

# ► Apprenticeship in the informal economy

DC dVET BarCamp Informality and dual  
VET  
2<sup>nd</sup> July 2025

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## I. ILO's engagement over the past 30 years

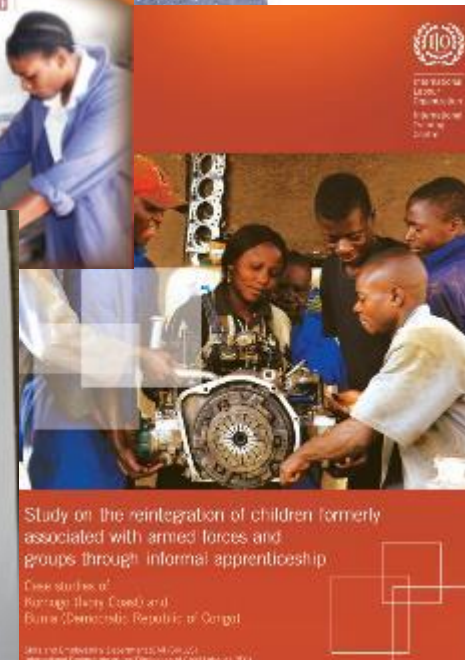
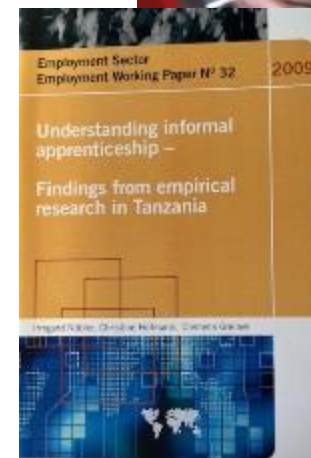
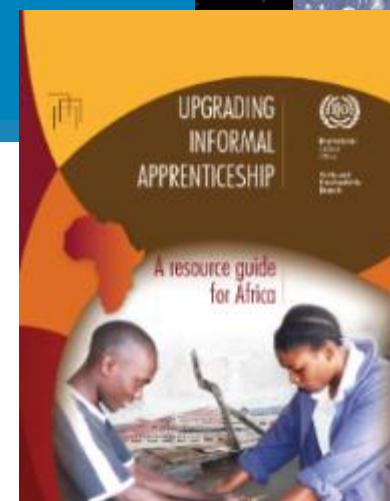
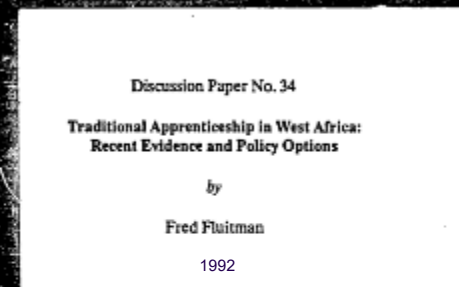
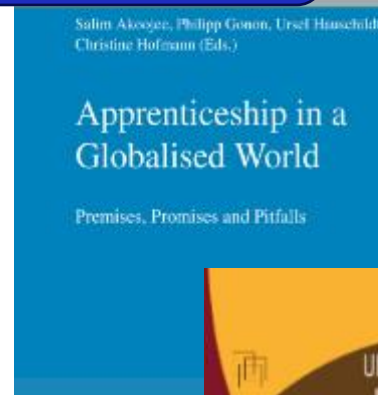
AFRISTAT support for **1-2-3 surveys**

Technical workshop in 2007: **Apprenticeship in the informal economy in Africa**

1st Regional Knowledge sharing workshop in Africa **«Apprenticeship in a Globalised World»** in 2013 in Johannesburg, South Africa (with INAP)

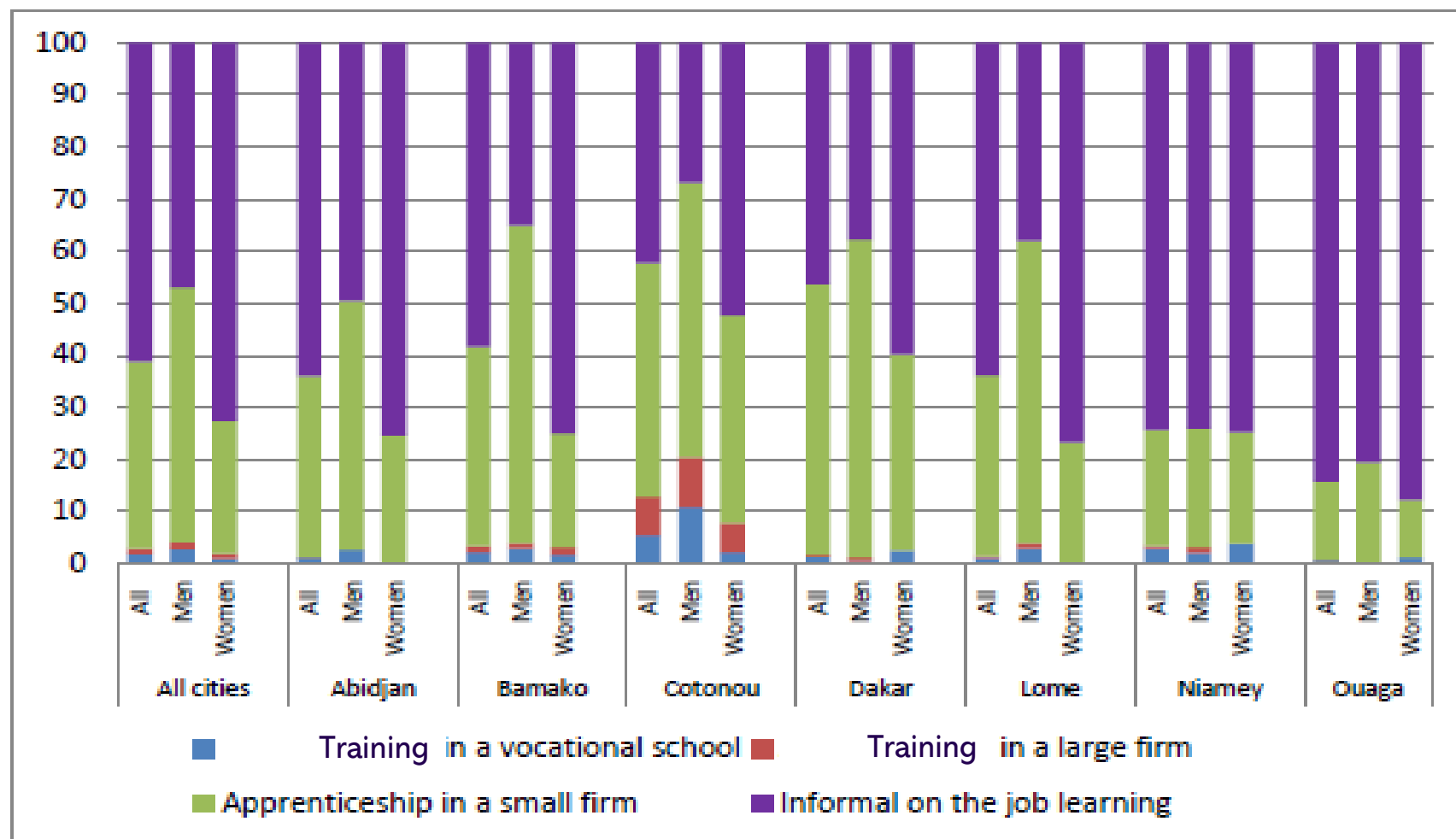
1st Regional Conference in Africa **«Strengthening apprenticeship systems in the informal economy in Africa to promote quality, innovation and transitions to formality »** in 2023 in Cotonou, Benin (with ADET, WB, SDC, AFD, NORRAG)

2<sup>nd</sup> Regional Conference by SASASNET «Transforming apprenticeship systems in the informal economy for youth employability in Africa» in 2025 in Mombasa, Kenya – **Mombasa Declaration**





## Apprenticeship – or on the job learning?

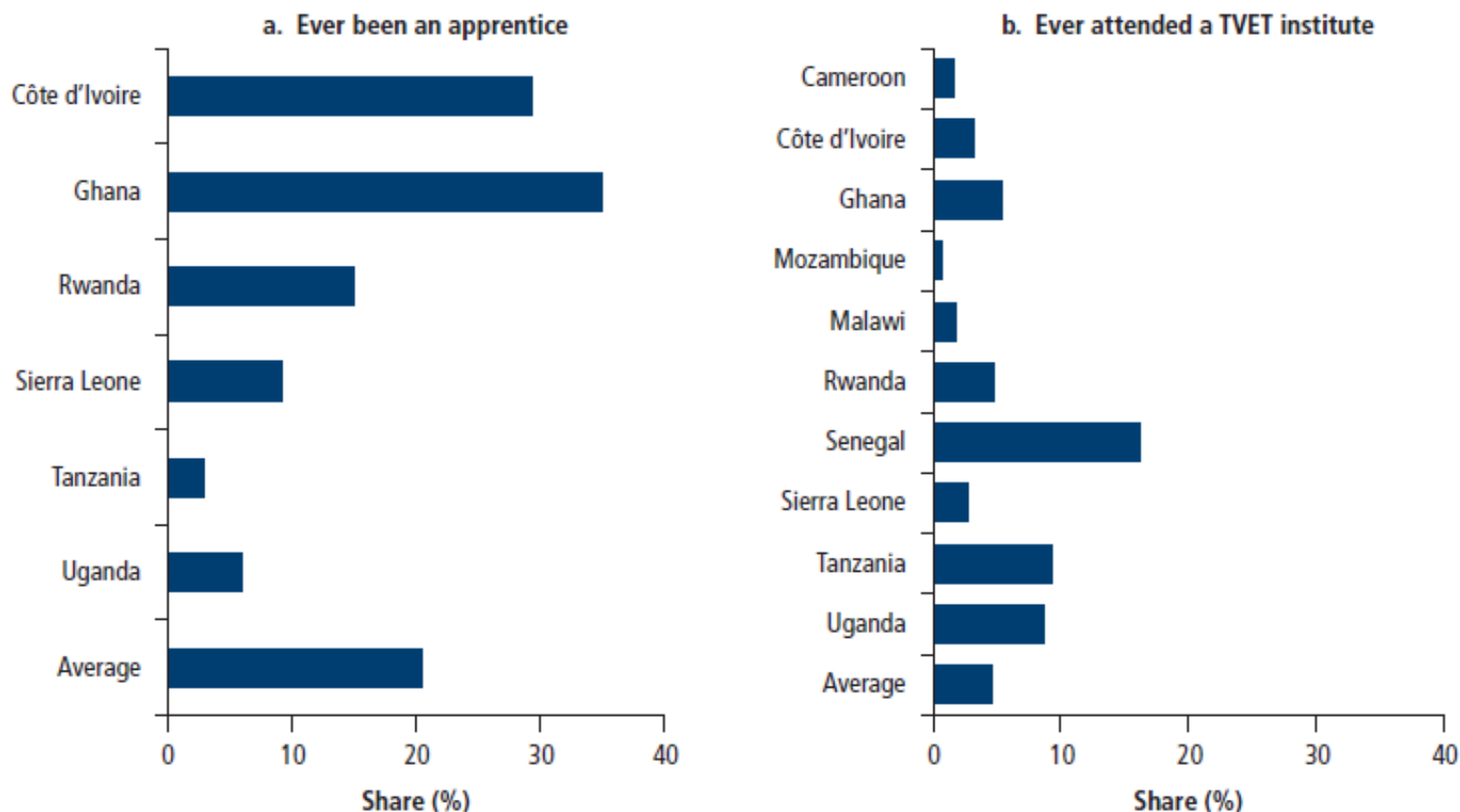


**6 million**  
apprentices in  
14 African countries  
with data

Source: ILO. 2023. Statistical  
Brief. Apprentices in countries  
with large informal economies

## Participation in apprenticeship versus formal TVET

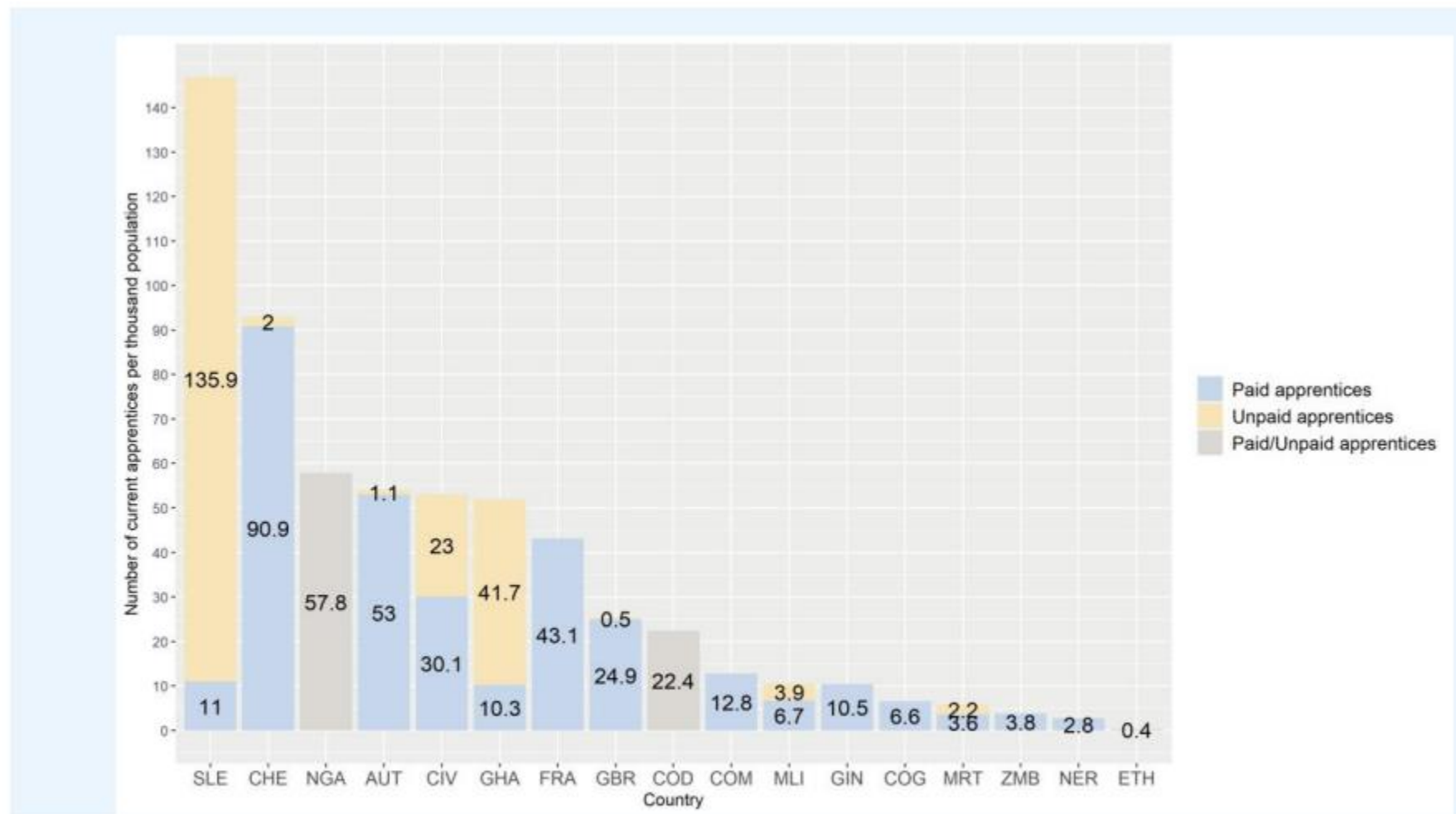
**Figure 3.18** Many young people, especially in West Africa, have been an apprentice, whereas experience with TVET is less prevalent




Source : Filmer and Fox. 2014.  
Youth Employment in Sub-  
Saharan Africa. Washington,  
DC: World Bank and AFD.

Source: Based on standardized and harmonized household and labor force surveys, latest data available (see appendix).

# Number of current apprentices among 15-34 olds in European countries and countries with large informal economies, by country, by paid and/or unpaid



Source: ILO calculations based on national labour force surveys from ILO database, ILOSTAT.  
Note: Data on paid/unpaid current apprentices for MDG has been excluded due to small sample size.



International  
Labour  
Organization

Statistical Brief

Apprentices in countries with large informal economies

**Key points**

- The aim of this statistical brief is to compare country-level data on apprenticeships with an interest in countries with large informal economies.
- There are close to 6 million apprentices in the 14 countries that clearly identify apprentices in their labour force surveys (LFS). Countries with a large apprenticeship institution have shares of apprentices comparable to those of apprenticeship countries in many, yet data and/or research often do not capture them.
- Countries that identify apprentices among the employed, unemployed, and those considered out of the labour force.
- Most apprentices are in informal employment, according to ILO definitions, regardless of whether they are paid or unpaid.
- There is a gender gap in apprenticeship.
- Multi-apprenticeship is a reality, yet in some countries, female apprentices outnumber males.
- Apprenticeship is also a skilling pathway for adults.

**Apprenticeships train for the world of work – in both formal and informal economies**

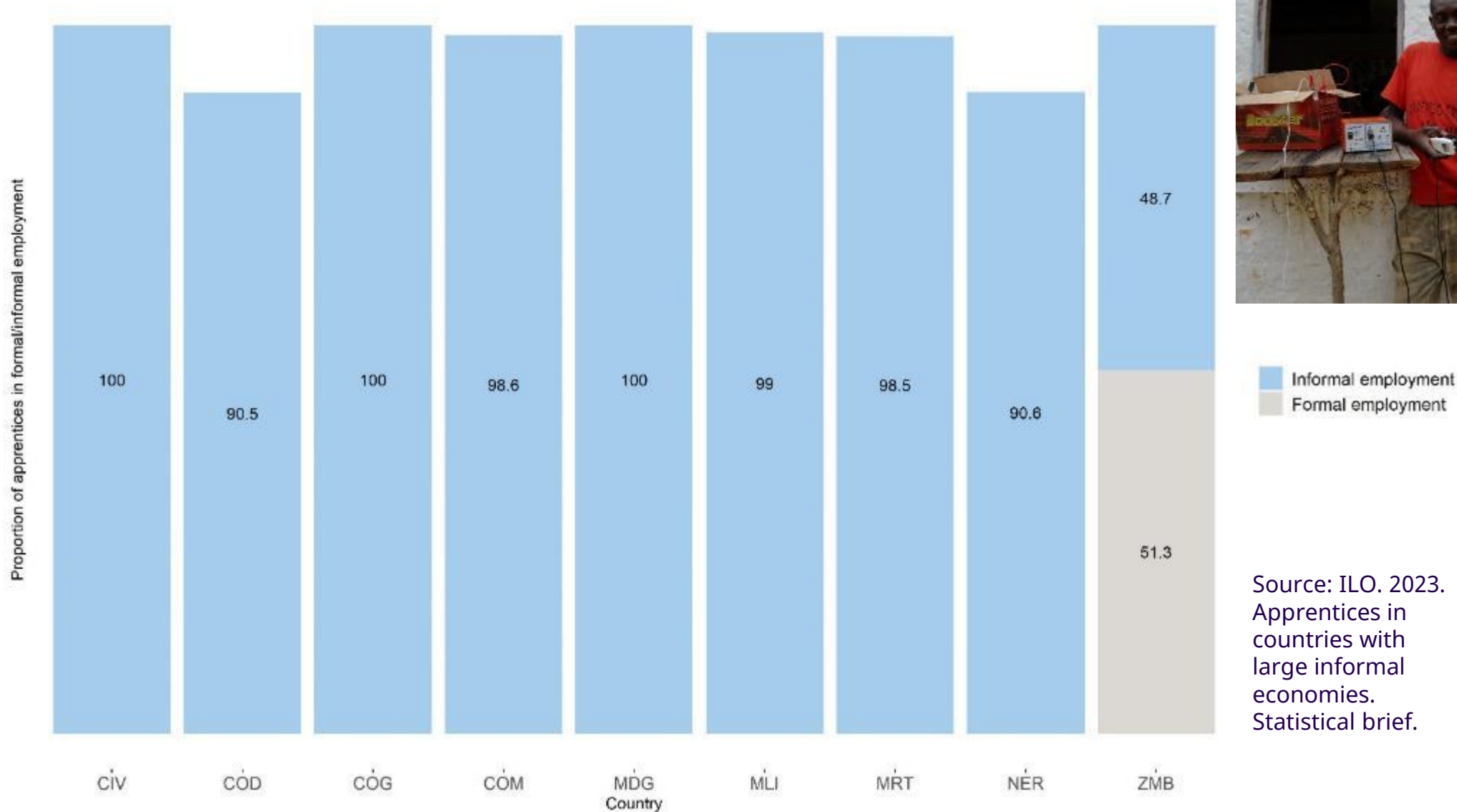
Around the world, apprenticeships are considered an effectiveness of facilitating the school-to-work transition for young people, one of the ways of the reskilling or upskilling of workers. In fact, this practice has been the traditional way of passing on skills from one generation to the next, throughout history. Many countries have developed apprenticeship systems, with their own specifications, but all following the same training logic. Apprentices learn the skills for an occupation in an enterprise from an experienced worker, based on an agreement or contract and should follow certain agreed standards. The apprentice contributes to the work of the enterprise throughout the duration of the apprenticeship. After a certain amount of time, the apprentice (usually a graduate) and becomes a skilled worker either in the same business, moves to work for another employer, or

1. In the 2015, apprenticeship systems of 14 countries are included in the ILO database, among them: International Conference of Labour Statisticians, 2015, apprentices, interns or trainees who work for pay in such or in kind are considered employed, and apprentices, interns and trainees who work without pay in such or in kind are considered unemployed or out of the labour force. The statistics between skill acquisition and the informal economy are not part of the ILO database.

2. See appendix 1 in the ILO Statistical Brief, 2023, for more details.

Source: ILO. 2023. Apprentices in countries with large informal economies. Statistical brief.

# Share of current apprentices in formal or informal employment, by country



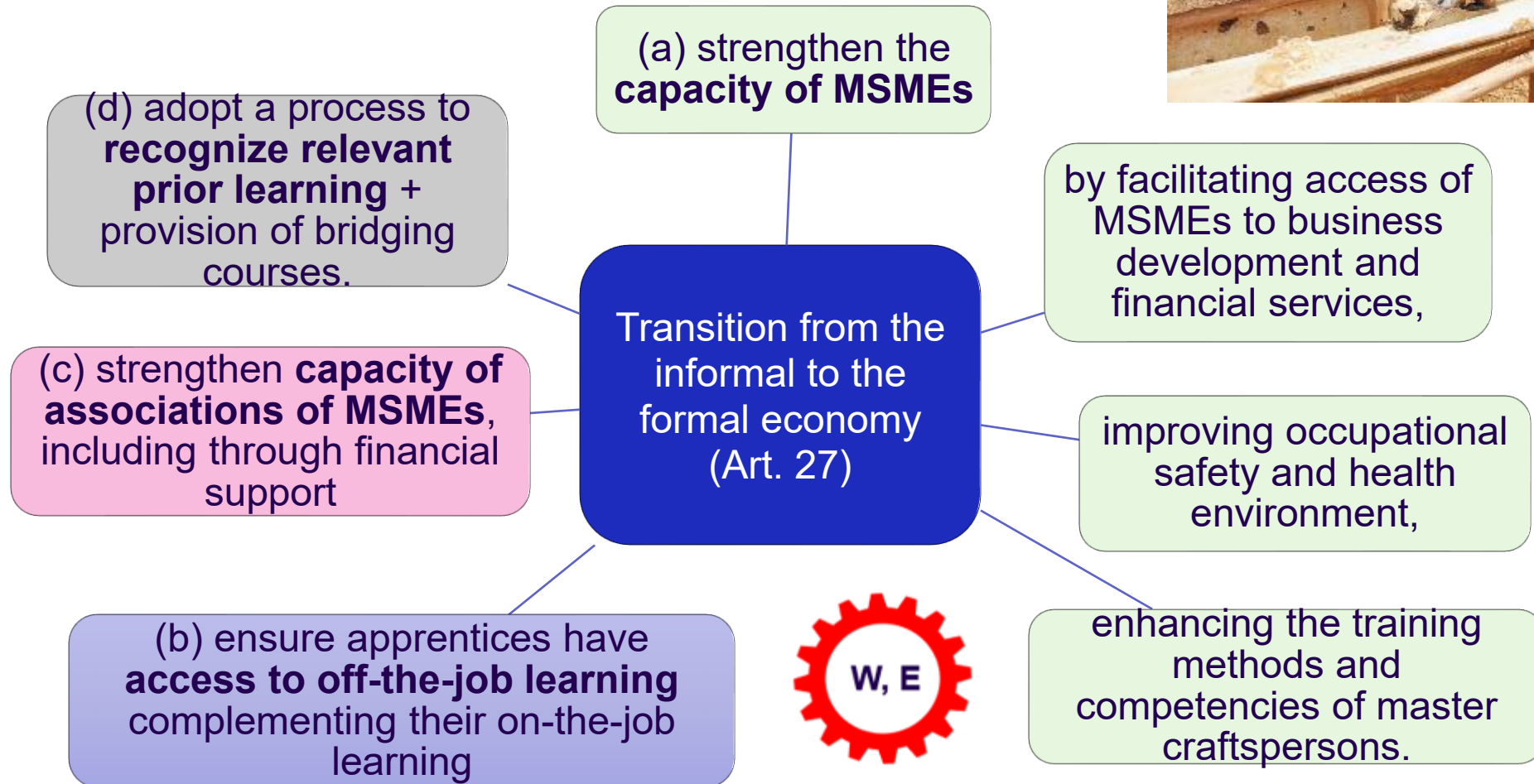
Source: ILO. 2023.  
Apprentices in  
countries with  
large informal  
economies.  
Statistical brief.

### III. ILO standards: Recommendation on Transitions from the informal to the formal economy, 2015 (No. 204)

- ▶ Guiding principles: (j) the preservation and expansion, (...), of the (...) **creativity, dynamism, skills and innovative capacities of workers and economic units** in the informal economy;
- ▶ Legal and policy frameworks: (h) **access** to education, lifelong learning and skills development;
- ▶ Employment policies to include: (f) **education and skills development policies** that (...) **recognize prior learning such as through informal apprenticeship systems**, thereby broadening options for formal employment;
- ▶ Incentive, compliance and enforcement: Members should provide **incentives for effective transition to the formal economy**, including (...) technology, **education and skills programmes**.



### III. Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023 (No. 208)



► **How to strengthen informal apprenticeship systems for a better future of work?**

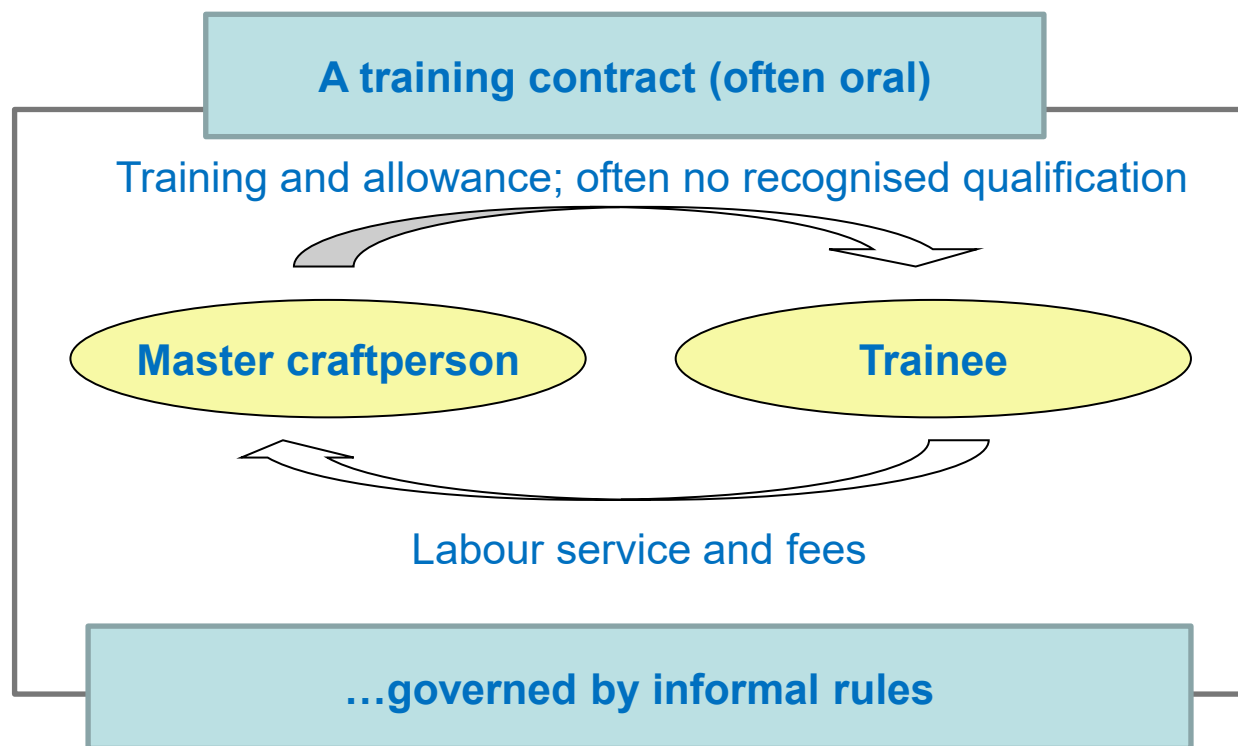
Lessons learned from comparative analysis of country cases

Authors / Christine Hofmann, Mariëtte Zeilenka, Boubakar Savadoqo, Wendy Lynn Akinyi Okoko

## ► IV. Considerations for analysis and practice

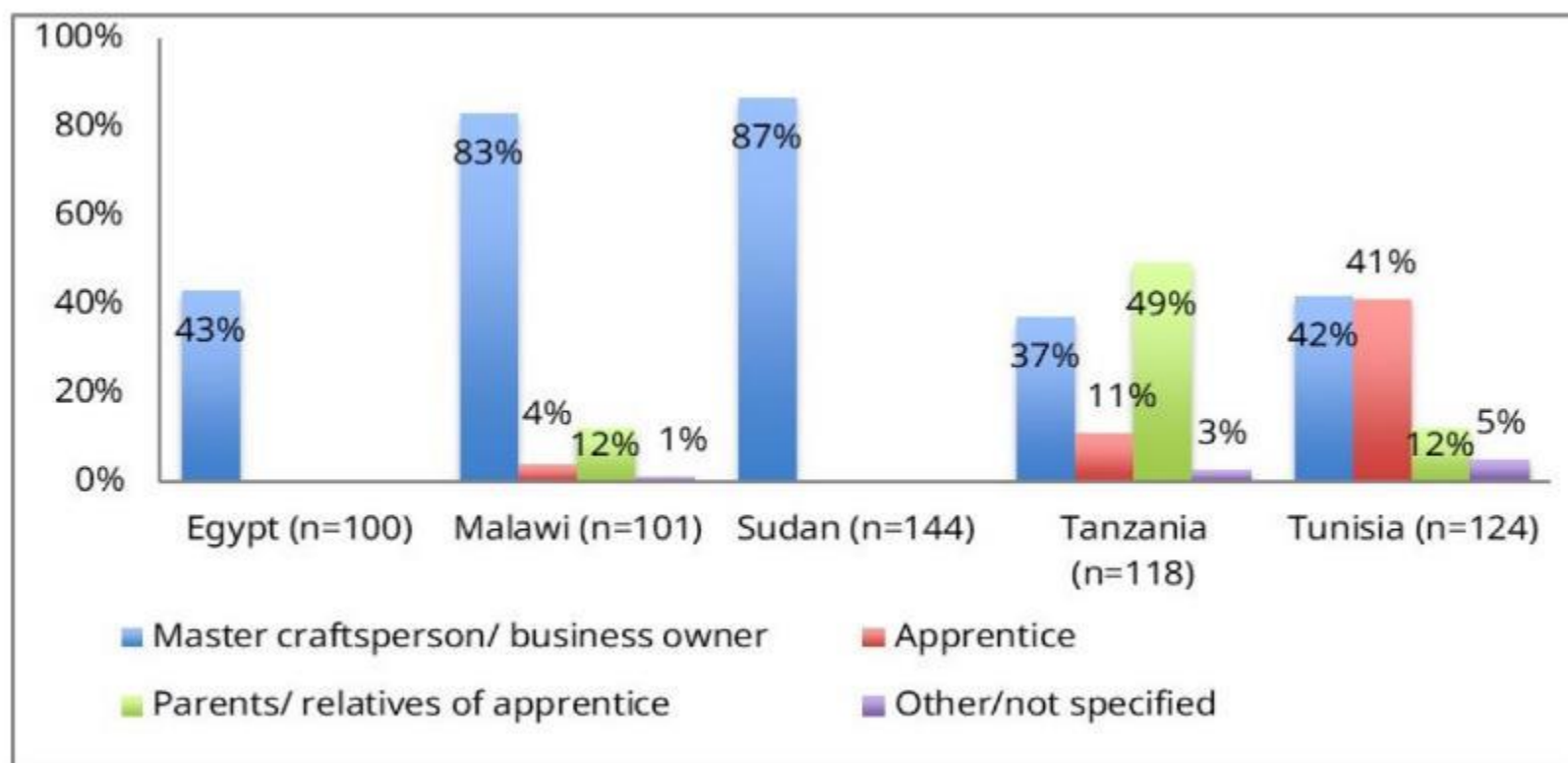
- What makes informal apprenticeship a system?
- Are there decent work deficits?
- Is informal apprenticeship effective in delivering quality and relevant skills to young people that make them employable and lead to decent jobs?

## ► Apprenticeship systems in the informal economy



A training system, embedded in local norms and traditions;  
Informal “institutions” and rules build the regulatory framework;

## Decent work - Social protection: Payment of medical expenses in case of sickness or occupational injury

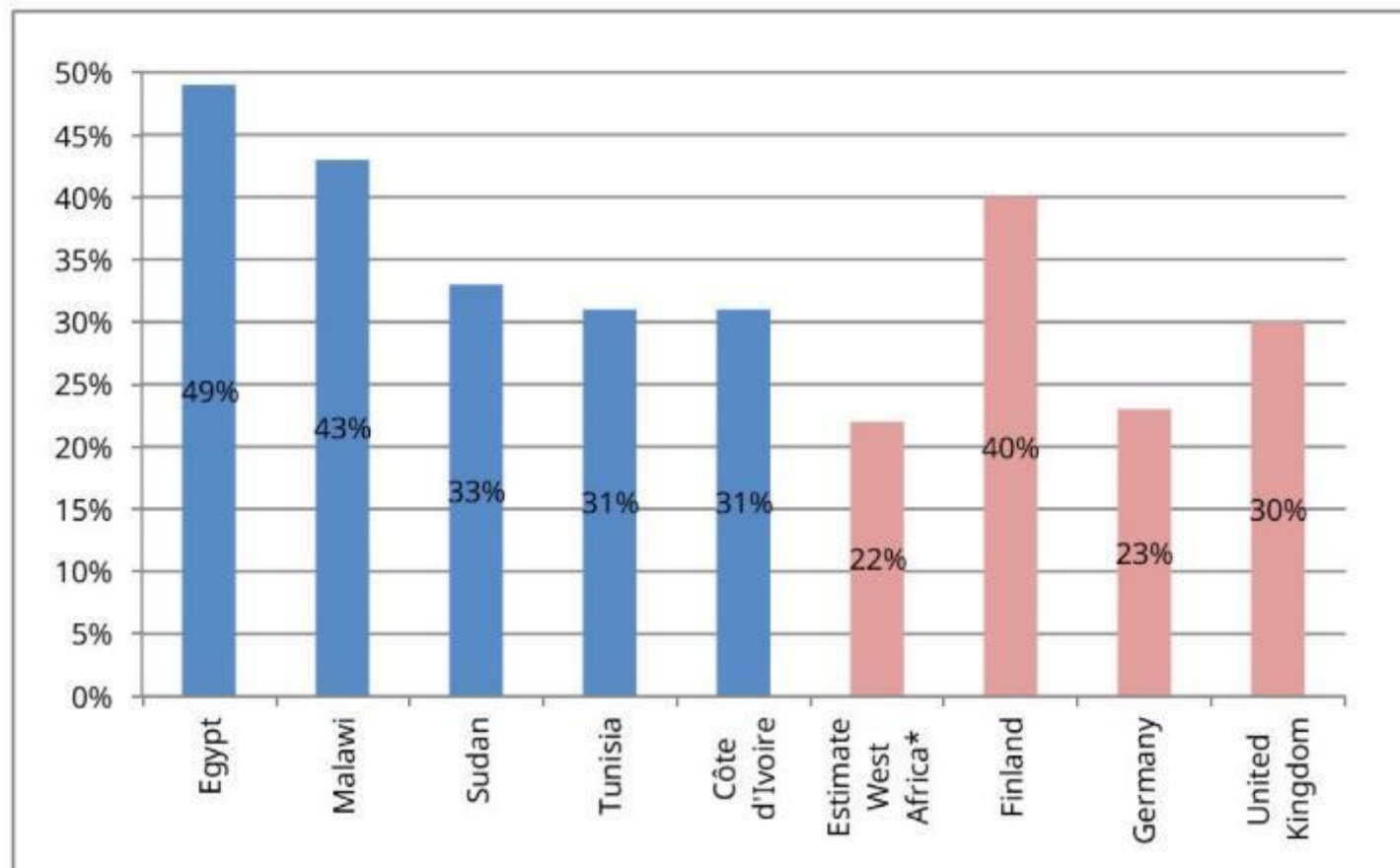


Note: In both Egypt and Sudan the question was not given with the other options of responses.

Source: Hofmann/Savadogo/Zelenka/Okolo. 2022. How to strengthen informal apprenticeship systems for a better future of work? Lessons learned from comparative analysis of country cases, ILO Working paper

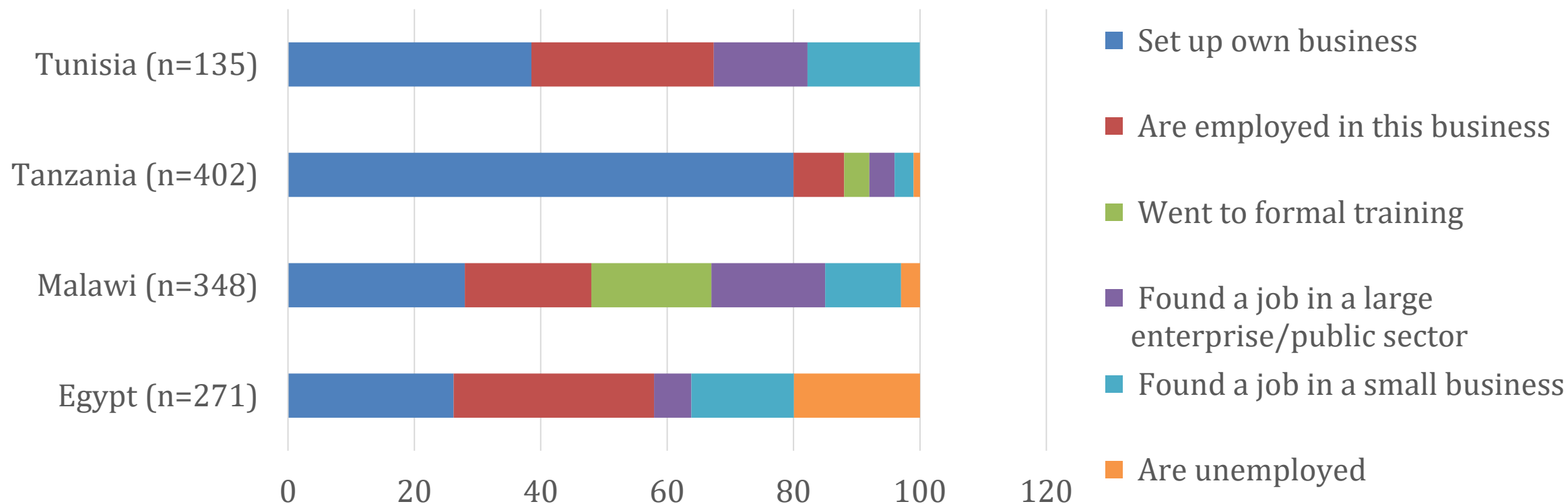


## Dropout rates of informal and formal apprentices



Source: Hofmann/Savadogo/Zelenka/Okolo. 2022. How to strengthen informal apprenticeship systems for a better future of work? Lessons learned from comparative analysis of country cases, ILO Working paper

## Transition towards employment



- ▶ Certificates increase the likelihood that apprentices transition to formality
- ▶ In Tanzania, comparison of skilled workers have shown that workers that have undergone informal apprenticeship earn more than those without

## ► Apprenticeships in the informal economy

### Why they work

- **Traditional skills** are passed on to the next generation
- **Economically viable for employers:**
- Employer **recoups the training investment** when the apprentice becomes productive, but still works at a lower wage level than skilled workers
- The **best candidates** can be selected
- Apprentices **learn while earning money** and are motivated to stay until the end – higher pay after apprenticeship
- **Skills are relevant** → training is **integrated into the work process** because employers know the skills needed

### Why they should be improved

- **Attractive** skills development system for youth
- Apprentices might **leave the company before the end of** the apprenticeship for a better salary elsewhere → **lack of motivation to finish**
- **Abusive practices including child labour and keeping “trade secrets”**– thus extending the apprenticeship time without passing on the skills
- Improved apprenticeships can **promote innovation and dynamize local economies**
- Strengthening apprenticeships is a **cost-effective way to improve young people’s employability**
- Promotes **transitions from the informal to the formal economy**

## V. Key take-aways

- ▶ Promote **inclusion of apprenticeships** in national skills and TVET systems
- ▶ Use **integrated policy solutions** and combining skills interventions with social and economic policies at different levels
- ▶ Promote **written apprenticeship contracts** and **involve social partners in the monitoring of agreements**
- ▶ Increase **participation of women and vulnerable groups** through sensitisation of MCs and the wider community
- ▶ **Involve informal economy workers** at all levels in the skills development systems including system governance
- ▶ Focus not only on formalization, but also on **skills needs in the informal economy**
- ▶ Improve **data** on apprenticeships
- ▶ **Take a step-by-step approach**



## Relevant ILO resources

- ▶ 2024. **ILO Recommendation 208. Guide for policy-makers.**
- ▶ 2023. **Improving skills and lifelong learning for workers in the informal economy to promote decent work and enhance transitions to formality.** BRICS Employment Working Group.
- ▶ 2024. **Strengthening apprenticeships for transitions to formality.** Policy brief.
- ▶ 2023. **Apprentices in countries with large informal economies.** Statistical brief, 2022.
- ▶ 2022. **How to strengthen informal apprenticeship systems for a better future of work?** Working paper, Geneva, ILO
- ▶ 2012. **Upgrading informal apprenticeship. A resource guide for Africa**
- ▶ 2018. **Recognition of Prior Learning RPL Package**
- ▶ 2015. **Assessing skills in the informal economy.** A resource guide for small industry and community organizations

