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Skills and Opportunities for Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship

A snapshot of our evidence from 2025

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. We stand with girls to tear down barriers, save lives and build a world where equality for girls leads to progress for all.

At the end of 2025, we reviewed the evidence available from projects and countries working in each thematic area – covering evaluations and results, key internal research and annual reporting metrics. We also scanned some of the external evidence, to situate our work in the global context. This short snapshot summarises some of the insights from this year in youth employment and entrepreneurship and what we can learn from it.



A 19-year-old feeds the frogs she rears at her home in Bokeo province in Laos.

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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:

- Ensuring that young people have **life, vocational and entrepreneurship skills and support from their communities.**
- Enabling young people to **set up their own businesses through entrepreneurship pathways.**
- Supporting young people to **find jobs through waged employment pathways.**
- Working with governments, employers and other duty bearers to **ensure decent and gender-responsive workplaces.**

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

Key insights:

Our programming and the global context

01 The global context for youth employment and entrepreneurship is increasingly shaped by economic instability, climate change, and digitalisation.

Youth, particularly in Asia and Africa, face high unemployment, widespread informal work and poverty, with women disproportionality impacted. Access to digital skills is uneven due to educational, geographic, and gender divides. Climate shocks increase unpaid care burdens and reduce girls' time for education.

02 Research this year reveals both progress and persistent barriers in advancing economic empowerment for youth, particularly girls and young women.

While gains were seen in some areas in terms of creating workplaces that promote gender equality – for example, due to investment in childcare – other reports underscored the gendered labour market inequalities, pay gaps and workplace discrimination that persist.

03 Our programming operated at scale to support young people to access jobs.

We saw positive results through programming to build entrepreneurship and vocational skills of young people, as well as ensure the supportive family and community environments which are vital for success. Among the young people surveyed across projects this year, outcomes in terms of skills development were strong and 94 per cent had pursued waged employment six months after the training or activity they participated in, including 95 per cent of young women.

04 We also supported more holistic interventions that help build resilience of young people, families and communities.

We provided agricultural inputs (such as seeds, livestock and equipment) that underpin livelihoods and food security, as well as supporting community-based savings mechanisms that help promote financial inclusion and empower members to invest in livelihoods, cope with shocks and build resilience. For example, this year we established and strengthened village savings and loans associations, with over 76,000 thousand people participating across 16 countries.

2025 figures at a glance

Our global reach footprint in youth employment and entrepreneurship¹

3.7 million

children and adults

were reached with programming on skills and opportunities for youth employment and entrepreneurship.

589,000

girls

with improved skills and work opportunities.



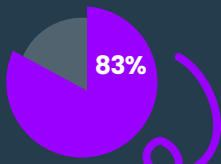
Examples of our results across projects^{3,4}

Skills for work

169,528 people, with a focus on youth,

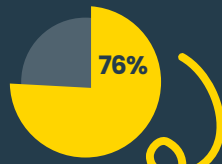
received training to help them to get a job or set up their own business.

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



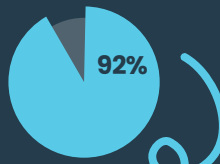
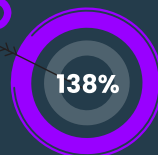
83% of young people

felt confident about their life skills, including 85% of girls. Most projects met or went beyond their goal for improving life skills, with an average achievement of 136% against targets.⁴



76% of young people

demonstrated entrepreneurship competencies, including 73% of girls. Most projects met or went beyond their goal for strengthening entrepreneurship competencies, with an average achievement of 138% against targets.⁵



92% of young people

demonstrated vocational competencies, including 78% of girls. Most projects met or went beyond their goal for improving vocational competencies, with an average achievement of 138% against targets.⁶



Getting young people into jobs

94% of young people

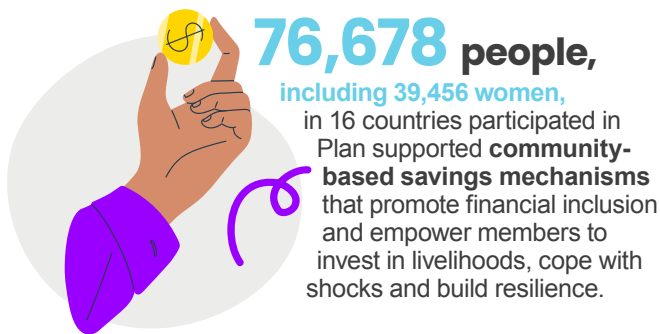
had pursued waged employment six months after participating in a training or activity, including 95% of young women. All of the projects achieved or overachieved their stated goal of getting young people into jobs.⁷



Supporting economic resilience and food security

44,517
people and
households

received agricultural inputs (including seeds, livestock, or farming equipment) to support their livelihoods through farming.



76,678 people,
including 39,456 women,
in 16 countries participated in
Plan supported **community-
based savings mechanisms**
that promote financial inclusion
and empower members to
invest in livelihoods, cope with
shocks and build resilience.

We supported the »
establishment of
1,921 new
savings groups or
cooperatives, and
strengthening of
2,723
existing
cooperatives and
savings groups.



Projects in 12 countries supported

13,587 people
to **increase their income**
which will enable them
to improve their living
circumstances and support
their family.



Advocacy for economic empowerment⁸

21 influencing
successes
reported in **economic
empowerment**, including »

7 changes
related to laws, policies,
regulations, or guidelines
on **girls' rights**.



1. Based on annual reach reporting by country offices, July 2024 to June 2025.
2. Results are aggregated based on data reported by projects this year, including both those operating in development contexts and those responding to crises. They represent a sub-set of overall reach figures since they are specific to particular project activities and depend on individual project reporting cadence. Best efforts have been made to adjust for double counting during the aggregation through careful review and adjustment where projects have reported more than once during the year. For specific data related to humanitarian programming, please refer to the Humanitarian Snapshot for 2025.
3. Project performance against targets was calculated and reported for global outcome indicators that are part of the dataset available this year. Where multiple data points had been reported by a project, an average was first calculated per project. The average performance across projects was then calculated as a mean.
4. Monitoring data from 9,336 young people participating in 28 projects.
5. Monitoring data from 5,384 young people participating in 27 projects.
6. Monitoring data from 7,094 young people participating in 21 projects.
7. Monitoring data from 1,703 people participating in six projects.
8. Based on annual reporting against our [Global Advocacy Strategy](#), July 2024 to June 2025.

What are some of the key issues?

Selected findings from research



A 20-year-old from Nepal is proud to be able to support her mother.

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The global context for youth employment and entrepreneurship is increasingly shaped by economic instability, climate change, and technological disruption. Inflation and geopolitical tensions have resulted in aggressive monetary policies that disproportionately affect developing countries, especially in Africa and Asia. Youth in these regions face high unemployment, widespread informal work, and poverty, with women particularly impacted. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, an estimated 145 million workers lived in extreme poverty in 2023, surviving on less than US \$2.15 a day, representing about one-third of the employed population.⁹ In Asia and the Pacific region, more than 144 million youth in the region are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), the majority of whom are women.¹⁰

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is highlighted as a strategic investment to improve employability and productivity, yet funding remains insufficient and inequitably distributed. Climate-smart agriculture and green transitions offer significant opportunities, with projections of millions of new jobs in renewable energy, construction, and climate-resilient sectors – provided young people are equipped with relevant skills.

Digitalisation and artificial intelligence (AI) are rapidly transforming the labour market, creating demand for digital skills and exposing certain roles – especially clerical and administrative jobs often held by women – to automation risks. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, an estimated 230 million jobs will require digital skills by 2030,¹¹ yet access to the required skills remains uneven due to educational, geographic, and gender divides. The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened these inequalities, underscoring the urgency of inclusive digital training. To prepare youth for the future of work, coordinated efforts are needed to modernise curricula, align training with the needs of the labour market, and integrate AI into education and employment strategies. Empowering youth, particularly in agriculture and digital sectors, is essential for economic resilience, social inclusion and sustainable development.

Plan International's research from this year reveal both progress and persistent barriers in advancing economic empowerment for youth, particularly girls and young women. The studies span diverse contexts – development and humanitarian, crisis-affected, and climate-vulnerable.

9. ILO. 2024. [World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2024](#). International Labour Organization.

10. Labour Force Statistics Database. [Share of youth not in education, employment or training, total \(% of youth population\) | Data](#).

11. IFC. 2021. [Demand for Digital Skills in Sub-Saharan Africa. Key Findings from a Five-Country Study: Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Rwanda](#). World Bank and International Finance Corporation, World Bank Group; INCLUDE. 2023. Digital Skills for Youth Employment in Africa: Fostering Digital Transformation for Social Inclusion, Gender Equality and Development.

Some gains were noted in creating **workplaces that promote gender equality**, especially in Asia Pacific and the Region of the Americas. For instance, the [Changing Lives 2024](#) report found that investments in childcare in Bangladesh enabled women's economic participation, while leadership indices highlighted countries like Singapore and New Zealand for their inclusive labour policies.

“ My wife couldn't go outside and work because of our baby but Plan has opened a daycare where we can take the child. Now she can do work outside without any worries ... We can fulfil our fundamental needs. We are solvent now.”

Male Community Leader, 44 years old, Bangladesh¹²

However, several reports underscored enduring barriers such as **gendered labour market inequalities, pay gaps and workplace discrimination**. The [State of Girls' Rights in the UK 2024](#) found that women were over-represented in low-paid sectors and faced significant pay disparities and workplace harassment. In Bolivia, women experienced “*triple labour vulnerability*” due to limited opportunities, gender norms and long working hours. These findings point to the need for fair labour practices, inclusive employment policies and mentorship programmes for women.

Supportive families and role models were identified as critical enablers of girls' aspirations and agency. Stories from [Real Choices, Real Lives](#) in Benin, the Dominican Republic and Vietnam illustrated how encouragement and shared domestic responsibilities helped girls pursue education and vocational goals. Conversely, unpaid care work emerged as a major constraint, limiting girls' time for education, skills building and rest. Girls globally were socialised into care roles from a young age, reinforcing gender inequality. In the United Kingdom, unpaid care was valued at £140 billion annually, with girls contributing disproportionately. Recommendations included recognising care work in national statistics, investing in infrastructure to reduce care burdens and promoting education centred on gender equality.



A 23-year-old runs a food and drinks stall in her home village in Togo.

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Youth employment remains precarious, especially for girls. The [Real Choices, Real Lives Out of Time](#) study found that girls often balance paid work with education, or engage in unpaid family labour. Gendered divisions of labour persist, with girls more likely to work in care and domestic roles, while boys take on manual jobs. In conflict-affected settings such as Cameroon and Colombia, explored in the [Still We Dream](#) report, livelihoods were disrupted by displacement, violence, and loss of property. Recommendations included integrating cash and voucher assistance with social protection and supporting reintegration of youth affected by armed conflict.

Several reports explored how climate change affects economic opportunities. Climate shocks increased unpaid care burdens and reduced girls' time for education. Yet, some initiatives – such as those explored in the [Seeds of Change](#) report – offered promise: in Kenya and Tanzania, ecosystem restoration projects empowered women economically and promoted leadership in environmental governance.

In Zimbabwe, climate-smart agriculture improved resilience and food security, especially for female-headed households. Reports called for gender-transformative, rights-based approaches in climate policy and for aligning national strategies with nature-based solutions.

12. Plan International and RMIT. 2024. [Changing Lives 2024 - The impact of Plan International's child sponsorship programmes in Bangladesh, Ecuador and Uganda.](#)

A 21-year-old from Rwanda uses her carpentry skills to make a wooden chair.
©Plan International



What have we learned?

Selected findings from evaluations



Young people show consistently improved entrepreneurship and vocational skills through our programming. This was linked to the delivery of comprehensive and tailored training packages and the collaboration with technical partners across the government and private sector, as well as factors such as mentoring and coaching and networking and peer learning opportunities. For example:

In **Niger**, the *CONVENIO* project built the entrepreneurship spirit and business skills necessary to manage small and medium enterprises in 98 per cent of the surveyed young women participants (representing an increase from under 80 per cent before the project started). This was achieved through tailored capacity building, in coordination with experts and cooperative leaders.

In **Paraguay**, the *SAPEA 2.0* project supported young people in developing business plans, reaching 91 per cent of its goal (reflecting over 1500 participants). Market-tailored training, delivered by competent trainers through an inclusive approach and alongside ongoing mentorship and support all drove success. Discovering about different businesses, learning days and utilising social networks to build skills added to the enabling environment of the project.

In **Zimbabwe**, training was useful in imparting to young people the knowledge and skills necessary to save and manage their finances. Through financial education and use of technology, participants could plan their ventures and calculate the funding required. Through community-based savings and loans associations, mutual support in borrowing funds and managing finances mitigated challenges in access to resources.

We reviewed 39 evaluations of Plan's youth employment and entrepreneurship programming this year, covering 27 countries in four regions.

Projects have built family and community support for young people's economic empowerment and skills development this year. While gendered barriers remained in some cases, key enablers for success included fostering active participation of families and communities in project activities, including through awareness raising and linkages with business. For example, in **Egypt** the *Economic and Social Participation of Young Women* project nurtured meaningful interactions between the community, clients and different stakeholders supporting women marketing and buying their products, resulting in community members and parents being more supportive of young people, especially women, entering work.

Projects supported young people in finding jobs or setting up their own businesses. This was primarily achieved through delivering training relevant to local market needs, increasing access to markets and youth-friendly financial services and establishing saving groups. Wrap-around support, such as business support, mentorship and alumni networks alongside strategic collaborations (especially with the private sector and government agencies) also had a positive influence on our impact in this area. For example:

In **Ethiopia**, working in a protracted crisis context with host, internally displaced and refugee communities, one of our projects managed to achieve strong results across self-employment indicators. Almost all (92 per cent) of the young people surveyed, were working on income generating activities and 95 per cent reported increases in their income as a result of the project. The project worked through 'one-stop service centres' that were equipped with essential materials and services, providing a safe space for young people to engage in recreational, entertainment and economic empowerment activities. Young people received support in their aims to set up a business, including vocational training, psychosocial, financial and legal support.

In **Jordan**, one project managed to place 320 young people (well over its target) in employment after providing training firstly in key areas in social entrepreneurship, employability, life skills, financial literacy, and gender equality, and secondly on more entrepreneurship (yet transferable) skills, such as business planning, governance, marketing and pitching. The project's achievements were bolstered by the team's collaboration with key support and non-formal education centres and the Ministry of Education, ensuring a smooth delivery and integration of training in a more holistic manner.

A 20-year-old from Egypt shows a Plan staff member one of the repairs she is working on.

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Young people in the Philippines plant rice as part of climate-smart agriculture project.

©Plan International

Projects saw a range of key achievements as a result of their engagement and influencing efforts. Influencing work with duty bearers such as government and the private sector is critical for long term change. For example:

In **Burkina Faso**, youth movements and networks were organised to conduct advocacy campaigns, including on social media, on issues related to youth economic empowerment. The project also strengthened the youth advisory council working to influence the national youth agenda and its goal to increase employment opportunities, socio-economic integration and youth empowerment. The involvement of youth is particularly important in humanitarian contexts of the country, where the voices and views of young people can easily be missed.

In **Ethiopia**, through advocacy with private employers and government actors, alongside youth civil society organisations, a strong commitment from decision makers (especially government officials) to address challenges and create an enabling environment for young people was recorded. This was particularly relevant in a context where 25 per cent of young people are unemployed and where employers struggle to find skilled and experienced workers.

In **Jordan**, where the environment promoting self-employment is not fully developed (but is acknowledged by policy makers, donors, civil society and other actors as critical to alleviating some of the country's economic problems), Plan contributed to the development of the National Entrepreneurship Policy, essential for an enabling environment for youth to set up businesses.

In **Timor-Leste**, Plan supported 15 village savings and loans cooperatives to transition into a federation, the first of its kind in the country. Previously, these cooperatives operated independently with limited capacity and sustainability. Through the *Youth Economic Empowerment* programme, the cooperatives' community-based financial systems and governance were strengthened, creating new opportunities for the economic empowerment of rural women and girls. The federation, which is led by women, now serves as an umbrella organization for all cooperatives in Aileu Municipality. As a result of collective advocacy efforts, the federation has now been formally handed over to the government, providing institutional support and promoting long term sustainability.

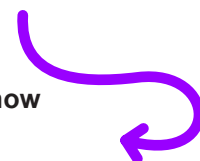
In **Zimbabwe**, with contributions from Plan International, the National Youth Empowerment strategy will be launched in October 2025, addressing the pressing issues faced by youth around climate change and green jobs, including lack of access to working capital, working spaces, formal financial services, green skills and markets.

Climate Change and Green Jobs in our Programming

- In **India**, participants showed an increased awareness and understanding of green enterprises and jobs and of how climate change affects the businesses.
- In **Malawi**, farmers used agri-smart techniques to improve their land farming outcomes.
- In **Ghana**, green technology adoption improved women's access and control over resources leading to increased income for eco-friendly/green enterprises.
- In **Niger**, participants used renewable energy in their activities, leading to increased income and access to clean electricity.
- In **Zimbabwe**, climate change knowledge and confidence in green economy in participants led to the set-up of green businesses.

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 in youth economic empowerment:



Market analysis is a non-negotiable pre-requisite

Success or stagnation in goals of getting young people into waged and self-employment is contingent on interventions that respond to the local market and opportunities, including an understanding of the local economy and absorption capacity of employers, availability of raw materials and access to finances, among others. This necessarily requires close linkages with the private sector and other stakeholders, to inform the design (and review) of training curricula as well as assess what additional wrap-around support might be needed.



Training is vital, but is not sufficient on its own

Training is seen as highly relevant and is an enabler for young people accessing work opportunities. However, it is generally not sufficient. An effective package of interventions must be context specific, tailored based on a market analysis, and reflecting the additional support that might be required in terms of access to finance, linkages with the local market and employers or other business support (for example, raw materials, start-up kits, etc).



Interventions must be tailored to different types of participants

The most marginalised (for example, internally displaced populations, refugees, rural youth, women and people living with disabilities) encounter the most barriers to participating in training, gaining employment and accessing resources, including financial support. They also have different needs – for example, the urgency with which a financial return is required, their availability to participate in different training modalities and the suitability of different interventions around access to finance. It's imperative that projects are designed with inclusion in mind – this requires consultation and participation during project design as well as partnerships and work with key stakeholders to break down barriers.



A long-term view is critical

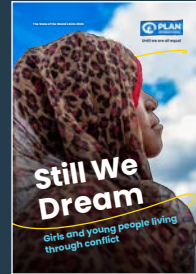
Meaningful assessments of the sustainability, relevance and impact of youth employment and entrepreneurship programming hinges very strongly on the post-project period – for example, to assess whether people access jobs or self-employment and how these are sustained, and to reflect on trends in the market and lay the groundwork for future activities. Due to the projectised nature of much of the work in the development sector, there are inherent challenges with this; however, opportunities might include a) negotiating – or fundraising – for *post hoc* follow-up studies, b) longer projects that allow multiple cohorts to go through training interventions but then receive follow-up support and assessments of whether progress has been sustained within the life of the project, and/or c) explicitly designing projects to build on past interventions and promote longer term sustained support models where appropriate and required.

Read more



[Seeds of Change: Girls' rights in the era of ecological crisis](#)

A report shedding light on the impacts of interrelated environmental degradation and gender inequality, examining how ecological breakdown undermines girls' rights in low and middle-income countries.



[State of the World's Girls 2024: Still We Dream](#)

The 2024 State of the World's Girls Report focuses on the experiences of young people whose lives are dominated by conflict, involving a large-scale survey of 9,995 participants from ten countries plus 104 in-depth interviews from four countries.



[The State of Girls' Rights in the UK 2024](#)

Results from listening to over 3,000 girls' voices in the United Kingdom, to explore their feelings about the issues they face growing up a girl.



[Changing Lives 2024: The impact of Plan International's child sponsorship programmes in Bangladesh, Ecuador and Uganda](#)

An action-oriented research series – conducted in collaboration with RMIT University – on the impact of child sponsorship, and how we can continually improve.



[Reports from the Real Choices, Real Lives Research Series](#)

A study that has been following the lives of over 100 girls in 9 countries around the world from their birth in 2006 until they turned 18 in 2024.



[Humanitarian Programming in 2025](#)

Our Humanitarian Evidence Snapshot provides a deeper look into our evidence from research and programming in emergencies this year, including in youth economic empowerment and livelihoods.

A young woman pumpkin farmer from north Ghana.

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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 crisis 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.

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This evidence snapshot was led by Teodor Balint, Aisling Corr and Emma Newbatt, with review and contributions from Tendai Manyozo. Additional inputs to the underpinning analysis were provided by Sophie Gulliver.

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The analysis underpinning the full suite of 2025 evidence snapshots was led by the Plan International Global Monitoring and Evaluation and Research Teams, with inputs and collaboration from colleagues in the Programmes, Humanitarian and Policy and Advocacy Teams.

Note: Images used throughout this report are not of research participants. Consent was received for the use of all images.

Front cover image: A 17-year-old from Niger serves customer at her sewing workshop. © Plan International