



POLICY BRIEF

EMPOWERING TRANS AND GENDER-DIVERSE YOUTH THROUGH EMPLOYMENT IN UGANDA

PREPARED TO | TRANZ NETWORK UGANDA | RAINBOW AFRICA INITIATIVE

PREPARED BY | JAY BURGE (SHE/THEM)

1. Summary

Trans women and gender-diverse (TGD) youth in Uganda face high unemployment due to discrimination, lack of skills, and limited job opportunities. TGD youth are often either entirely jobless or in unstable work, leading to poverty, mental health challenges, and exclusion. This policy brief highlights why this issue matters, and suggests practical solutions. We recommend government, Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and partners provide safe skills training, create inclusive job programs, and support TGD-led businesses to empower these youths economically and build a fairer Uganda.

2. Overview of the problem

Trans women and gender-diverse youth, aged 15–24, are among the most marginalized groups in Uganda. They face rejection from families, schools, and employers because of their gender identity, making it hard to find jobs or start businesses. TGD youths are often unemployed or engaged in low-paying informal work, and many experience workplace discrimination, with employers refusing to hire or firing them due to their gender identity or appearance. Access to capital is also limited, as institutions often reject TGD youth for loans due to lack of collateral or discriminatory practices. This leaves many in poverty, resorting to risky work like sex work to survive, which increases their vulnerability to violence and HIV infection. Unemployment harms TGD youth through poverty, mental health challenges, and social exclusion, perpetuating cycles of marginalization.

Without jobs, TGD youth struggle to afford food, rent, or healthcare. Some turn to dangerous work, including sex work with risky practices, increasing risks of violence or HIV/STI infection and even arrest. The inability to afford the basic necessities of life has had a huge impact on the mental health and wellness of TGD youth, leading to impacts such as stress, low self-esteem, depression and hopelessness. It is worth noting that for many of these youth, the challenge is not so much the lack of employed skills but the discrimination both in hiring practices and within the different work places. Some TGD youth have started small businesses, such as soap-making or beadwork, with support from organizations, but these initiatives are small-scale and require more funding to expand.

5. Policy gaps

Research shows that unemployment among TGD youth is driven by systemic issues which include:



Social Stigma: TGD youth face workplace discrimination, making it hard to keep jobs or get hired. Uganda's labor laws, like the Employment Act 2006, do not protect against discrimination based on gender identity, leaving TGD youth vulnerable to abuse and unfair termination and compensation policies in many workplaces merely because of their identity.



Economic Barriers: The economy lacks enough jobs for all youth, but TGD youth face extra challenges due to exclusion from mainstream opportunities like government programs.



Education Mismatch: Many TGD youth drop out of school due to bullying, missing out on skills needed for jobs. Those who finish often lack practical training, like digital or business skills, and even those who possess all the necessary employable skills will still constantly struggle to survive and maintain their jobs, especially in formal employment.

6. Policy Recommendations

It is worth noting that, in some African countries like South Africa and Kenya have made progress towards creating employment opportunities for TGD persons, which has overall had a positive impact on the TGD community as a group but also on the economy generally. For instance, in South Africa, the Gender Dynamix programme trains TGD youth in skills like catering and IT, and links them with potential employers, while in Kenya, the Trans Alliance provides micro-grants for TGD-led businesses, helping youth start ventures like fashion design. All these initiatives have been powered by NGOs.

To empower Ugandan trans women and TGD youth through employment, we propose the following actions for government, NGOs, and private sector delegates:



Create Safe Vocational Training Programs: It is important that the state work with NGOs to set up training facilities that are inclusive, welcoming to all and protective of TGD persons in order to enable them achieve their full academic potential.



Provide TGD-Specific Startup Funds: The government of Uganda has set up several initiatives to eradicate poverty among the population but unfortunately, these programmes are often exclusive of TGD persons. It would be advisable to set up a “TGD Entrepreneurship Fund” offering low-interest loans or grants to TGD youth for businesses, with no collateral needed, accompanied by mentorship programmes. These would greatly uplift the quality of life of TGD persons and encourage entrepreneurship and growth among the TGD community.



Promote Inclusive Employment Policies: The government of Uganda should consider amending the Employment Act to include protections against discrimination based on gender identity, and offer tax incentives to business that engage in affirmative action for TGD youth.



Support Digital Job Opportunities: Train TGD youth in digital skills like graphic design, coding, or online marketing to access global remote work.



Establish Safe Spaces and Networks: Fund TGD-led “economic hubs” in urban and rural areas where youth can access training, job referrals, and peer support, and partner with organizations to run awareness campaigns against workplace stigma.



Engage Communities and Employers: Run media campaigns (social media) to reduce stigma against TGD youth in workplaces, using platforms like WhatsApp and Signal for safety, and train employers on inclusion, focusing on sectors like retail, hospitality, and tech.

Tackling unemployment among TGD youth unlocks their talents, boosting productivity and innovation and thus contributing to growth of local markets economies. This would also create stable and financially secure futures for TGD youth, which would reduce their reliance on risky work and thus reduce the disease burden on this community (and on the public health system).

Conclusion

Unemployment among trans and gender-diverse youth in Uganda is primarily due to discrimination, inaccessible training opportunities and economic exclusion. By addressing policy gaps through safe training, startup funds, and inclusive laws, Uganda can empower TGD youth to thrive, living with dignity and opportunity, and contributing to a stronger, more inclusive nation.



Get in touch

 **Gayaza Road, Luteete, Kampala, Uganda**

 www.tranznetwork.org

 info@tranznetwork.org

 +256 787 832 896

 +256 708 901 232



© 2025 Tranz Network Uganda (TNU). All rights reserved.