (in the last week) (%)		Hours per day in unpaid care work		Married or has a child (%)			Married before legal age (%)		Had a child by 19 years old (%)	
	OC (age 22)	OC (age 29)	YC (age 22)	OC (age 29)	YC (age 22)	OC (age 29)	YC (age 22)	OC (age 22)	YC (age 22)	OC (age 22)	OC (age 29)	YC (age 22)	OC	YC	OC	YC
Average of full sample	6.6	25.5	16.2	63.9	53.9	28.6	9.7	2.9	3.5	20.4	58.2	13.4	6.8	2.4	11.1	4.0
Gender																
Women	12.0	42.6	24.3	44.4	39.2	36.7	15.9	4.9	5.2	35.6	73.7	22.4	13.3	4.6	17.8	7.3
Men	1.6	9.9	8.7	81.6	67.6	24.6	6.3	1.1	2.0	6.8	44.1	5.2	0.8	0.4	4.9	0.9
Difference (t-test)	-10.40***	-32.71***	-15.57***	37.23***	28.47***	-12.16**	-9.60***	-3.81***	-3.23***	-28.73***	-29.61***	-17.20***	-12.47***	-4.23***	-12.89***	-6.44***
Area of residence (Round 1)																
Urban	8.7	26.5	16.2	63.0	50.0	38.1	17.8	2.4	3.0	12.5	53.0	8.3	2.5	0.8	11.0	3.0
Rural	5.6	25.1	16.1	64.3	55.9	24.8	6.1	3.2	3.8	23.6	60.3	15.9	8.5	3.2	11.1	4.5
Difference (t-test)	-3.13	-1.45	-0.12	1.31	5.88	-13.25**	-11.69***	0.77**	0.84***	11.13***	7.28	7.60***	5.97**	2.42**	0.09	1.51
Concurrent area of residence																
Urban	9.8	25.8	18.2	62.8	51.2	35.2	13.6	2.8	3.3	19.3	55.8	12.4	4.7	1.7	10.8	3.7
Rural	3.8	24.8	13.8	66.2	57.1	16.2	5.5	3.1	3.8	21.7	62.8	14.6	8.6	3.3	11.0	4.3
Difference (t-test)	-5.96**	-1.03	-4.34	3.47	5.90	-18.93***	-8.16***	0.27	0.44	2.39	7.00*	2.19	3.83	1.58	0.14	0.53
Wealth index (Round 1)																
Bottom tercile	6.1	25.8	15.8	64.1	57.9	24.5	6.3	3.3	3.9	24.1	60.5	15.7	8.2	3.2	10.4	4.1
Middle tercile	7.2	25.5	18.8	63.7	49.9	35.4	17.1	2.5	3.3	18.2	60.3	13.2	5.4	1.6	14.7	4.6
Top tercile	7.6	22.4	13.1	64.5	42.7	32.7	8.2	2.3	2.8	5.3	39.5	4.5	2.6	1.0	5.3	2.5
Difference (bottom vs top tercile) (t-test)	1.51	-3.48	-2.65	0.38	-15.14***	8.12	1.97	-0.97	-1.07***	-18.82***	-21.01***	-11.16***	-5.56	-2.16	-5.10	-1.56
Region (Round 1)																
Addis Ababa	5.6	18.7	13.5	72.0	53.4	44.4	22.5	1.7	2.7	5.3	46.7	6.7	1.3	1.0	17.3	3.4
Amhara (in person)	6.9	45.2	15.4	40.9	47.8	23.7	11.5	3.1	3.9	25.0	57.0	7.5	9.7	3.0	7.5	2.5
Amhara (phone survey)	15.9	15.9	14.7	66.7	46.5	31.0	3.3			19.0	61.9	14.0	9.5	0.0	6.3	0.0
Oromia	5.6	11.8	13.8	77.6	62.3	35.0	13.5	2.9	3.4	24.7	67.8	20.4	8.6	3.3	15.8	5.1
SNNP	5.6	33.9	16.0	57.6	45.3	26.3	5.3	3.5	4.1	18.7	53.5	12.0	4.7	2.7	9.9	2.9
Tigray	9.1	24.8	22.2	66.7	63.5	14.9	2.7	2.9	3.3	23.6	58.9	16.0	7.1	2.8	8.5	7.3
Caregiver education																
None	7.8	27.2	18.3	64.8	56.5	24.4	6.2	3.1	3.8	22.8	59.6	16.2	7.7	2.9	10.3	4.9
1 to 4 years	5.4	23.1	15.0	65.3	56.3	31.2	10.7	3.0	3.8	23.5	63.0	15.6	6.9	3.3	13.4	4.4
5 to 8 years	5.2	21.6	12.2	61.4	51.5	33.3	16.1	2.6	2.8	10.2	45.5	3.5	4.5	0.0	6.8	1.7
More than 8 years	5.7	34.2	13.8	56.4	36.4	45.5	22.9	2.4	2.6	7.7	51.3	8.4	2.6	1.5	15.4	1.5
Difference (none vs more than 8 years) (t-test)	-2.14	6.99	-4.43	-8.35	-20.12***	21.01	16.74***	-0.70	-1.23***	-15.07	-8.32	-7.81	-5.17	-1.35	5.07	-3.35
Number of participants	593	695	1529	696	1535	444	827	593	1406	691	696	1533	696	1535	696	1535

Notes: Differences are significant at ***1%, **5% and *10%. Differences are percentage points. The t-test for household wealth was estimated by comparing bottom with top tercile, while the t-test for caregiver's years of formal education was estimated by comparing no formal education with more than eight years of formal education. Information on caregiver's formal education was taken from 2006 (Round 2). Area of residence refers to the household location in 2002 (Round 1) as well as the current area of residence (either Round 5 or Round 7). Region uses information from 2002 (Round 1). Household wealth terciles were calculated separately for each cohort using the household wealth index of 2002 (Round 1). 19 participants have missing information of the wealth index in Round 1. Eight participants have caregiver's formal education information missing. Information on area of residence in Round 7 is missing for one participant. Information for area of residence in Round 5 is missing for 28 participants.

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Acknowledgements and credits

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The views expressed are those of the author. They are not necessarily those of, or endorsed by, Young Lives, the University of Oxford, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) or other funders. Photo credit: © Young Lives / Mulugeta Gebrekidan. The images throughout our publications are of young people living in circumstances and communities similar to the young people within our study sample.



Young Lives is a longitudinal study of poverty and inequality, following the lives of 12,000 children into adulthood in four countries (Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam).

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