



# THE EU'S COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY WITH AFRICA

GIVING GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE WHATEVER THEY WANT TO BE

FEBRUARY 2020



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## INTRODUCTION

2020 is a key year for the relationship between the European Union and Africa. The Post-Cotonou negotiations are ongoing, including a pillar of the agreement dedicated to the partnership between the EU and African signatories. At the end of the year, the 6th EU-AU Summit will take place. In addition, EC President von der Leyen has tasked the European Commission with the development of a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa. In light of these developments, Plan International would like to highlight the importance to ensure girls and young women can be whatever they want to be! This can be done by putting youth economic empowerment (YEE) with a gender lens at the centre, emphasising in particular the knowledge, competence and skills young people need to succeed.

## WHAT IS YOUTH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT WITH A FOCUS ON GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN?

The UN World Population Prospects estimates that in 2030, there will be 1.2 billion young people worldwide, 25% of whom will live in Africa, and these numbers will only keep growing by 2050.<sup>1</sup> Against this demographic background, the global alliance 'Decent Jobs for Youth' highlights that in Sub-Saharan Africa there are currently 9 million unemployed young people, and 20% of young people are neither in employment, education nor training (NEETs). Moreover, employment does not guarantee a way out of poverty: in the region, 64 million young people are working but living in poverty.<sup>2</sup> There are multiple reasons behind these numbers, such as a lack of education beyond primary education, including vocational trainings, and a lack of decent job opportunities when entering the labour market, making the transition difficult.

**For girls and young women in particular, discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes create pervasive obstacles to the realisation of their rights and set the stage for economic and gender-based inequalities directly affecting their economic empowerment and their access to decent jobs.<sup>3</sup>** These obstacles are visible for example through unequal care responsibilities, unequal access to education and training, occupational segregation, gender-based violence, financial exclusion, and the digital gender gap. They affect the likelihood of a young woman entering and participating in the labour market, which types of jobs she can pursue, how much she will be paid and how far she can advance in her career. It is also important to note that too often girls are ignored in economic empowerment discussions, as they are not seen as economic actors. But a woman's economic life does not begin at the age of 18. Gender equality and discriminatory social norms are an overarching issue that has negative effects on girls from birth, and that increases across a woman's life cycle. Changing girls' economic future requires a life course approach to economic empowerment, so that, starting in childhood, girls are being prepared for economic life and have the tools to be economically independent in adulthood.

Youth Economic Empowerment (YEE) is a process starting in childhood by which **girls and young women acquire the ability to succeed**, through for example skills, confidence and knowledge, **and the power to make their own economic decisions**, through equal economic rights and access to resources.

**We believe it is crucial to support simultaneously youth economic empowerment from an early age and gender equality to make sure all young people, including young women, unlock their potential.**



<sup>1</sup> UN World Population Prospects: <https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/>

<sup>2</sup> Decent Jobs for Youth global alliance: <https://www.decentjobsforyouth.org/about>. Plan International is a partner.

<sup>3</sup> ILO unemployment rates by sex and regions: <https://www.ilo.org/infostories/Stories/Employment/Youth-still-struggle-to-get-good-jobs#where-jobs-are/gender>

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY WITH AFRICA?

The Comprehensive Strategy with Africa is a great opportunity to promote youth economic empowerment and to help fulfil the EU's own commitments toward young people, bringing together and building on existing initiatives such as the **Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs**. With the recent **European Green Deal** in particular, the EU's ambition to 'make climate and environmental issues key strands in relations between the two continents', including through a green and circular economy, requires skills development to that end. In addition, as stated in the **European Consensus on Development**, 'responding to the educational needs of children and youth is crucial to [...] boosting youth employment' and ensuring sustainable development. The EU and its member states committed to support quality employment and entrepreneurship opportunities through 'effective policies in education, vocational training, skills development and access to digital technologies and services'. They committed to pay special attention to girls and young women, 'to ensure everyone has the knowledge, skills and capabilities and rights they need to enjoy a life in dignity'.

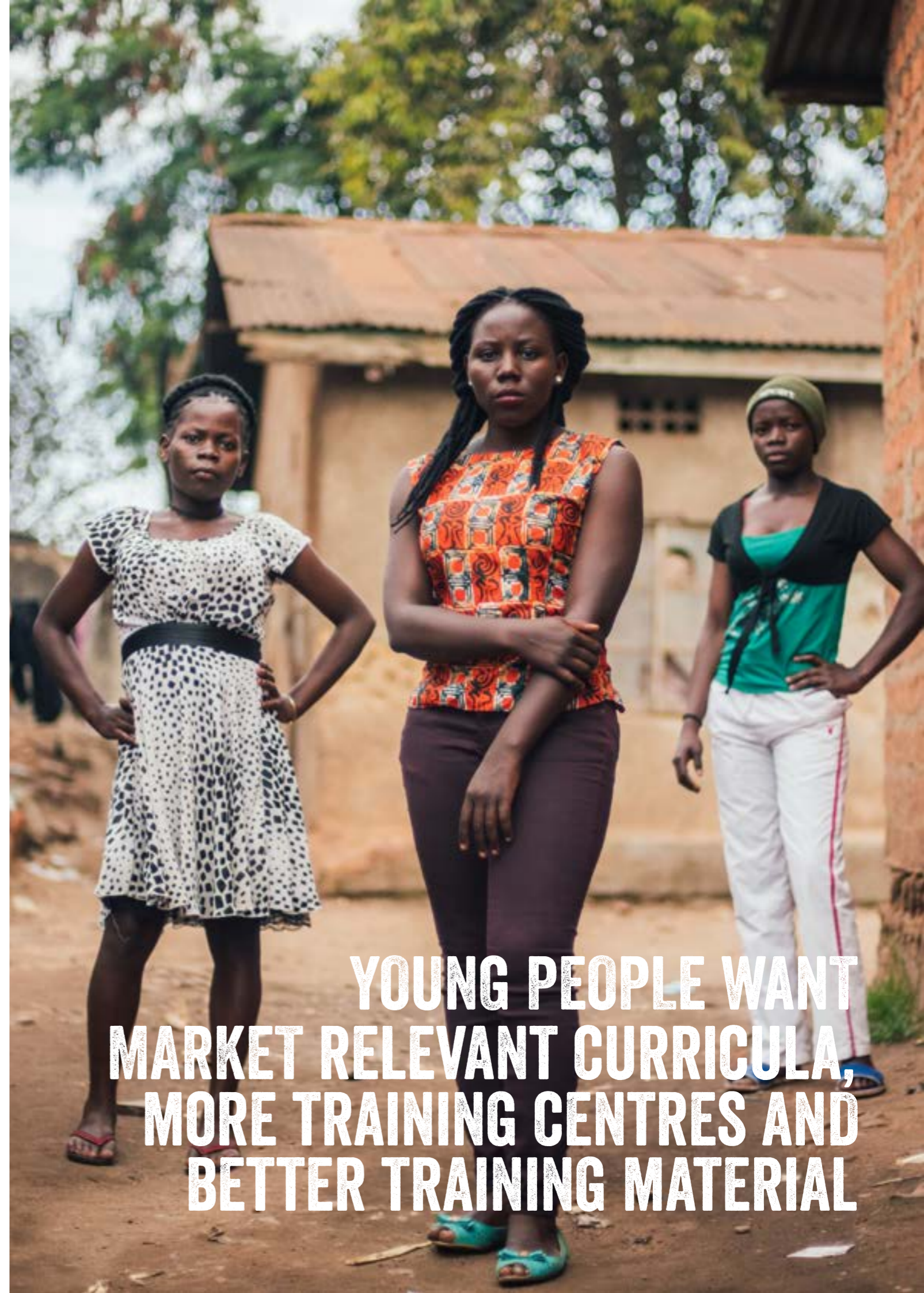
It is clear that this is an area of shared interest between the EU and African countries. The ACP negotiating directives for the new **EU-ACP partnership agreement**, which covers 48 Sub-Saharan African countries, address decent job creation for youth, education and skills (especially in relation to technology and innovation), entrepreneurship and, as a crosscutting theme, gender equality. These themes have also been reflected in the **EU-AU partnership** discussions. The Joint Declaration adopted at the 5th EU-AU Summit in 2017, under the overarching theme 'investing in youth', includes as a priority 'investing in people – education, science, technology and skills development'.

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONCERNS

The Youth Summit that ran in parallel to the 5th EU-AU Summit in 2017 also produced a declaration, **asking EU and AU member states to act on education and skills, business, job creation and entrepreneurship**. For example, it calls for 'comprehensive and continuous capacity building programmes to enhance young people's employability', 'the recognition and validation of competences gained through non-formal education' and the guarantee of 'universal access to quality and inclusive education, recognising the importance of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)'.

More recently in 2019 for the G7, a youth consultation in West and Central Africa led by Plan International France and West and Central Africa offices for the Education Coalition revealed that 70% of young people consulted think that the existing technical and vocational trainings do not encourage their insertion into the labour market. **They recommend for example market-relevant curricula, more training centres and better training material.** <sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> To access the summary report of this consultation: [https://www.campaignforeducation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/G7-Youth-Consultation\\_Summary-report\\_Coalition-Education.pdf](https://www.campaignforeducation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/G7-Youth-Consultation_Summary-report_Coalition-Education.pdf)



**YOUNG PEOPLE WANT  
MARKET RELEVANT CURRICULA,  
MORE TRAINING CENTRES AND  
BETTER TRAINING MATERIAL**



## PLAN INTERNATIONAL'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY WITH AFRICA

We strongly encourage the EU to consider the following:

### Partners for Sustainable Growth and Jobs

- Promote measures to eliminate specific barriers to girls and young women's education, including their access to secondary education, vocational education and training, taking into account diversity and intersectionality. This means for example ensuring flexibility for trainings (evening, part-time etc.), safety in, around and on the way to educational facilities, improving sanitation facilities, and special learning initiatives for the retention of marginalised girls, boys and young people;
- Improve the quality of learning in education and training, ensuring it supports employability and is relevant to the 21st century economy;
- Support entrepreneurial and financial skills development, in conjunction with equal access to economic resources (capital, land and markets) for young women.

### Partners for a Green Transition

- Promote green skills in formal and informal education and training, and encourage girls and young women's participation in these subjects;
- Support green jobs and green entrepreneurship that contribute to preserving or restoring the environment in existing industries or new green sectors.

### Partners for a Digital and Data Transformation

- Mainstream digital literacy and skills in education;
- Promote girls and young women's participation in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) and Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) subjects, including by addressing gender biases and occupational stereotypes in curricula and training materials.

### Partners for peace, security, governance and resilience

- Ensure that in fragile settings and in situations of forced displacement, girls and young women have access to education and training opportunities including vocational, life skills and language training, and address gender-based barriers;
- Support the recognition of previous qualifications for displaced young people.

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