

Africans increasingly dissatisfied with government efforts on their top priority: jobs

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 402 | Ronald Makanga and Derick Msafiri

Summary

Even in the best of times, unemployment is a major challenge for most African countries. The continent's relatively robust economic growth over the past two decades has failed to translate into sustained employment gains and poverty reduction (Baah-Boateng, 2016). Adding about 3 million jobs a year will not come close to absorbing the 10-12 million people entering the labor market annually as the workforce grows more rapidly in Africa than in any other region (International Labour Organization, 2016; Yeboah & Jayne, 2016; African Development Bank Group, 2020).

And these are not the best of times: If the COVID-19 pandemic persists, Africa could lose millions of jobs in both the formal and informal sectors (African Union, 2020).

Yet these are the realities facing African leaders and their development partners: According to citizens' views recorded by Afrobarometer, jobs are consistently their top priority, and they are increasingly dissatisfied with their government's efforts to create them.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys in 2019/2021 are planned in at least 35 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples that yield country-level results with margins of error of +/-2 to +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

This analysis relies mainly on data from 45,823 interviews completed in 34 countries between September 2016 and September 2018 (see Appendix Table A.1 for a list of countries and fieldwork dates). The countries covered are home to almost 80% of the continent's population. The data are weighted to ensure nationally representative samples. When reporting multi-country findings such as regional or Africa-wide averages, all countries are weighted equally (rather than in proportion to population size).

Key findings

- On average across 34 countries, about one-third of respondents said they were employed full-time (22%) or part time (12%), while 27% were unemployed and 39% were not active in the labor market.

- Among those active in the labor market:
 - More than four in 10 (44%) were unemployed. Unemployment was disproportionately high among women, rural residents, and citizens who were less educated, young, or poor.
 - On average, six in 10 (62%) were self-employed, while 24% worked in the private and nonprofit sectors and 12% were employed by the government.
 - About one in four (26%) were employed in agriculture-related occupations, followed by traders/hawkers/vendors (12%). Unskilled and skilled manual labor accounted for one-fifth (17%) of all employment.
- Unemployment continued to rank as the most important problem that Africans want their government to address.
- Almost three-fourths (73%) of Africans gave their government poor marks on job creation.
- Finding a job and escaping economic hardship are the most important reasons why Africans would consider emigration.

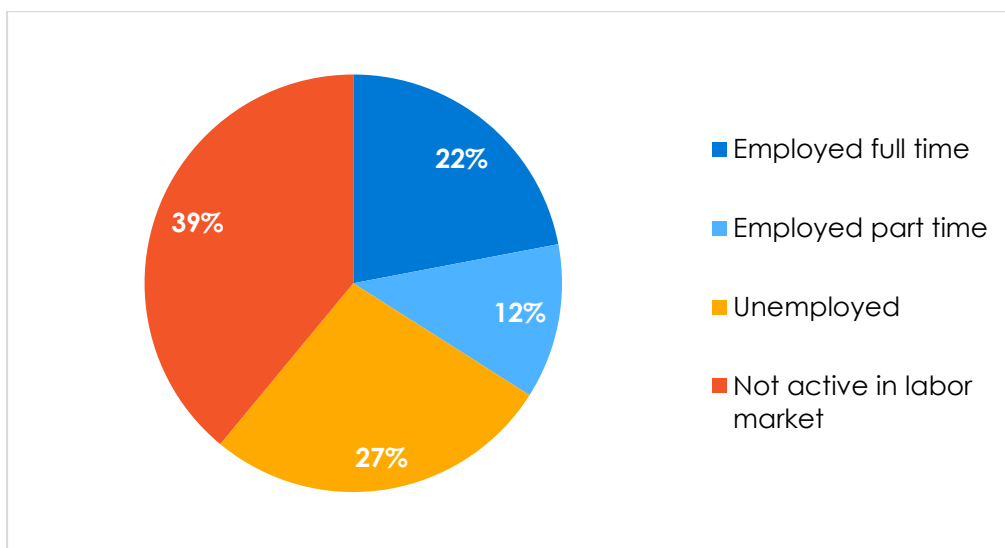
Unemployment in Africa

On average across 34 countries surveyed in 2016/2018, about one in five African adults said they had full-time jobs, and 12% had part-time work. More than one-fourth (27%) were unemployed, while 39% said they did not have jobs and were not looking for work (Figure 1).

Excluding respondents who were not active in the labor market (i.e. not working and not looking for work), more than four in 10 respondents (44%) were unemployed (Figure 2).

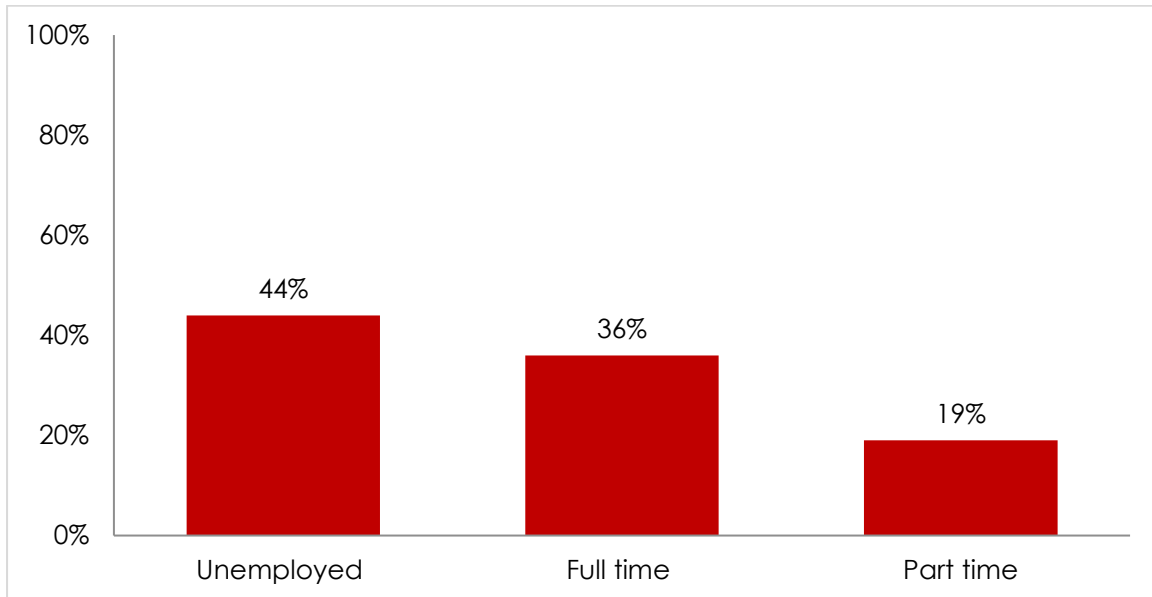
Across 18 countries surveyed in all Afrobarometer rounds since 2005/2006, the proportion of unemployed respondents among those active in the labor market declined significantly between 2008/2009 (50%) and 2014/2015 (39%) before rebounding slightly in 2016/2018 (Figure 3).

Figure 1: Employment status | 34 countries | 2016/2018



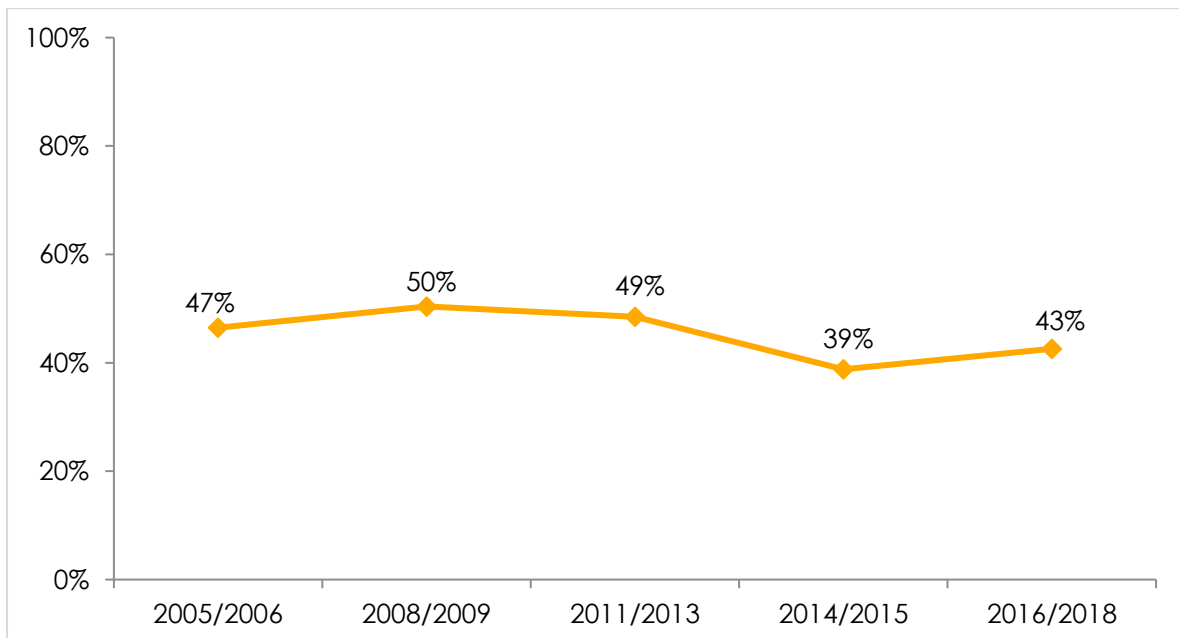
Respondents were asked: Do you have a job that pays a cash income? [If yes:] Is it full time or part time? [If no:] Are you currently looking for a job?

Figure 2: Employment status within labor market | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: Do you have a job that pays a cash income? [If yes:] Is it full time or part time? [If no:] Are you currently looking for a job? (Figure excludes respondents who did not have a job and were not looking for work.)

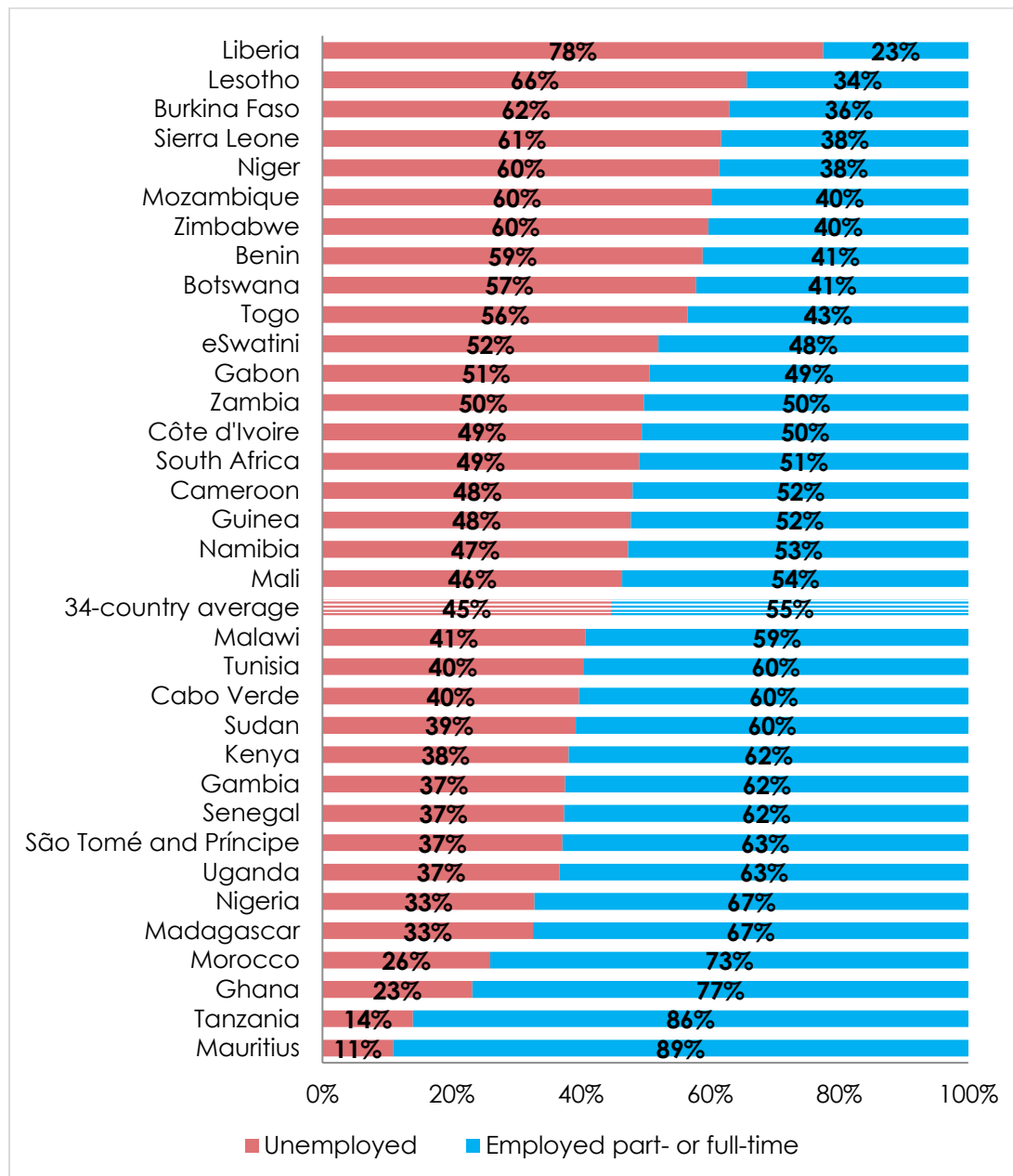
Figure 3: Trend in reported unemployment | 18 countries | 2005-2018



Respondents were asked: Do you have a job that pays a cash income? [If yes:] Is it full time or part time? [If no:] Are you currently looking for a job? (Figure excludes respondents who did not have a job and were not looking for work.)

Across 34 countries surveyed in 2016/2018, unemployment varied widely, from fewer than one-fourth in Mauritius (11%), Tanzania (14%), and Ghana (23%) to two-thirds or more in Lesotho (66%) and Liberia (78%) (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Employment status | by country | 34 countries | 2016/2018



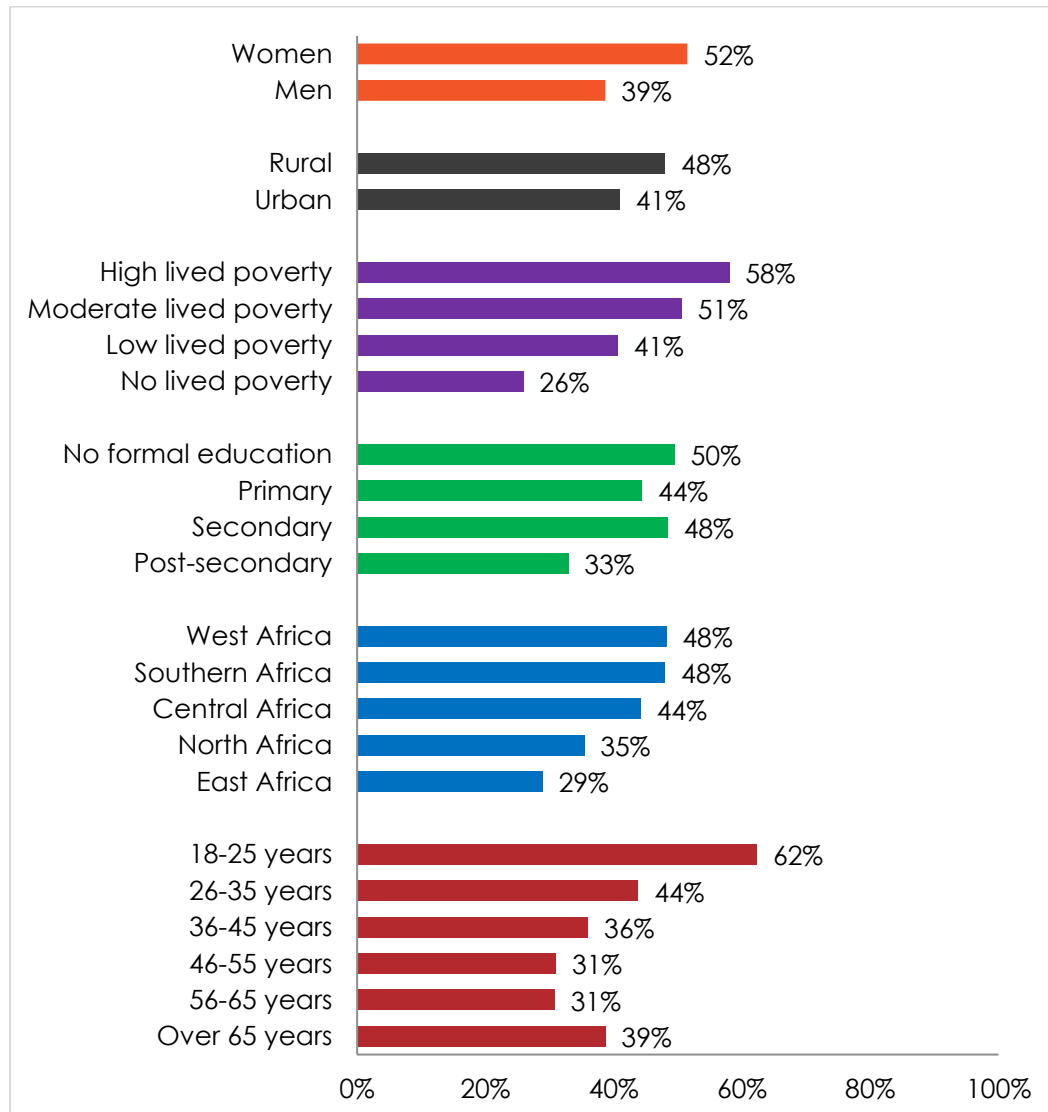
Respondents were asked: Do you have a job that pays a cash income? [If yes:] Is it full time or part time? [If no:] Are you currently looking for a job? (Figure excludes respondents who did not have a job and were not looking for work.)

Women (52%) and rural residents (48%) were more likely than men (39%) and urbanites (41%) to be unemployed (Figure 5). Poor respondents were more than twice as likely as the best-off citizens¹ to report unemployment (58% vs. 26%), a disadvantage that was also reflected

¹ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food and water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes (2020).

across different education levels. The youngest respondents were most likely to be out of work and looking (62% of those aged 18-25). Unemployment also varied widely across regions: Respondents in West Africa (48%) and Southern Africa (48%) were most likely to be jobless, compared to 29% in East Africa and 35% in North Africa.²

Figure 5: Unemployment level | by socio-demographic group | 34 countries
 | 2016/2018



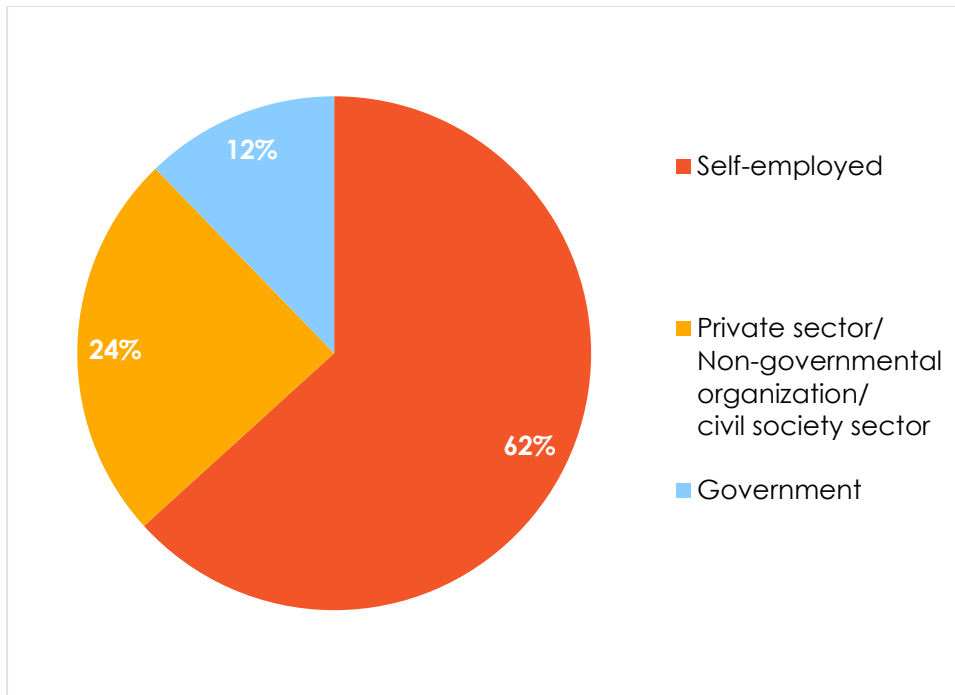
Respondents were asked: Do you have a job that pays a cash income? [If yes:] Is it full time or part time? [If no:] Are you currently looking for a job? (% who said they have a part-time or full-time job) (Figure excludes respondents who did not have a job and were not looking for work.)

² Regions: North Africa (Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia), Central Africa (Cameroon, Gabon, São Tomé and Príncipe), Southern Africa (Botswana, eSwatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe), East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda), West Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo)

Current employment patterns

Among survey respondents who were employed, six in 10 (62%) reported being self-employed, while 24% worked for the private or non-profit sectors and 12% worked for the government (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Sector of employment | 34 countries | 2016/2018



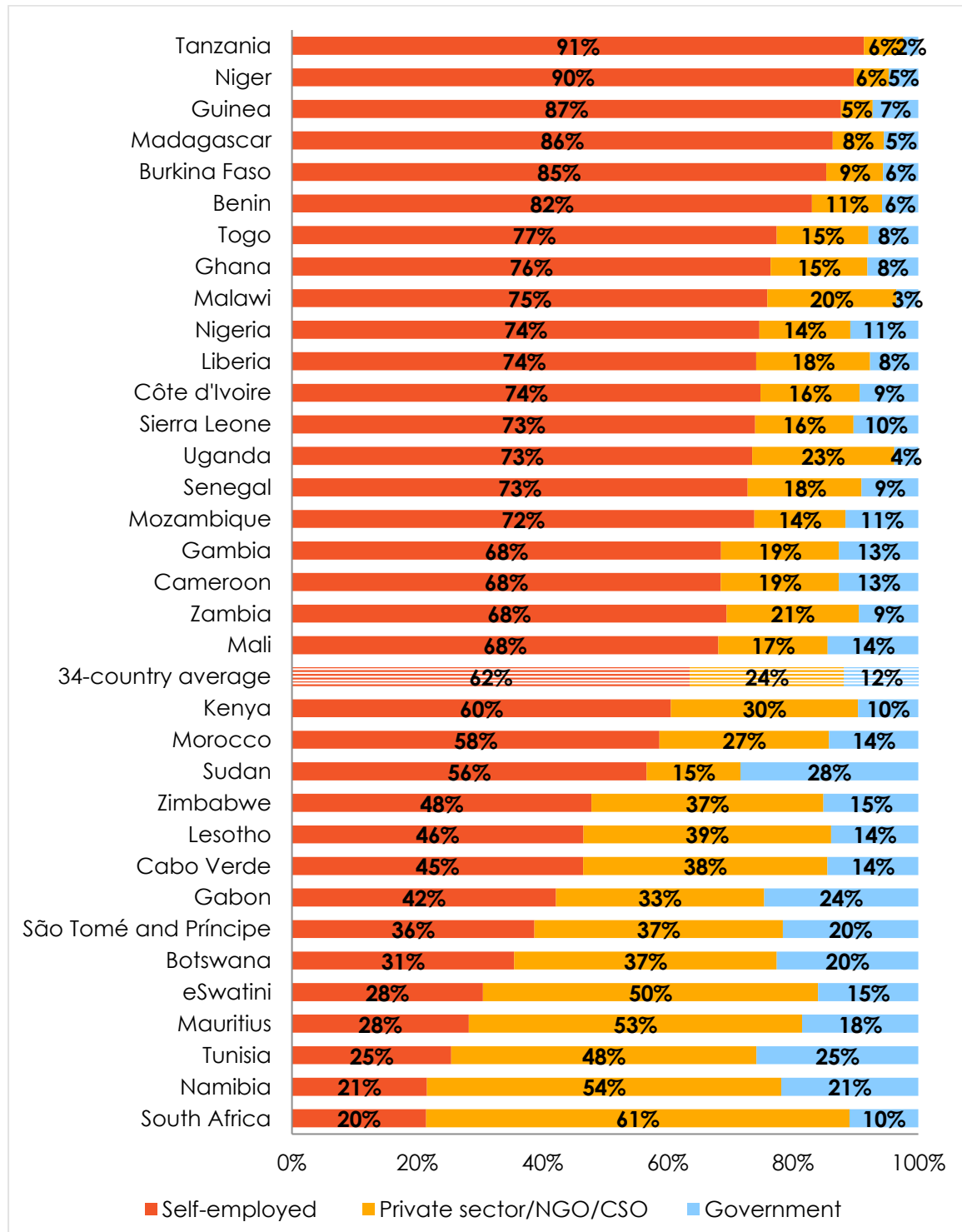
Respondents who said they were employed were asked: Do you work for yourself, for someone else in the private sector or the non-governmental sector, or for government? (Note: Respondents who said they were not employed were excluded.)

Self-employment was especially common in a number of lower-income economies, including Tanzania (91%), Niger (90%), Guinea (87%), Madagascar (86%), Burkina Faso (85%), and Benin (82%) (Figure 7). In contrast, employment in the private and nongovernmental sectors was relatively high in more developed economies, such as South Africa (61%), Namibia (54%), and Mauritius (53%).

About one-quarter of respondents (26%) said they worked in agriculture-related jobs (including farming, fishing, and forestry), while about one-tenth reported being traders/hawkers/vendors (12%), homemakers (11%), students (11%), and unskilled and skilled manual workers (8% and 9%, respectively) (Figure 8). Fewer were recorded in mid-level professional (6%), retail (4%), and other occupations.

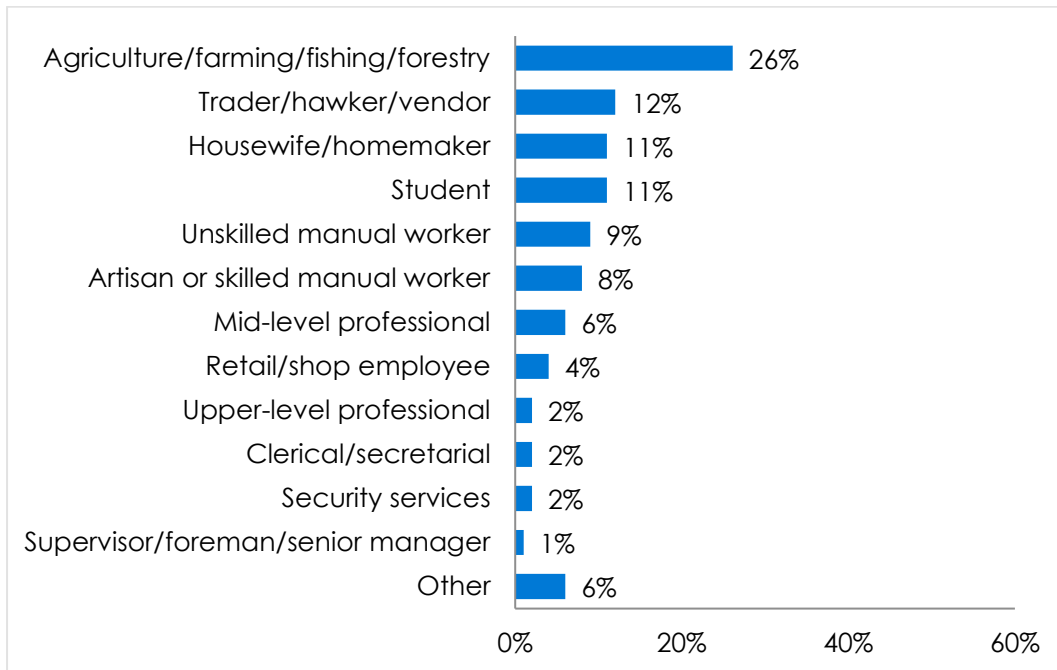
In low- and middle-income sub-Saharan countries, agriculture is a major source of employment and income (OECD-FAO, 2016). This was particularly true in Madagascar (64%), Tanzania (56%), Malawi (51%), Burkina Faso (51%), Uganda (50%), and Guinea (48%). On the other hand, only about one in 20 South Africans (4%), Tunisians (5%), Mauritians (5%), and Batswana (5%) said they rely on agriculture, fishing, and forestry as their main source of income (Figure 9).

Figure 7: Sector of employment | 34 countries | 2016/2018



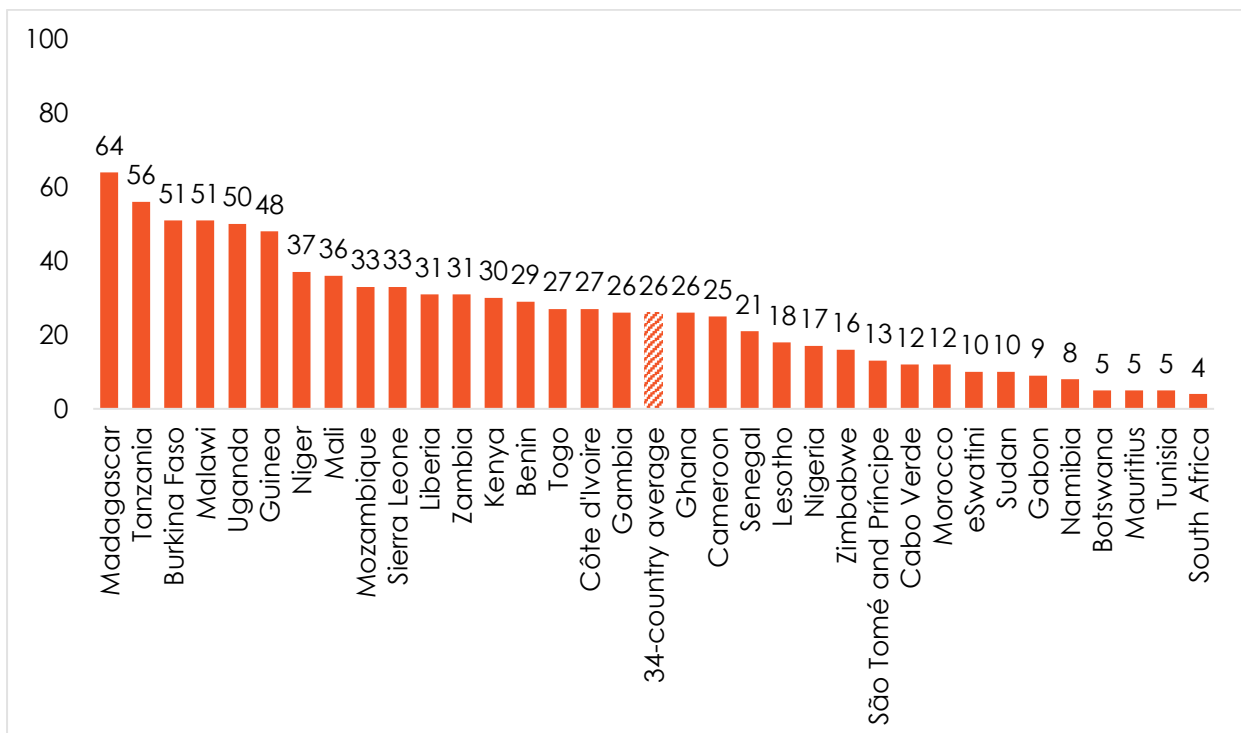
Respondents who said they were employed were asked: Do you work for yourself, for someone else in the private sector or the non-governmental sector, or for government? (Note: Respondents who said they were not employed were excluded.)

Figure 8: Occupations | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: What is your main occupation? [If unemployed, retired, or disabled:] What was your last main occupation?

Figure 9: Agriculture-related occupations (%) | 34 countries | 2016/2018

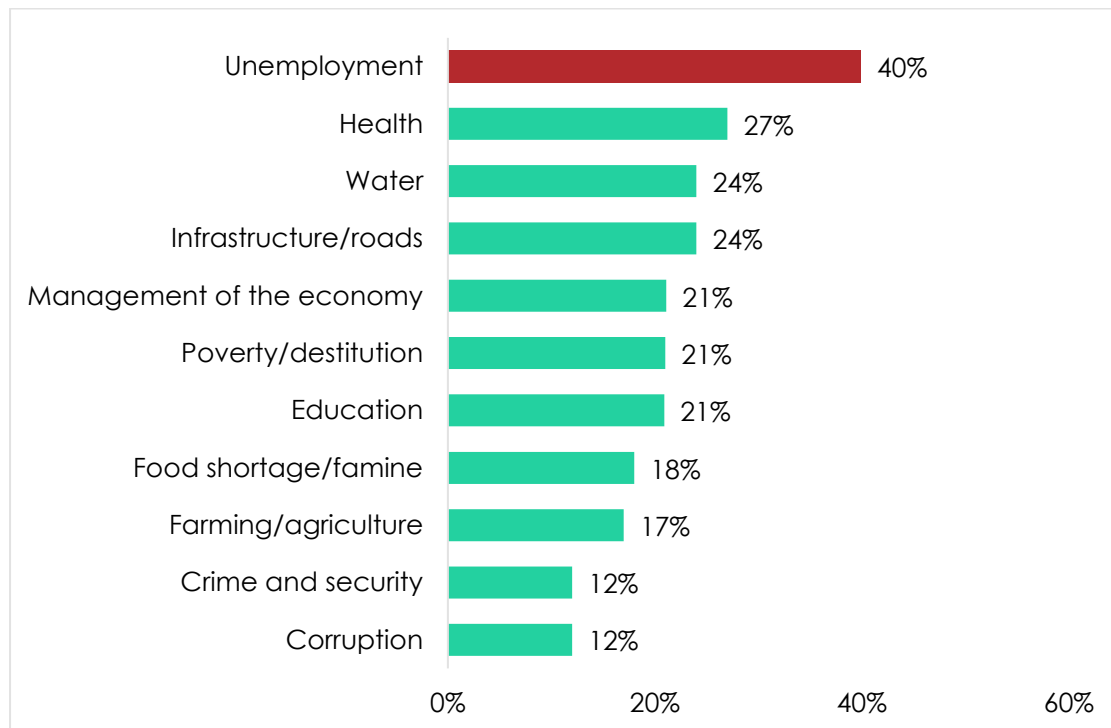


Respondents were asked: What is your main occupation? [If unemployed, retired, or disabled:] What was your last main occupation? (% who said they were employed in agriculture/farming/fishing/forestry)

Unemployment: Africa's most prioritized problem

When Afrobarometer asked respondents what they consider the most important problems that their government should address, unemployment ranked at the top in 2016/2018, as it did in the 2011/2013 and 2014/2015 surveys. Four in 10 respondents (40%) in the most recent survey round cited unemployment as one of their top three priorities, well ahead of health (27%), water (24%), and infrastructure/roads (24%) (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Most important problems | 34 countries | 2016/2018



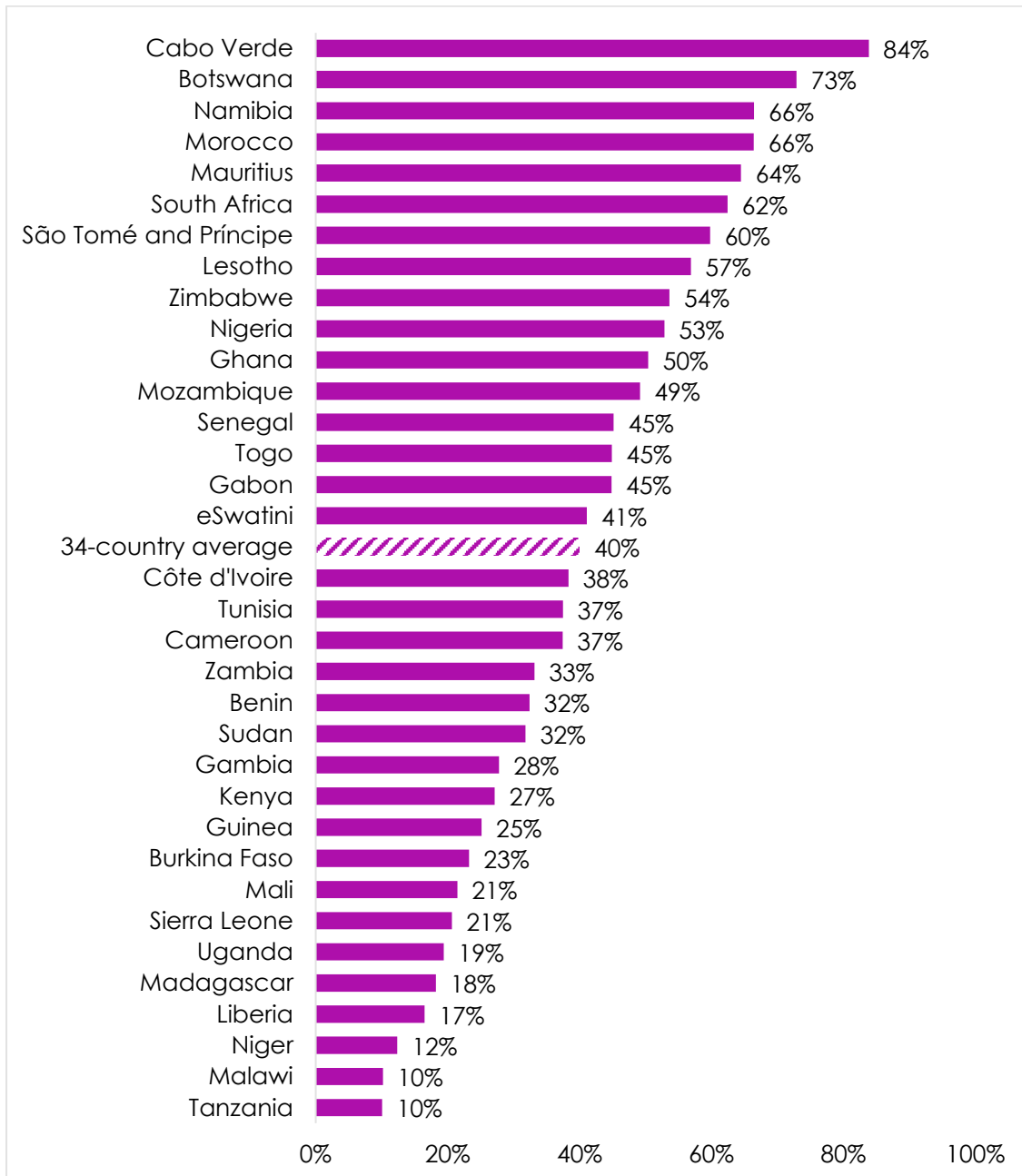
Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Respondents could give up to three responses. Figure shows % of respondents who identified each issue as one of their country's three most important problems.)*

Countries varied dramatically in how citizens prioritized unemployment. Only one in 10 Tanzanians and Malawians (10% each) mentioned joblessness as a top priority, compared to 84% of respondents in Cabo Verde and 73% in Botswana (Figure 11). The eight countries where unemployment was most often cited as one of the most important problems are either upper-middle-income or lower-middle-income economies, while the eight countries where unemployment was least often mentioned are categorized as low-income economies (World Bank, 2020). One possible explanation for this pattern is that

citizens in lower-income economies may be more likely to be concerned about social and public services than about a distant prospect of employment.

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Figure 11: Prioritization of unemployment | 34 countries | 2016/2018

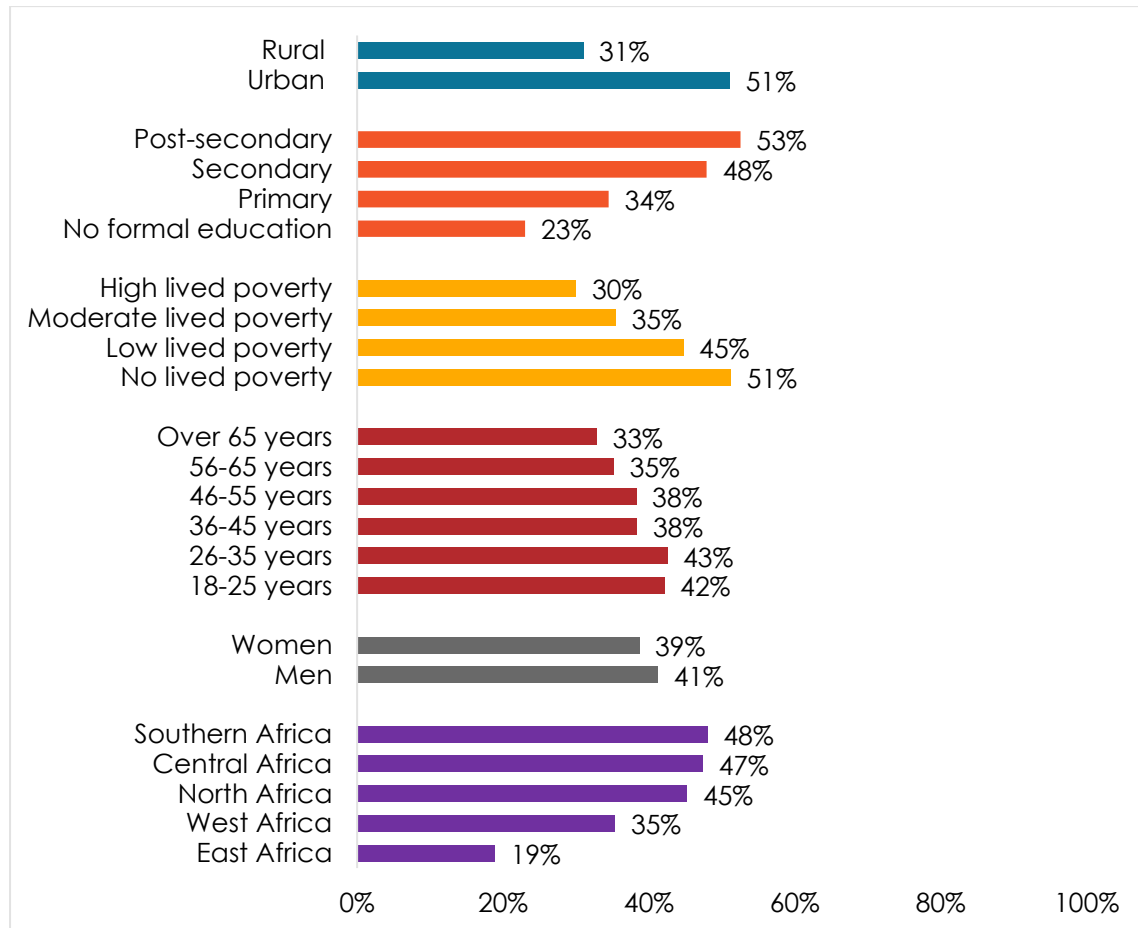


Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Respondents could give up to three responses. Figure shows % of respondents who identified unemployment as one of their country's three most important problems.)*

Prioritization of unemployment as one of the country's most important problems was higher among urban (51%) than rural (31%) residents and among younger citizens (42%-43%) compared to their elders (33%-38%). More educated respondent were more likely to cite unemployment (53% of those with post-secondary qualifications, vs. 23% of those with no formal education), as were economically better-off citizens (51% of those with no lived poverty vs. 30% of those with high lived poverty) (Figure 12).

By region, citizens in Southern (48%), Central (47%), and North (45%) Africa were more likely to express concerns about unemployment than West (35%) and East (19%) Africans.

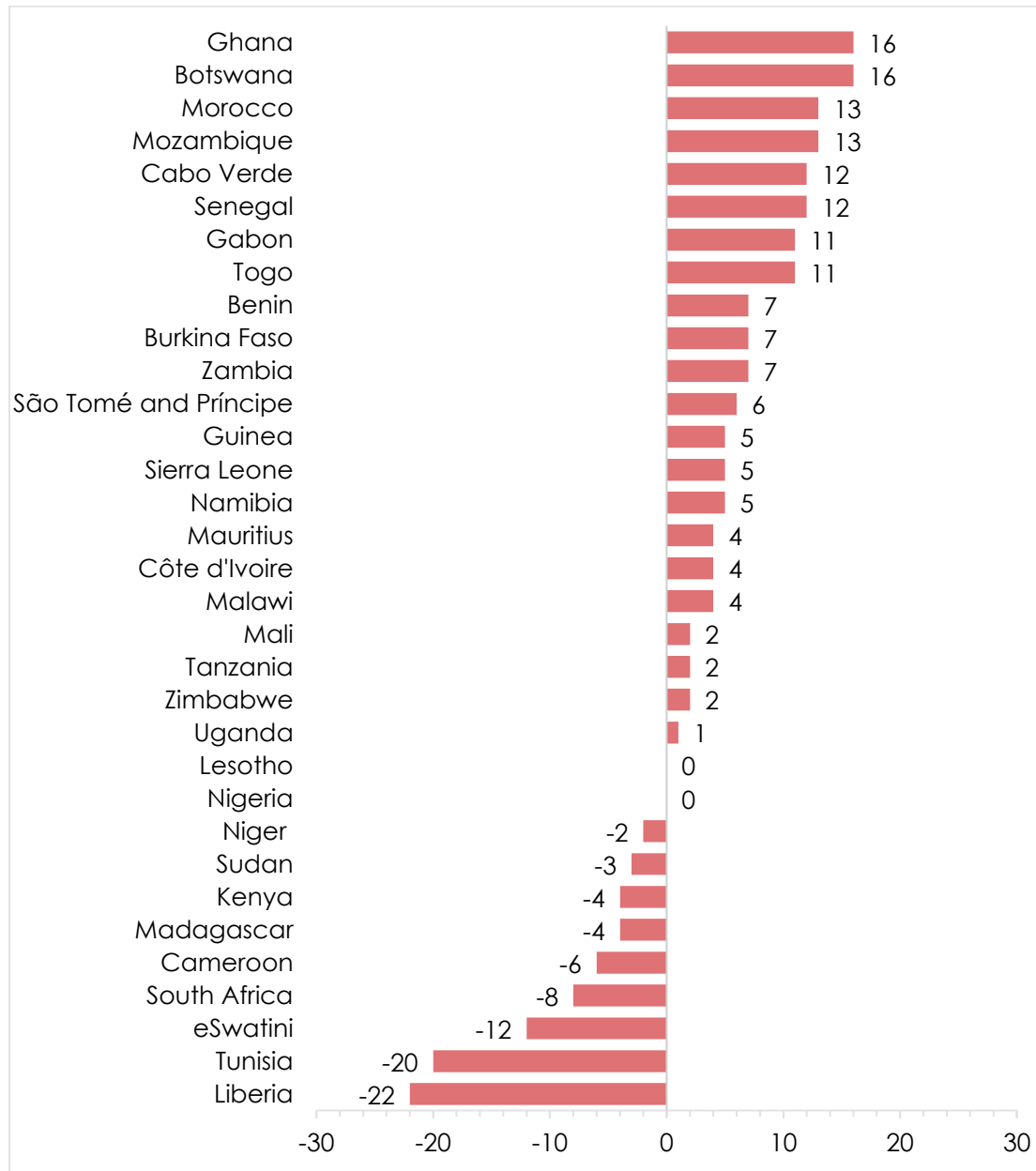
Figure 12: Prioritization of unemployment | by socio-demographic group
 | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Respondents could give up to three responses. Figure shows % of respondents who identified unemployment as one of their country's three most important problems.)*

Prioritization of unemployment in 33 countries surveyed in both 2014/2015 and 2016/2018 shows significant over-time variation. The proportion of respondents who cited unemployment as one of their country's most important problems increased dramatically in Ghana (16 percentage points), Botswana (16 points), Morocco (13 points), and Mozambique (13 points). The largest decrease was recorded in Liberia (-22 percentage points), followed by Tunisia (-20 points), eSwatini (-12 points), and South Africa (-8 points) (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Change in prioritization of unemployment | 33 countries | 2014-2018

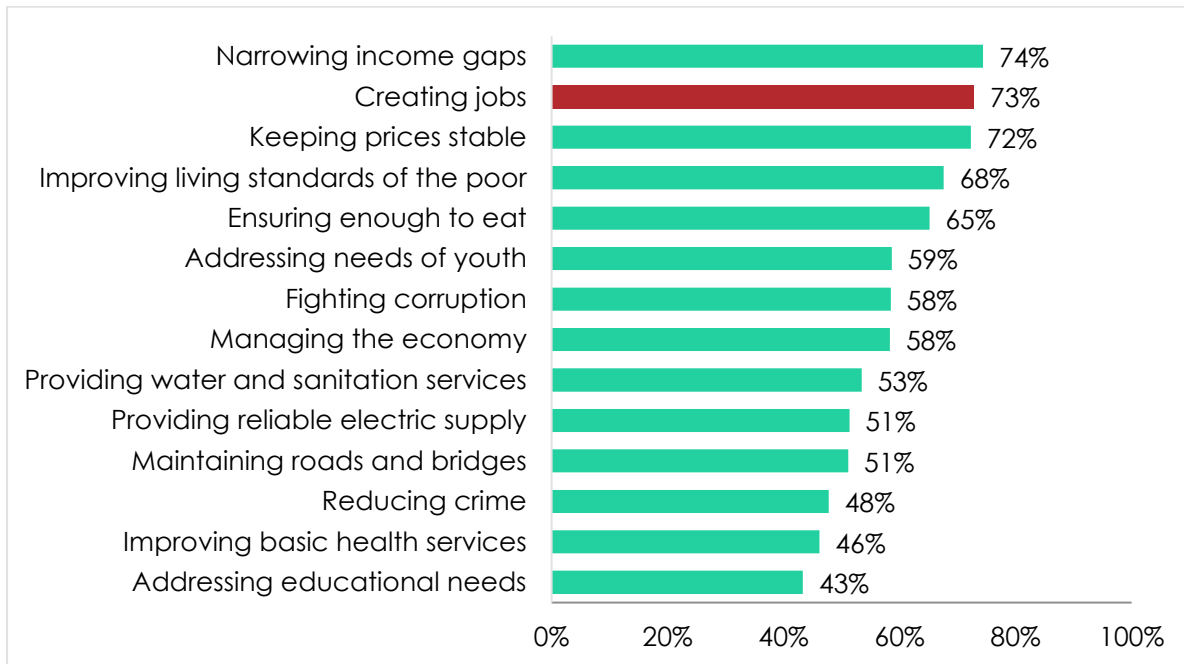


Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Respondents could give up to three responses. Figure shows increase or decrease, in percentage points, from 2014/2015 to 2016/2018 in the proportion of respondents who cited unemployment as one of their country's most important problems.) (Note: The Gambia was not surveyed in 2014/2015.)*

Government performance on job creation

While unemployment has consistently ranked at the top of citizens' priority problems, African governments have not satisfied their demand for action. On average across 34 countries, almost three-fourths (73%) of respondents said their governments were performing "fairly badly" or "very badly" at creating jobs, one of the worst ratings on a range of key issues (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Negative ratings of government performance | 34 countries | 2016/2018

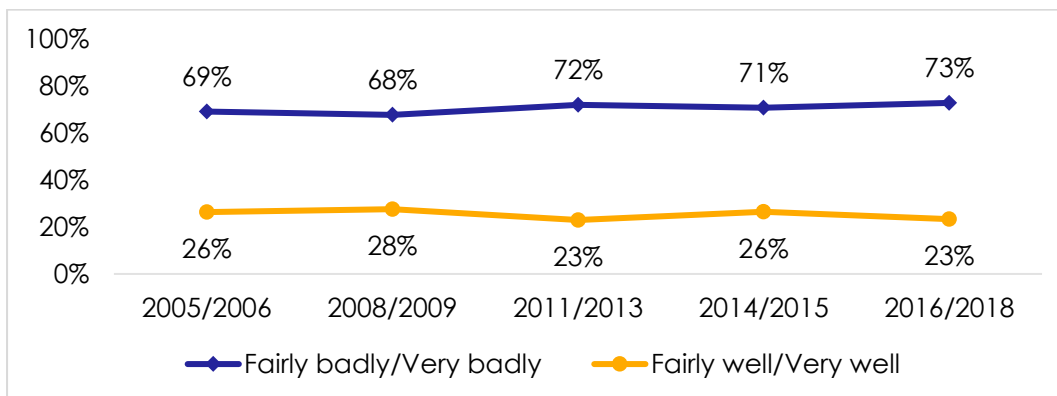


Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who said "fairly badly" or "very badly")

Dissatisfaction with the government's handling of job creation remains high and continues to grow. Across 18 countries surveyed consistently since 2005/2006, the proportion of respondents who perceived their government as handling job creation "fairly badly" or "very badly" increased by 5 percentage points between 2008/2009 and 2016/2018 (Figure 15).

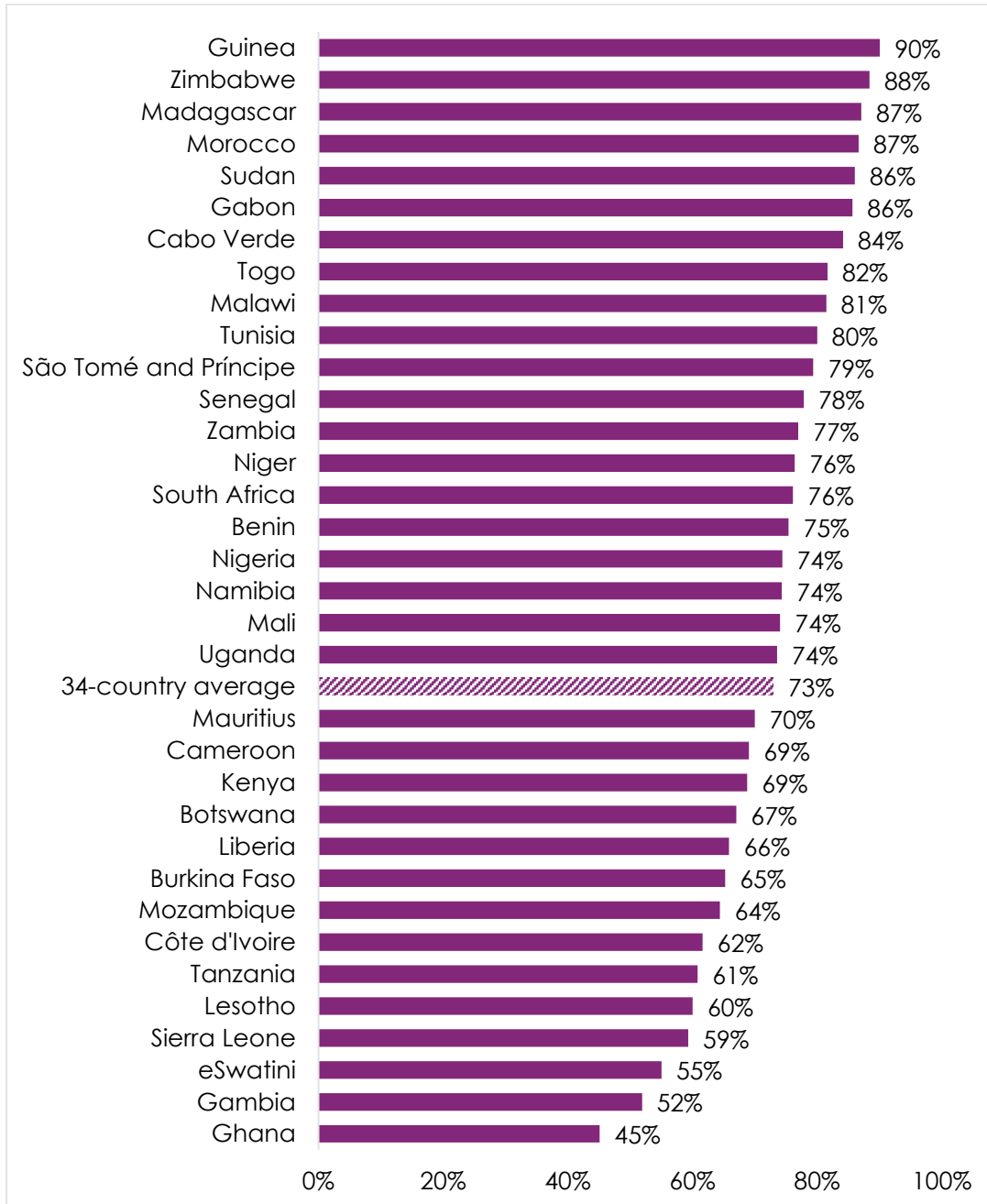
Disapproval of the government's performance on job creation was the majority view in all but one country (Figure 16) in 2016/2018; the exception was Ghana, where positive and negative assessments were tied at 45% each. More than eight out of 10 respondents gave their government poor marks on job creation in Guinea (90%), Zimbabwe (88%), Madagascar (87%), Morocco (87%), Sudan (86%), Gabon (86%), Cabo Verde (84%), Togo (82%), and Malawi (81%).

Figure 15: Government performance on job creation | 18 countries | 2005-2018



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Creating jobs?

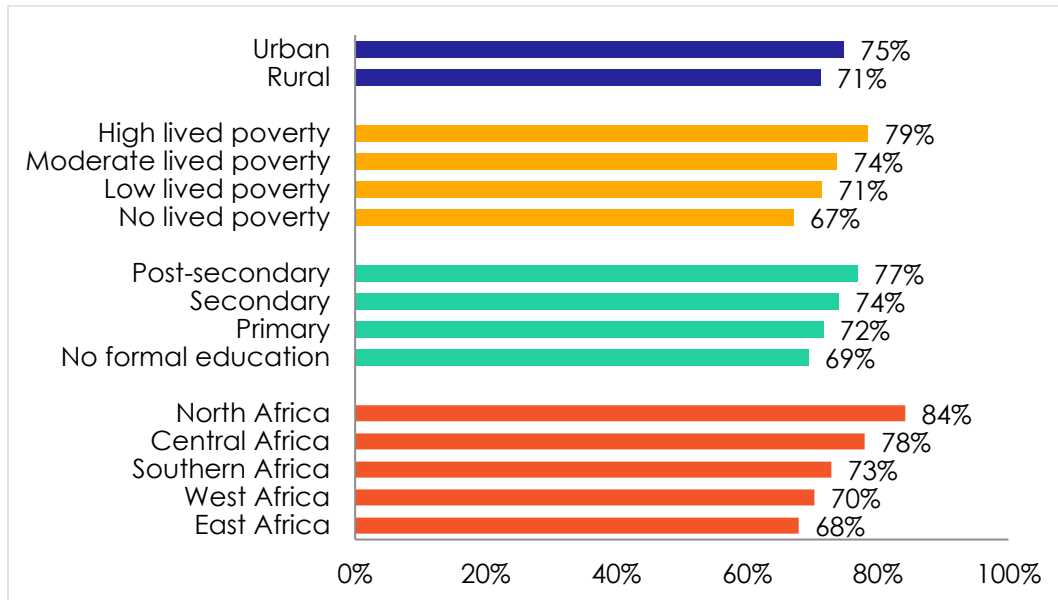
Figure 16: Negative ratings of government performance on job creation
 | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Creating jobs? (% who said "fairly badly" or "very badly")

Poor citizens were more likely to be critical of the government's efforts on unemployment (79%, vs. 67% of those with no lived poverty) (Figure 17). Disapproval also increased with respondents' education level, ranging from 69% of with no formal education to 77% of those with post-secondary qualifications. Popular dissatisfaction with government handling of job creation was particularly high in North Africa (84%) and Central Africa (78%).

Figure 17: Negative ratings of government performance on job creation | by socio-demographic group and region | 34 countries | 2016/2018



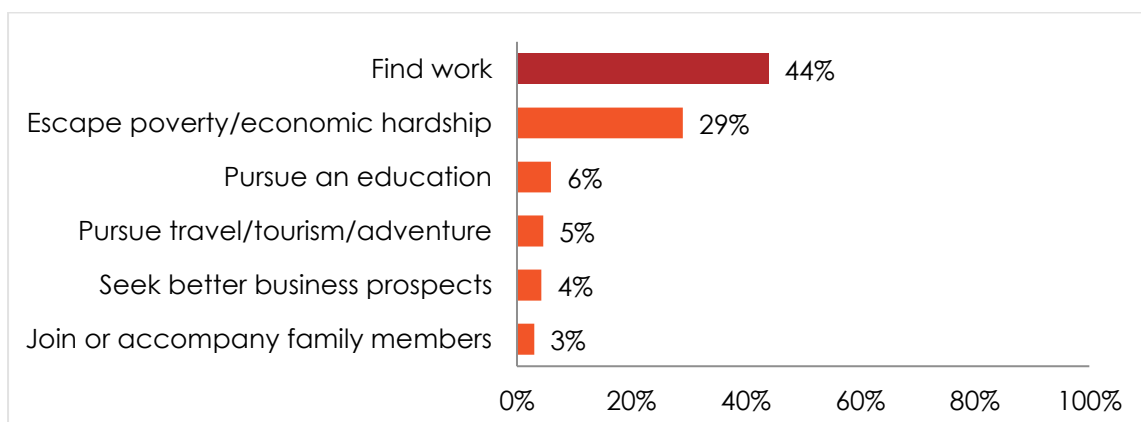
Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Creating jobs? (% who said "fairly badly" or "very badly")

Unemployment and migration

The inability to find paid employment is a major driver of migration. In 2017, 36.3 million African migrants represented 14% of the global migrant population. More than 70% of sub-Saharan African migrants moved within the continent (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2019).

Afrobarometer findings show that searching for a job is the most important reason why Africans consider emigration. Among respondents who said they had considered emigrating, more than four in 10 (44%) said the main reason was to find employment. In addition, 29% said their motivation was to escape economic hardship or poverty (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Reasons for considering emigration | 34 countries | 2016/2018

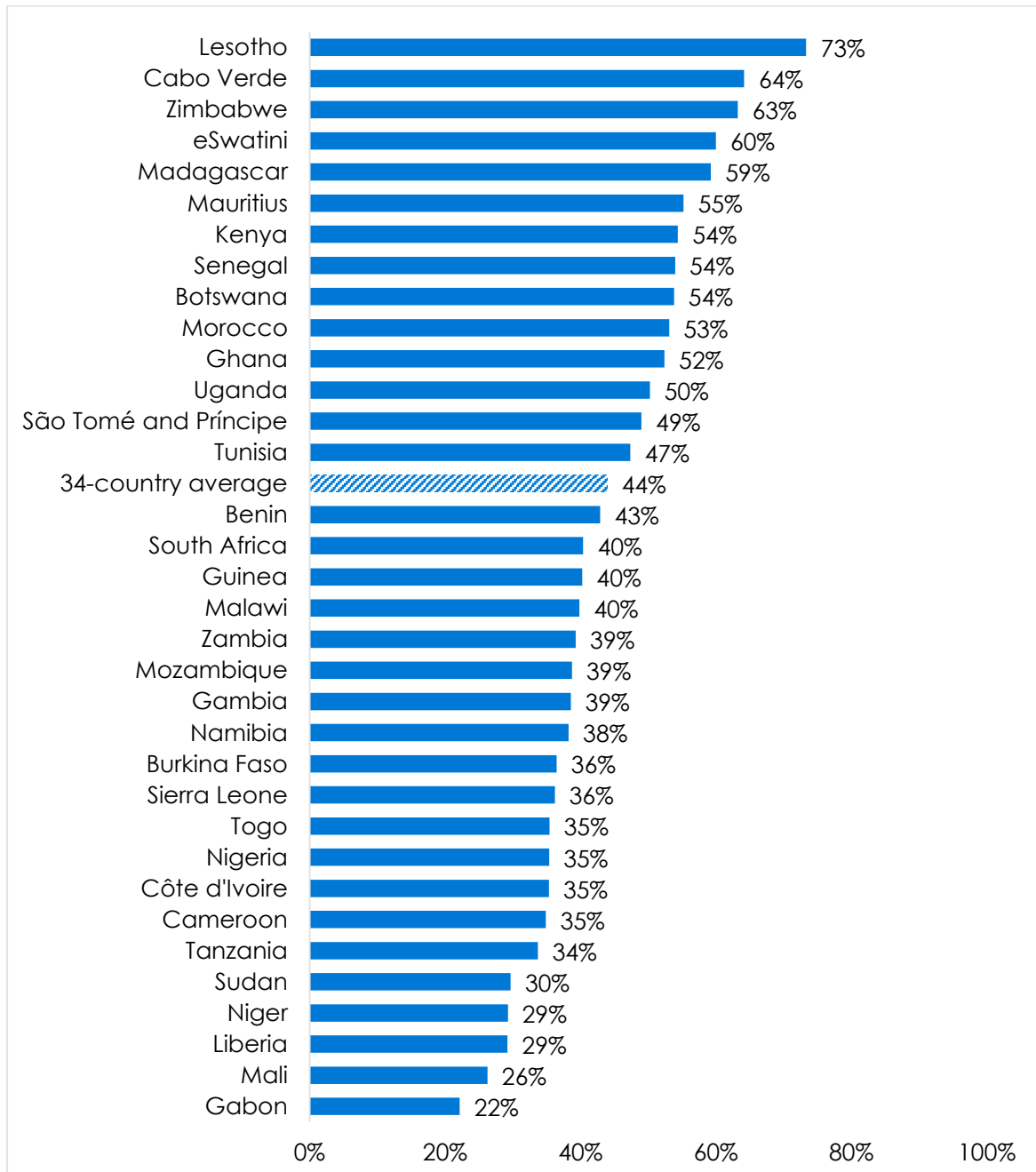


Respondents were asked: How much, if at all, have you considered moving to another country to live?

Excluding those who said they had "not at all" considered emigration, respondents were asked: What is the most important reason why you would consider moving from [your country]?

Citizens in Lesotho (73%), Cabo Verde (64%), and Zimbabwe (63%) were particularly likely to cite employment opportunities as their main reason for considering emigration, while fewer than three in 10 respondents did so in Niger (29%), Liberia (29%), Mali (26%), and Gabon (22%) (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Finding work as the most important reason to consider emigration
 | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: How much, if at all, have you considered moving to another country to live?
Excluding those who said they had “not at all” considered emigration, respondents were asked: What is the most important reason why you would consider moving from [your country]? (% who said to find a job)

Conclusion

Over the past decade, ordinary Africans have consistently ranked unemployment as the top-priority problem needing urgent government action. At the same time, they have been growing increasingly dissatisfied with their governments' failure to create jobs. Given Africa's rapidly expanding labor force, unemployment is a major development challenge, and a particularly high barrier for young citizens, women, and the poor. For many young and educated Africans, the lure of a good job is a good-enough reason to emigrate.

These findings point to a need for African governments to prioritize added employment in both the private and public sectors, especially the creation of high-productivity, well-paying jobs; to ensure a business environment conducive to investment; and to scale up support for innovation start-ups and entrepreneurship programs.

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Appendix

Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 7 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds

Country	Months when Round 7 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
Benin	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Botswana	June-July 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Burkina Faso	Oct 2017	2008, 2012, 2015
Cameroon	May 2018	2013, 2015
Cape Verde	Nov-Dec 2017	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Côte d'Ivoire	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2013, 2014
eSwatini	March 2018	2013, 2015
Gabon	Nov 2017	2015
Gambia	July-August 2018	N/A
Ghana	Sept 2017	1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Guinea	May 2017	2013, 2015
Kenya	Sept-Oct 2016	2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Lesotho	Nov-Dec 2017	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Liberia	June-July 2018	2008, 2012, 2015
Madagascar	Jan-Feb 2018	2005, 2008, 2013, 2015
Malawi	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Mali	Feb 2017	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014
Mauritius	Oct-Nov 2017	2012, 2014
Morocco	May 2018	2013, 2015
Mozambique	July-August 2018	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015
Namibia	Nov 2017	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014
Niger	April-May 2018	2013, 2015
Nigeria	April-May 2017	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015
São Tomé and Príncipe	July 2018	2015
Senegal	Dec 2017	2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014
Sierra Leone	July 2018	2012, 2015
South Africa	August-Sept 2018	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015
Sudan	July-August 2018	2013, 2015
Tanzania	April-June 2017	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Togo	Nov 2017	2012, 2014
Tunisia	April-May 2018	2013, 2015
Uganda	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015
Zambia	April 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2014
Zimbabwe	Jan-Feb 2017	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014

Ronald Makanga is a research associate for Hatchile Consult Ltd, the Afrobarometer national partner in Uganda. Email: makanga.ronnie@gmail.com.

Derick Msafiri is an assistant researcher working with REPOA, the Afrobarometer national partner in Tanzania. Email: msafiriderick@gmail.com.

Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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