



Until we are all equal



Plan International

# Skills and Opportunities for Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship

A snapshot of our evidence from 2024

Through our global strategy *All Girls Standing Strong*, Plan International works in over 80 countries and focuses programming in six priority thematic areas, as well as responding to humanitarian emergencies.

At the end of 2024, we reviewed the evidence available from projects and countries working in each thematic area – covering evaluations and results, key internal and external research and annual reporting metrics. This short snapshot summarises some of the insights from our evidence this year in skills and opportunities for youth employment and entrepreneurship and what we can learn from it.

**Plan International's focus in the area of youth employment and entrepreneurship is ensuring that marginalised young people, especially young women, gain knowledge and skills, access opportunities and engage actively in decent work of their choosing.** Core focus areas include:

- Life, vocational and entrepreneurship skills and community support
- Youth entrepreneurship (self-employed)
- Youth employment (waged)
- Private sector decent and gender-responsive workplaces

Learn more about our work [here](#).



## Key insights



- **The global employment context is rapidly changing.** The needs of labour markets are evolving due to globalisation, technological advancements, demographic trends and climate change. Many countries are experiencing population growth that is not matched by the availability of jobs. Globally, 20 per cent of youth are not in employment, education or training, of which two in three are women.
- **Plan International's work on youth employment and entrepreneurship centres on ensuring that young people, especially young women, gain knowledge and skills and access opportunities for decent work of their choosing.** This includes through training for waged or self-employment, market analysis and advocacy with government and the private sector. Green skills and digital interventions are an increasing focus. This year, our programming reached 4.6 million people, including over 700 thousand girls.
- **Effective training and capacity building with young people was a strong theme of our work this year.** High proportions of young people demonstrated life, vocational or entrepreneurship skills after completing training. Young people continued to emphasise the value of support throughout the process from skills building, mentorship and coaching to the conceptualisation and actioning of their entrepreneurial idea or as they started employment, as well as longer term support and networking.
- **Key enablers to success have included ensuring that interventions are based on a comprehensive analysis of the market, as well as combining training efforts with complementary approaches such as job shadowing.** However, challenges remain, including ongoing gendered barriers impacting girls and young women, the scope of available employment opportunities (particularly in rural geographies), as well as challenges in access to financial services.
- **Continued advocacy is needed with governments and the private sector for sustained change.** This includes on decent working conditions, the regulatory environment and access to financial services, as well as communicating the benefits of employing young people.

# 2024

## figures at a glance

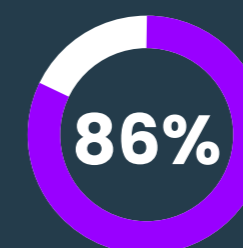
### Young people building their skills for life and work

At the end of the project training activities they participated in...



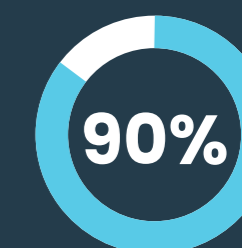
90% of young people reported feeling confident about their life skills, including 87% of girls and 90% of boys.

(Monitoring data from 2384 young people participating in 11 projects)



86% of young people demonstrated vocational competencies.

(Monitoring data from over 12000 young people participating in nine projects)



90% of young people demonstrated entrepreneurship competencies, including 90% of girls and 91% of boys.

(Monitoring data from 2546 young people participating in 10 projects)

### Advocacy for economic empowerment

17 influencing successes in relation to economic empowerment, including:



6 changes or developments related to laws, policies, regulations or guidelines on girls's rights.



8 advances in the adoption, replication or scaling up of programme models by duty bearers or collaborators.

(Annual reporting, July 2023 to June 2024)

### Our global footprint in youth employment and entrepreneurship



770.5 thousand girls with improved skills and work opportunities

4.6 million young people and adults reached with programming in skills and opportunities for youth employment and entrepreneurship

(Annual reporting against our Global Advocacy Strategy, July 2023 to June 2024)

## What are some of the key issues at stake? Selected findings from research

**The global employment context is rapidly changing.** The needs of labour markets are evolving due to globalisation, technological advancements, demographic trends and climate change.<sup>1</sup> In addition, many low- and middle-income countries are faced with continuous population growth that will bring millions of new entrants on to the labour market; however, their economies are not growing fast enough to accommodate this labour supply, so countries in Africa and parts of Asia and the Pacific are continuing to experience a shortage of jobs. Globally, 13 per cent of youth are unemployed and 20 per cent of youth are not in employment, education or training, of which two in three are women.<sup>2</sup> Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest unemployment rate in the world, at over 30 per cent, and young women face even higher unemployment rates than young men in most African countries.<sup>3</sup>

“**If I do well at school, I can become a midwife, that’s my dream.**”

Fezire, 17, Togo

One of Plan International’s studies this year consulted with young people across four regions, and found that the support prioritised by young people when seeking employment or initiating an entrepreneurship initiative was **ongoing mentoring and coaching**. Young people valued engagement throughout the process from skills building, to the conceptualisation and implementation of their entrepreneurial idea, or as they started employment, as well as longer term support and networking. Training was also identified as a key enabling factor for participants across other studies, including in *Understanding Young Women’s Pathways to Economic Empowerment and Resilience in Rural Contexts*, a multi-country research study in Ethiopia, Malawi and Nepal, which highlighted the positive impacts of receiving vocational training. Research underscored the importance of provision of microfinancing for young entrepreneurs, as well as the role of a supportive policy environment, with fair and regulated hiring and retention practices and improved access to land and resources, particularly for women.

“**[I want] a good job and be something in life. It is important to have an occupation to travel and spend [money] on yourself and I would help my mother giving her a house.**”

Larissa, 16, Brazil

Insights were also available from *Real Choices, Real Lives*, a longitudinal study following over 100 girls in nine countries around the world. As the girls navigate their late adolescence transitions – from childhood to adulthood, and from school to the world of work – they **express their agency through making decisions** about how they split their time between their various responsibilities and activities, and through the futures that they imagine for themselves and pursue.

However, **unpaid care work** was prominent as a gendered barrier to employment and economic opportunities across several of our research studies this year, straddling a diverse range of country contexts. One of the *studies* - focused on understanding pathways to economic empowerment - shed light on some of the other barriers facing girls in accessing formal employment or starting their own businesses in rural contexts. For example, young women talked about having limited access to funding for their businesses.

“**It is important for women to be financially independent. The main thing that is holding women back not to be financially independent is lack of initial capital. In addition, there is a lot of pressure from our family, like we are pressured to get married, not being able to continue their education...**”

Young woman, name and age unknown, Ethiopia

While some respondents reported receiving support from their families in their pursuit of entrepreneurship, others reported experiencing negative reactions from their community. **Gendered norms** were seen as shaping access to opportunities where expectations around what work is considered appropriate for women impact the support they receive and the spaces they are able to access. Men are also more likely and more able to travel to cities and abroad to seek employment, while women are generally more likely and expected to remain in communities and are therefore restricted to certain sources of income, including informal sources such as agriculture, rearing animals, and selling fruit and vegetables.

**Lack of job opportunities** were also noted as a reason for leaving their country of origin in protracted crisis contexts, including in the *Adolescent Girls in Crisis study in Ciudad Juarez* on Mexico’s border with the USA. Migrant populations faced significant barriers in access to safe and legal work, including a lack of documentation. For women on the move, vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking is heightened due to their lack of legal status as well as gender discrimination by employers who more actively seek out their male counterparts for work.



<sup>1</sup>International Labour Organization. 2024. World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2024. Geneva: International Labour Office, 2024. © ILO.

<sup>2</sup>International Labour Organization. 2024. Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024. Decent work, brighter futures, Geneva: International Labour Office, 2024. © ILO.

<sup>3</sup>MATSH. 2023. Youth Employment Statistics in Africa in 2023

## What have we learned? Selected findings from evaluations

**We reviewed 20 evaluations of our youth employment and entrepreneurship programming this year, covering countries in four regions.**

**Effective training and capacity building with young people was a strong theme of our work this year.** Our globally aggregated results data show high proportions of young people with skills after training. This theme was echoed in our evaluations, with evidence of strengthened skills (life, vocational or entrepreneurship) among participating young people. Key enablers to success have included ensuring that interventions are market-informed and needs-based in the context, as well as combining training with complementary approaches such as opportunities for networking and practical experience such as job shadowing. Collaboration with local institutions and expertise was also an important consideration.

**Positive findings were also evident from work on building community and family awareness and support for young people's employability and opportunities.** From our evaluations, there was evidence of improvements in both young people's perceptions of the support they receive and in terms of measured attitudes and support of family and communities. Progress was achieved through engaging stakeholders through project activities, and by leveraging the relationships and activities of key community actors, including technical and vocational and education and training centres. For example:

- In **Vietnam**, parents and teachers were engaged through *Champions of Change* and other events related to gender equality in career selection, to learn more about young people's career opportunities, exchange ideas and increase support for their children's career in a fast-changing socio-economic context.
- In **Zambia**, engagement of family members, especially men, in gender awareness trainings increased awareness and shifted attitudes around gender norms that hinder young people's access to self-employment opportunities.

**Employment and entrepreneurship interventions continue to be highly relevant, particularly in settings where young people lack access to education or skills.** Relevance was enhanced through use of evidence, in particular from market analyses or taking recommendations from local actors. However, opportunities for improvements were also identified in some cases – in particular in terms of alignment to the market demands and contextual requirements, or challenges linked to high costs or complexity of businesses. Gendered barriers also remain as a significant barrier in some cases, particularly in relation to translating skills to employment in contexts where gendered norms and stereotypes (for example, linked to the burden of unpaid care work or barriers to entry in male-dominated sectors) and/or gaps in access to opportunities for women are still prevalent.

In terms of **influencing work and private sector engagement**, while there was somewhat more limited evidence compared to other areas, we've seen various successes this year. For example:

- In **Brazil and China**, the evaluation report highlighted the success of the project's advocacy efforts in influencing the uptake of a financial education and life skills curriculum. In both cases, the quality and impact of the course was key in influencing decision makers in steadily adopting the curriculum.
- In **Philippines**, a project was successful in collaborating with relevant government actors and business fora in increasing the recognition of hiring youth and having gender responsive workplaces. The findings at the end of the project highlighted a strong indication of business owners' willingness to hire young people (with 95 per cent reporting they are willing, compared to a target of 75 per cent).

- In **Egypt**, Plan International launched the "Annual Showcase Day for Economic Empowerment Activities in Local Communities." The event provides opportunities for micro-entrepreneurs to showcase their business, as part of a broader goal of uplifting women and young entrepreneurs from disadvantaged governorates, helping them secure financial independence. Plan engaged with key stakeholders, including ministries and financial institutions, who participated in the event but also provided essential services such as networking opportunities, financial mentorship, and support for business expansion.

**"My father noticed how interested I was in learning how to repair things. Although social norms and our culture perceive this work to be exclusively for males, my father encouraged me to learn more about it. He was sure that I would be able to excel as long as I do what I'm passionate about"**

- Basma, 20, Egypt

Basma recently joined the Tamkeen III youth economic empowerment project run by Plan International which aims to improve access to economic opportunities for young men and women aged 18 to 35 in three areas of Egypt (Cairo, Alexandria and Assiut).



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## Where we need to keep going deeper....

The evidence available this year has informed insights which are relevant for Plan International but also the wider sector, in terms of how investment is targeted and how programmes are designed, to achieve gains:

**We need to continue to strengthen how we analyse the market and consult stakeholders during project design.** Getting young people into waged employment, or starting their own business, requires holistic interventions, with resources, that respond to the specific gaps and barriers to accessing and staying in work in the context. Building on positive learnings, more consistent, and in-depth consultations (with young people and other stakeholders) and market analysis are needed during project design to target approaches to the specifics of the operating context.

**We need to deepen our work on the private sector and other aspects of the enabling environment.** We need to continue, and expand, how we engage governments and the private sector for sustained

change, including on policies for decent working environments (especially those addressing harassment, discrimination and exclusion), the regulatory environment and access to financial services. We also need to continue to advocate with the private sector around the benefits of employing young people, especially young women. This is vital to ensure that investments in training and capacity strengthening of young people can translate to tangible changes in employment status and income.

**We need to build on good practices and deploy differentiated strategies that respond to gender and inclusion related barriers.** There is a need for systematic inclusion of targeted interventions that respond to the specific barriers faced by girls and young women and people living with disabilities, for example, by increasing focus on shifting gender norms. This necessitates continuing engagement with girls, young women and other groups in terms of what their needs and aspirations are, and what would work in terms of supporting them to access opportunities. Understanding whether these interventions are effective also implies gathering the perspectives of different groups to understand where we are making progress and where shifts in approach are warranted.

### Read more from this year:

*Youth Employment and Enterprise Programme Evaluation:* Learning Brief summarising key findings of a global meta-evaluation of 90 evaluations conducted between 2018 and 2022.

*The Girls' Pact for the Future:* Adolescent girls and young people share their concerns, their vision of a positive future with gender equality at its heart, and recommendations for policy makers.

*Real Choices, Real Lives:* Research Series that has been following the lives of over 100 girls in nine countries around the world from their birth in 2006.

*Adolescent Girls in Crisis:* Research Series capturing the voices and experiences of adolescent girls in protracted crises.



Until we are all equal

## About Plan International







Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organization that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We believe in the power and potential of every child but know this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected.

Working together with children, young people, supporters and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges girls and vulnerable children face. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood and we enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 85 years, we have rallied other determined optimists to transform the lives of all children in more than 80 countries.

## We won't stop until we are all equal.

Plan International  
Global Hub  
Dukes Court, Duke Street, Woking,  
Surrey GU21 5BH, United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 1483 755155  
Fax: +44 (0) 1483 756505  
E-mail: [info@plan-international.org](mailto:info@plan-international.org)

-  [plan-international.org](https://plan-international.org)
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**Cover photo:** At the age of 25, Marceline is already a successful business owner in Benin where she runs a weaving business. ©Plan International

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