

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

# YOUTH AT HEART

Young people at the heart of  
Dutch development cooperation

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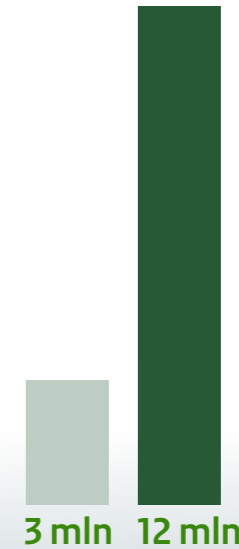
# INTRODUCTION

The countries in the Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation focus regions (the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and North Africa) have very young populations.<sup>1</sup> This presents immense opportunities but also serious challenges. In Africa alone, twelve million young people enter the labour market each year, while only three million new jobs become available. Work and education pose even greater challenges for young refugees, displaced persons and young people in vulnerable host communities. Young people<sup>2</sup> have their lives before them. They have a right to gain the right skills, knowledge and opportunities to build a stable future for themselves, their communities and their countries, and thus also for the Netherlands.

To keep pace with this youthful world, the Netherlands is increasingly putting youth at the heart of its development policies. In line with the Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (BHOS) policy document ‘Investing in Global Prospects’, we are investing in education and youth employment. This is because the world is not on track to meet the agreements set out in the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>3</sup> for education and youth employment. With the Youth at Heart strategy, we aim to work on improving prospects for young people through a distinctive approach that bridges the gap between the skills young people learn and what the labour market demands. In this, we will be working with a range of partners, including from the private sector.

- <sup>1</sup> Half of the population of the MENA countries are below the age of 25 (MENA Generation 2030. UNICEF, 2019). In Sub-Saharan Africa, this figure is around 60% (World Population Prospects. United Nations, 2019).
- <sup>2</sup> People between the ages of 15 and 24. A different age category may apply for some specific interventions. For interventions geared to supporting youth enterprise, the age limit is 35. It is important to recognise that young people form a diverse group, in which opportunities and challenges are unevenly distributed.
- <sup>3</sup> The United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are our guiding principles, in particular SDG 4 (quality of education) and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth). SDG 5 (gender equality) is a cross-cutting goal of Dutch policy as a whole.

**TWELVE MILLION YOUNG PEOPLE ENTER THE LABOUR MARKET IN AFRICA EACH YEAR, WHILE ONLY THREE MILLION NEW JOBS BECOME AVAILABLE.**



The barriers faced by young people in the fields of education and work are not isolated problems. Leaders in the focus regions seldom give priority to prospects for young people. The new generation wants to be heard. Demonstrations are taking or have taken place in several countries in the focus regions – Sudan, Lebanon, Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia and Iraq, to name a few. And it is often young people who take to the streets to demand change.

In this integrated Youth at Heart strategy, we first discuss education and youth employment and then go on to young people's voice. Each chapter comprises an analysis and description of the actions the Netherlands plans to take. These actions pursue three tracks: 1) setting up new programmes, 2) upscaling and joining international initiatives, and 3) strengthening young people's voice through meaningful participation in our policy cycle and in our dialogue with international partners.

### **New programmes and international initiatives**

The Netherlands is investing in young people, education and work through a number of new programmes and international initiatives which we present in this strategy. We are committed to an approach that addresses labour market supply (young



people's skills) and demand, as well as the match between them. An overview is given below.

The following chapters present underlying analyses and examples of activities in the field of education and youth employment. Decision on these activities will be made with relevant partners, such as government authorities, educational institutions, businesses, international organisations, other donors, civil society organisations and young people themselves. Decisions will always be based on an analysis of the local context.

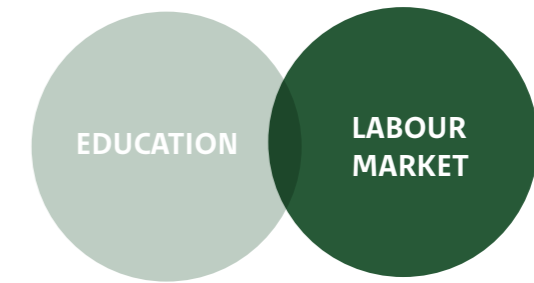
Youth at Heart is the starting point for a more targeted approach to young people. We actively seek dialogue with young people and our partners in order to continuously finetune our approach. The strategy is by no means an exhaustive overview of every activity within Dutch development policy that targets youth,<sup>4</sup> but focuses on the themes of education and work and on bridging the gap between them.

### **Strengthening young people's voice**

We plan to focus more frequently on youth as a specific target group within our existing programmes. Investment in a country with a young population does not necessarily lead to better prospects for young people. Programmes that take no account of young people's specific challenges and preferences tend mainly to benefit other age groups.

<sup>4</sup> The Addressing Root Causes Fund is a good example of an existing fund at the interface with this youth strategy. The aim of this fund is to address the causes of armed conflict, instability and irregular migration. The fund as a whole does not target young people exclusively, but some of the activities implemented by Dutch and international NGOs focus on this target group. For example, some programmes seek to remove the barriers to young people's access to the labour market.

## **THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IS SOMETIMES SO POOR THAT IT HARDLY IMPROVES OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH ON THE LABOUR MARKET**



Where relevant, we want to take challenges and opportunities for young people explicitly on board in our policy and programmes. We also want to target youth in our trade agenda.

We want to increase our impact by putting young people, education and work firmly on the map, forging alliances and taking the lead. Where possible, we want to hear what young people themselves have to say. Partly to support this commitment, the Netherlands has appointed an Ambassador for Youth, Education and Work.

The Netherlands wants to consult young people more often. Meaningful youth participation is not only fair, but also improves development interventions and makes them more sustainable. A youth advisory committee will be appointed which will be involved in delivering the youth strategy.

The youth strategy was devised after consultations with civil society, knowledge institutions and individual experts and with businesses and young people both in the Netherlands and abroad, in person and online. We would like to thank everyone for their input.








# Overview of new programmes

- The **CHALLENGE FUND FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT (CFYE)** seeks to create future prospects for 200,000 young people in the focus regions (in the 15 to 35 age group, women and men equally) by investing in decent work and income. Besides stimulating job growth, the fund aims to boost job opportunities for young people by achieving a better match between labour market supply and demand and by removing specific obstacles encountered by young people. The CFYE works by providing funding and technical assistance for innovative and scalable projects in the most cost-effective way possible. These projects must be potentially commercially viable, and yield clear benefits to society. Private parties (possibly in partnership with knowledge institutions), civil society and local authorities are invited to propose innovative solutions. The proposals with the greatest impact on young people will receive support. The CFYE focuses on big companies in the countries in question and local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with growth potential. The CFYE was launched at the end of 2019 and is managed by Palladium Europe, Randstad and development organisation VSO.
- Through the **NEXUS PROGRAMME FOR SKILLS AND JOBS**, the Netherlands supports young women and men in the focus regions in making the transition from education to decent work or a better income. The Dutch embassies fund country programmes in which local parties work together to improve the match between vocational education and labour market demand. We work together in this programme with NGOs, educational institutions and businesses. There is no blueprint: in each country, the approach is tailored to local challenges. The programme will be launched in eight countries: Burundi, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, Niger, Senegal and Somalia. Activities will start in 2020 and will comprise work placements and apprenticeships combining learning and work; career advice and information for young job-seekers; improvement of young people's relevant skills; and more up-to-date vocational education and training.

- **PARTNERSHIP FOR IMPROVING PROSPECTS FOR FORCIBLY DISPLACED PERSONS AND HOST COMMUNITIES (PROSPECTS)** aims to provide refugees, displaced persons and their host communities with decent protection and opportunities for education and work. Young people are a key target group for the programme. It takes an average of 20 years before refugees can return home, while around 50% of refugees worldwide are currently below the age of 18.<sup>5</sup> We don't want to lose a generation, but ensure that young refugees, displaced persons and host communities have future prospects, become self-reliant and can build a life for themselves and contribute to the societies in which they live. The partnership is active in eight countries in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa (Egypt, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Sudan and Uganda). The partners are five organisations that play a key role in achieving the transition from humanitarian aid to a more development-driven approach to the long-term displaced, i.e. UNICEF, the World Bank, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC). The partnership also aims to provide psychosocial support, with early identification of mental health problems in young people and children.
- The multi-stakeholder partnership **GENERATION UNLIMITED** seeks to support young people in developing the skills needed for successful entry onto the labour market. The Global Board comprises representatives of governments, businesses and multinationals like Unilever and MasterCard, NGOs, UN organisations, philanthropists and charities, and youth organisations and representatives.<sup>6</sup> Generation Unlimited was set up to identify promising, upscalable initiatives at country level to promote education and employment and young people's empowerment in society. Youth organisations and movements play a major role in devising these

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR Global Trends 2017 & 2018.

<sup>6</sup> The Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation is a member of the Global Board.



country investment plans. Close involvement of the private sector, local authorities and NGOs is also of crucial importance. Within this partnership, the Netherlands is investing in initiatives to improve the skills of and opportunities for vulnerable young people, in particular young women and young people no longer attending school.

- The second stage of the **LOCAL EMPLOYMENT IN AFRICA FOR DEVELOPMENT (LEAD) PROGRAMME** was launched in early 2020 for a period of four years. The programme will be implemented by four NGO alliances in Algeria, Egypt, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia and Tunisia. LEAD activities mainly target economic growth sectors in the countries in question and support young Africans in earning a sustainable income. Activities include helping young people start their own business, strengthening the ecosystem for enterprise, increasing young people's employability and helping businesses grow so that new jobs can be created for young people.
- The **ORANGE CORNERS INNOVATION FUND (OCIF)** was recently launched to supplement the existing Orange Corners programme, which gives young entrepreneurs access to training, networks and facilities, enabling them to start or upscale their businesses. The innovation fund gives entrepreneurs in the programme more access to funding. It also provides mentoring for selected entrepreneurs. Customised solutions, in line with the local context, will be provided in each country in which the OCIF is active. OCIF will be launched in seven countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal and Sudan).

- The **YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION MULTI-DONOR TRUST FUND** is part of the African Development Bank's Jobs for Youth in Africa strategy, which aims to create 25 million jobs and provide 50 million young Africans with the skills needed for a formal job. The fund has been supported by Denmark and Norway since 2017. The Netherlands is a more recent contributor, as well as Sweden and Italy.

## Results and knowledge

These initiatives serve as proof of concept for our approach.

In order to learn from policy already delivered, to know what results have been achieved, and to enable adjustment where necessary, new programmes each have their own, tailored monitoring and evaluation frameworks, with overarching indicators. These are in line with the Theories of Change for our wider education and youth employment policies. The results achieved through Dutch efforts targeting youth, education and work are published on the Dutch Development Results website. No (quantitative) targets will be set for the new programmes, with the exception of the Challenge Fund and the African Development Bank's Youth Entrepreneurship and Innovation Multi-Donor Trust Fund. Humanitarian and fragile contexts are often fluid. Programmes implemented in these contexts must be able to respond rapidly to change, and pre-agreed, multi-year targets could form an obstacle to that flexibility. The Challenge Fund has the express ambition to reach at least 200,000 young women and men.

The Netherlands has joined the ILO's [Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth](#) and the World Bank's Solutions for Youth Employment ([S4YE](#)) initiative. We also take an active part in the [Generation Unlimited](#) multi-stakeholder partnership. We share knowledge, experience and lessons learned through these international platforms and through our partnership with the [INCLUDE](#) knowledge platform.

# EDUCATION

Education is one of the policy priorities set out in ‘Investing in Global Prospects’. Everyone has the right to education.<sup>7</sup> Education is empowering, it reduces exclusion and enhances freedom of choice for girls and women in particular. Education gives children and young people the knowledge and skills they need to participate to their full potential in society. By developing the right skills, young people prepare for the world of work now and in the future.

The Youth at Heart strategy focuses on young people specifically and aims for inclusive, high-quality education that prepares young people for work and participation in society. Consultations held in preparing this strategy show that the match between education and the labour market in the focus regions is a point for concern. For example, 87% of African CEOs are concerned about the availability of workers with relevant skills on the labour market.<sup>8</sup> The same concerns also apply to the MENA region.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, rapid changes like digitalisation require the workforce – and the field of education – to be able to adapt equally fast to keep pace. This calls for skills that increase workers’ capacity to adapt, and their capacity for lifelong learning.<sup>10</sup> Vital skills for the future include not only digital skills but also higher order cognitive skills, like problem-solving ability and critical thinking. Social and emotional skills will also become more important in the workplace of the future, and must therefore be developed at school.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 26.

<sup>8</sup> PwC, 2019. [22nd Annual Global CEO Survey](#).

<sup>9</sup> In Lebanon, for example, 38% of entrepreneurs cite shortage of required skills as a major obstacle to growth of their business. World Bank, 2013. [Jobs for shared prosperity – Time for action in the Middle East and North Africa](#)

<sup>10</sup> These skills are particularly important if young people have had little or no opportunity to learn the relevant skills at school.

<sup>11</sup> World Bank Development Report 2019: [‘The Changing Nature of Work’](#).



**CHANGES LIKE DIGITALISATION  
MEAN THAT EDUCATION  
WILL HAVE TO ADAPT FAST  
TO KEEP PACE**



## Primary education and junior secondary education

Primary education also plays a role in matching education to the labour market and society. After all, secondary and tertiary education do not stand alone, but build on what young people learn at primary school.

The Netherlands devotes special attention to improving the quality of primary education. Though access to primary education has improved worldwide, its quality still leaves much to be desired in many countries. As a result, many children leave primary school with poor literacy and numeracy skills.<sup>12</sup> This may be attributable to teacher shortages or poor quality teacher training and teaching methods, but also to malnutrition and illness. In many countries in the focus regions, access to secondary education is also inadequate. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, fewer than 50% of young people of secondary school age attend school.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> World Development Report 2018.

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO Institute of Statistics Global Database



In general, it is more difficult for girls and young women to attend school or complete their education, although there are major differences between countries in the focus regions. Social norms are often the reason. Boys are expected to earn money for their families or communities, so more often work as child labourers.<sup>14</sup> Girls are expected to work in the household or perform care tasks, often at the expense of school attendance or, eventually, paid employment. Pregnancy, forced marriage or taboos surrounding menstruation also cause higher rates of absenteeism and school dropout among girls. Girls and young women rarely have the means to postpone their first pregnancy, or avoid successive pregnancies. Bearing children at a very young age thus not only has serious health risks, but also severely limits girls' prospects of further education and work.<sup>15</sup>

School attendance is lower among children in excluded groups, like children with a disability, refugee children and displaced children. Children in the last two groups in particular have poor access to high-quality education. The majority find shelter in the region of their country of origin. In the focus regions, these are low- to middle-income countries where unemployment is generally high and services lacking. Refugee children may encounter various obstacles in trying to achieve their right to education.<sup>16</sup> Regulations may stand in the way of attendance at some schools in the host country. Refugees may be treated differently from nationals of the country, for example with regard to entry requirements and school fees. Violence and discrimination also play a role in refugees' lower school attendance levels. Families often develop negative survival mechanisms. Children and teenagers earn money for the family, and girls in particular are forced into arranged marriages.

## Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) presents crucial opportunities for young people. TVET comprises work-based learning, builds on prior education and training, and can be provided in tandem with traditional forms

<sup>14</sup> ILO, 2017. [Global Estimates of Child Labour](#),

<sup>15</sup> The Netherlands is therefore committed to freedom of choice and improved sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in its wider development policy. Examples include access to contraceptives and sex education and to safe abortion and childbirth. For more information on the Dutch commitment to SRHR, go to [www.dutchdevelopmentresults.nl/theme/srhr](http://www.dutchdevelopmentresults.nl/theme/srhr).

<sup>16</sup> See for example UNESCO's [Global Education Monitoring Report 2017/2018](#).

of vocational education at secondary school and in higher education. TVET courses combine learning with work and therefore form a good alternative for young people in the focus regions who leave school early to earn money. Many countries in the focus regions give priority to vocational education in their national development plans and many donors are responding to this. Regional and international organisations, like the African Union, the OECD, UNESCO and ILO also regard vocational education as a priority.<sup>17</sup>

In the focus regions, access to technical and vocational education and training is limited, while its quality is generally poor. The poor quality is partly caused by insufficient funding, so that schools cannot afford to buy teaching materials and equipment, like machinery for practical lessons. Courses provide few opportunities to gain practical experience, and curriculums are seldom updated. What is more, employers expect developments like digitalisation to accelerate the pace at which jobs – and professional practice – will change in the future. This demands enormous adaptive capacity on the part of educational institutions.<sup>18</sup> However, teachers do not always engage with the world of work, and they have few opportunities for refresher training.


Access to vocational courses is unequal. Generally, fewer women attend vocational courses than men. Women are held back not only by obstacles like time and location (attending evening school is more often a problem for women), and lack of transport and childminding services, but also by social norms. Many vocational courses are regarded as unsuitable for women. Publicly-run courses are often concentrated in urban areas, excluding young people from rural areas.

Access to vocational courses is poor for other disadvantaged groups, too, such as refugees and displaced persons. Their foreign qualifications and diplomas are not always recognised, so that they do not meet formal admission requirements. Since refugees often fail to complete primary school, they have a learning deficit which makes it difficult for them to participate in vocational education. If refugees have poor access to the labour market, they may also be discouraged from taking

<sup>17</sup> UNESCO, 2015. [Unleashing the potential: Transforming Technical and Vocational Education and Training](#)

<sup>18</sup> ILO-UNESCO, 2019. [A global overview of TVET teaching and training: current issues, trends and recommendations](#)






vocational training because they do not expect to benefit from it. What is more, many young refugees and displaced persons suffer from traumas and other psychological problems that negatively affect their day-to-day functioning, including going to school.

In the focus regions, vocational education has a low status among young people and their parents, while there are often numerous employment opportunities for skilled workers. Social background usually determines choice of school. Vocational courses are for example regarded as inferior by young people from the middle classes and elite, while young people from poor families are less able to afford good-quality secondary or higher education.<sup>19</sup>

### Higher education

Higher education has a better image in the countries of the focus regions than vocational education. Participation in higher education has grown in the past years, though there are considerable differences between countries. In many countries, this rise in student numbers is putting pressure on the quality of



<sup>19</sup> R.G. Sultana, 2017. 'Career guidance and TVET: critical intersections in the Arab Mediterranean Countries'. *International Journal of Training Research*, 15(3). World Bank, 2015. [Nigeria. Skills for competitiveness and employability.](#)



teaching. Institutions of higher education have too little capacity to absorb greater numbers of students. In higher education, too, equal access and the relevance of courses to the local labour market are both concerns.<sup>20</sup>

Many graduates from institutions of higher education cannot find work. One of the reasons for this is that students often do study programmes with poor job prospects. Young people are encouraged by their families to choose traditional courses, like law or medicine, while there are far more graduates in these fields than needed to meet labour market demand.

Moreover, young people who took part in the consultations indicated that background, network and in some cases willingness to pay bribes<sup>21</sup> play a bigger role in finding a job than educational attainment. This is highly demoralising for young people in higher education. Work placements are not encouraged, while there is little career guidance. In the MENA region in particular, but also in Sub-Saharan Africa, unemployment is higher among highly-educated young people than among young people with little or no education. However, one of the reasons for this is that highly-educated young people often come from wealthy backgrounds and, with the support of parents and family, can afford to be unemployed.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> World Bank, 2016. [Higher Education for Development](#)

<sup>21</sup> The Netherlands contributes to more transparent operation of governments in the focus regions by strengthening public institutions and civil society.

<sup>22</sup> William Baah-Boateng, 2016. 'The youth unemployment challenge in Africa: What are the drivers?' *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 27(4).



## What is the Netherlands planning to do?

The aim of the Netherlands' action on education within this youth strategy is to improve young people's knowledge and skills with a view to relevance to enterprise and the labour market and in the wider sense to enable young people to participate to their full potential in society. The strategy targets young people from the age of 15 in the focus regions. To achieve this impact, it is necessary to create better, more equitable access to relevant, good-quality education and training. The strategy takes explicit account of young women and young people in vulnerable groups.<sup>23</sup>

In choosing interventions, problems and opportunities at local level will be the decisive factors. In some cases the focus will be on increasing the relevance and improving the quality of existing education, in others on making education more accessible to members of vulnerable groups like refugees, or on upscaling existing, successful initiatives to raise the number of young people benefiting from them. For these reasons, and given the fact that fragile and humanitarian contexts tend to be fluid, no overall targets have been set. The various Dutch programmes will each have their own, tailored monitoring and evaluation frameworks, although a number of equivalent performance indicators will be formulated.

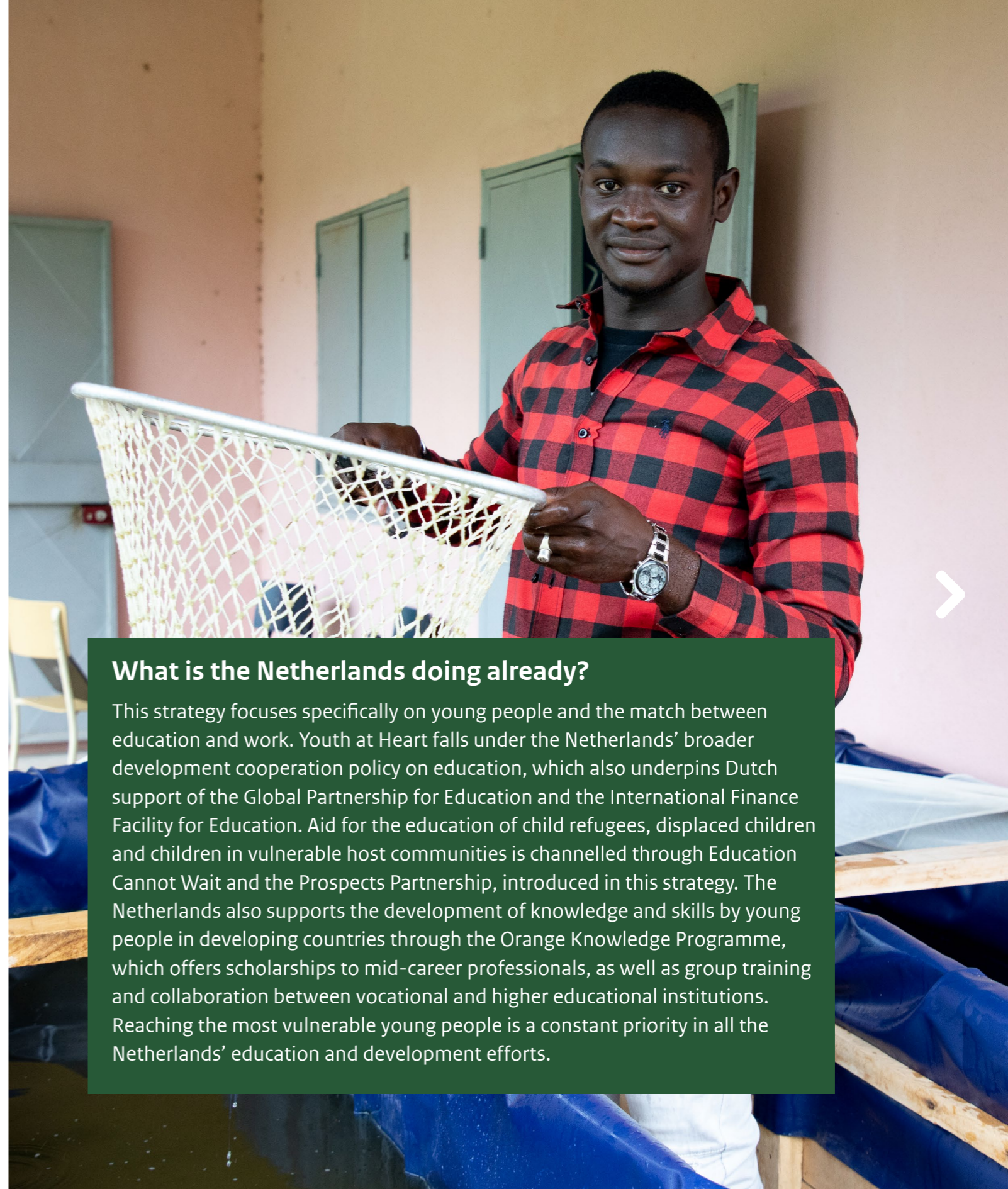
The interventions may include the following elements (examples are given in sub-bullets).

- Encourage cooperation between educational institutions, the private sector and/or trade unions, for example in developing standards and curriculums.  
A programme is now being planned in Jordan through the Nexus Programme for Skills and Jobs on the transition from education to work in the IT sector, focusing in particular on a curriculum that matches available jobs. Close cooperation with the private sector is a feature of this programme.

<sup>23</sup> People with a disability are among these vulnerable groups. For policy on this theme, see the [Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation's letter \(in Dutch\)](#) to the House of Representatives of 7 October 2019 on the Netherlands' contribution to international programmes for people with a disability.

### What is the Netherlands doing already?

This strategy focuses specifically on young people and the match between education and work. Youth at Heart falls under the Netherlands' broader development cooperation policy on education, which also underpins Dutch support of the Global Partnership for Education and the International Finance Facility for Education. Aid for the education of child refugees, displaced children and children in vulnerable host communities is channelled through Education Cannot Wait and the Prospects Partnership, introduced in this strategy. The Netherlands also supports the development of knowledge and skills by young people in developing countries through the Orange Knowledge Programme, which offers scholarships to mid-career professionals, as well as group training and collaboration between vocational and higher educational institutions. Reaching the most vulnerable young people is a constant priority in all the Netherlands' education and development efforts.



- Encourage and facilitate educational institutions and businesses to offer young people work placements and apprenticeships.  
Through the Nexus programme, we are planning to support a multiyear project in Lebanon which aims to engage with the private sector in generating work placements and training for excluded groups of young people, i.e. refugees and disadvantaged Lebanese youth.
- Improve the practical knowledge and skills of teachers working in vocational education, for example through refresher training and by keeping teacher training courses up-to-date.
- Strengthen training in business skills, specifically in vocational education and training.
- Provide psychosocial support for vulnerable young people who are prevented by trauma or stress from attending school or going to work.  
In Ethiopia, for instance, the Prospects partners IFC and UNHCR support young people, young women in particular, making the transition from school to the labour market. This includes psychosocial support, where necessary.

- Encourage government authorities and educational institutions to recognise foreign qualifications and acquired competences so that young people are more easily admitted to vocational education.
- Provide crash courses for young people with a learning deficit due to poor primary school attendance, who lack the skills needed to participate in vocational education or training or in society in the wider sense.  
Crash courses are a focus area of the Generation Unlimited partnership. It organises youth clubs, for example, at which vulnerable young people learn life skills, such as working together and having confidence in themselves.
- Promote learning opportunities outside formal education, for example through online platforms or youth hubs. This is also a good way of reaching young people in rural areas who have little access to formal vocational education.
- Provide students and pupils with information on the labour market, in the form of career advice, for example.



# WORK

Africa has huge economic potential. From 2004, economic growth has averaged around 4.5% a year.<sup>24</sup> Population growth, economic diversification, urbanisation and a growing middle class are major underlying growth factors. There are of course differences between African countries and regions. Some countries in the focus regions – Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Uganda, for example – have been doing well in the past few years, while growth in others has been slower. Economic growth in the MENA region is expected to rise in the coming years, reaching 2.9% in 2021, with high achievers like Egypt expected to achieve a 6.1% growth rate.<sup>25</sup> However, the benefits of economic growth are not shared equally in every country, and growth does not always lead to a sharp rise in jobs.

Every year, 12 million young people in Africa enter the labour market, while only three million new jobs become available for them.<sup>26</sup> According to the World Bank, the MENA region will need at least 24 million new jobs in the next ten years just to prevent unemployment rising even further. In short, labour market growth cannot keep pace with population growth. The official youth unemployment rate in the MENA region is the highest in the world, at 30% in the Middle East and 29% in North Africa.<sup>27</sup> Worldwide, unemployment among young people is three times higher than among adults. In Africa, the official youth unemployment rate is 11%, but in reality it is probably higher because of the largely informal nature of the continent's economies.

Jobs are in short supply, and those that are available often fail to meet the standards for decent work. There is little job security, working conditions are dangerous, workers' rights mechanisms are non-existent and wages

are low. Many young people are therefore among the working poor. In Sub-Saharan Africa, around 70% of working youth live below the poverty line.<sup>28</sup> Underemployment is also prevalent, with young people working fewer hours than they would like and not at the level for which they are trained.

## Digitalisation and the future of work

According to the World Bank's [World Development Report 2019](#), the world is now set for the next stage in the digital revolution.

Digitalisation will have radical consequences for the jobs we know now, and the skills needed to do them. It presents opportunities for economic growth, particularly in countries with no major industries, but may also widen the digital gap within and between countries. In a yet to be published advisory report on digitalisation and employment in Africa, the Advisory Council on International Affairs will also examine youth employment in relation to the structural transformation of African economies. The Digital Agenda for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation shows how the Dutch development agenda will respond to these changes.

The changes on the work floor present opportunities and challenges for gender equality. We need to ensure that women and other disadvantaged groups are taken on board in the transition to the work of the future. Worldwide women make up a relatively large part of the workforce in sectors where jobs are disappearing fastest, in particular through digitisation of office and administrative jobs. At the same time, relatively few women work in the fast-growing digital technology sectors.

<sup>24</sup> IMF, 2019. [International Financial Statistics \(IFS\)](#)

<sup>25</sup> World Bank, October 2019. [MENA Economic Update October 2019](#)

<sup>26</sup> African Development Bank, 2016. [Jobs for Youth in Africa: Catalyzing youth opportunity across Africa](#)

<sup>27</sup> ILO, 2017. [Global Employment Trends for Youth, 2017](#)

<sup>28</sup> ILO, 2016. [World Employment Social Outlook](#)



### **Gender and refugees**

Women in the focus regions have fewer opportunities on the labour market. In all regions, youth unemployment rates and underemployment are higher among women than men. Persistent gender roles, social norms and discrimination make it more difficult for women to find decent work. A World Bank study of gender roles in Jordan – the country with the highest unemployment rates among young women – shows that 60% of non-working women would like to have a job, but that factors such as childcare duties, lack of transport and lack of growth opportunities in the workplace present considerable obstacles. As a result, more young women than men work in the informal sector, not only in Jordan. They perform low paid work in vulnerable circumstances and are more likely to live in poverty.

Refugees displaced over a long period need to work in order to earn a living. Government authorities often opt not to open their labour markets to refugees, or limit access to a few sectors, out of fear that local workers will be crowded out. Discrimination, non-recognition of qualifications acquired elsewhere and existing job shortages are further obstacles. Ultimately, it is mostly low-paid jobs in the informal sector which are open to refugees, for instance in construction or farming, where working conditions are usually poor.

### **Public and private sector**

Many young people in the focus regions aspire to jobs in the public sector, where they expect security, status and a good salary. However, demand far outstrips supply of jobs, which, to the frustration of many young people we spoke to during the consultations, are mainly accessible to people with the right connections. In the MENA region, the relatively large public sectors form obstacles to the growth of the private sector, which is relatively underdeveloped.<sup>29</sup> Many major enterprises are or were state-owned and in many cases still enjoy more protection than other companies. This can stand in the way of innovation and growth. Many governments are committed to reforms that should lead to more private sector growth. This youth strategy focuses on the private sector.

<sup>29</sup> World Bank, 2016. [Middle East and North Africa: Public employment and governance in MENA](#)

## THE AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECTOR HAS MAJOR POTENTIAL TO GENERATE EMPLOYMENT, BUT FEW YOUNG PEOPLE ARE INTERESTED IN JOBS IN THIS SECTOR



The formal private sector that would normally have the greatest potential to create new jobs is relatively small and poorly developed in the majority of countries in the focus regions. Take the Sahel region, where the majority of the working population work in the largely informal agriculture sector. The rest of the region's economy is also informal: 90% of the working population not employed in agriculture work in the informal sector. Those working in the formal economy are largely employed by the government or non-profit organisations.<sup>30</sup>

Factors preventing businesses in the focus region from growing include:

- Poor access to infrastructure like electricity and the internet;
- Unfavourable macro-economic conditions (e.g. slow economic growth, volatility of exchange rates or financial markets, and inflation);
- Political instability;
- Conflict and fragility;
- Isolated markets;
- Unfavourable legislation and regulations;
- Corruption and/or other obstacles to the proper functioning of the rule of law;
- Lack of opportunities to borrow money;
- Employees' or entrepreneurs' lack of skills;
- Entrepreneurs' poor knowledge of specific products and export opportunities.

<sup>30</sup> DFID, 2018. Drivers, Drivers, Challenges and Opportunities for Job Creation in the Sahel



### Agriculture sector

Migration from rural to urban areas is ongoing. In Africa in particular, cities are set to grow into megacities in the coming years. Yet the agriculture sector will continue to be extremely important in all our focus regions. Many young people live in rural areas and in many countries, in the Sahel region in particular, agriculture is the backbone of the economy.

At the same time, agriculture and rural areas have a negative image among many young people in these regions. Because their parents' farms are small and productivity is low, incomes are low too and working conditions generally poor. Young people have no access to finance, land or the right knowledge and skills – not only technical skills, but also business skills and soft skills like communication skills and the ability to work together.

Some young people are trying to break new ground in farming – and related services and industries – for example by setting up modern, well-managed agricultural cooperatives and businesses. Technological innovation and digitalisation could also play a major role in making the sector more attractive to young people.

## Youth within the trade agenda

As a trading nation and development partner, the Netherlands can contribute to sustainable, inclusive growth in other countries; its commitment to youth is part of this. The Netherlands encourages the private sector to invest in countries abroad, taking on board the capacities and skills of young people in emerging markets. There is a strong business case: in return, companies acquire local knowledge and better trained, enthusiastic and productive workers. In this way we combine earning capacity for the Netherlands with investment in young people's prospects. During trade missions to the focus regions we will connect employment to the skills of local youth, wherever appropriate. We will also enter into dialogue with the Dutch private sector, through the Challenge Fund for Youth Employment and Generation Unlimited, for example.



## Enterprise

Enterprise is an engine driving development. Enterprise presents opportunities precisely where too little employment is generated for large groups of young people entering the labour market. Many young people in the focus regions have become entrepreneurs out of necessity, and this forms a fragile basis. Challenges confronting young entrepreneurs in the focus regions include the following.

- Too little support: access to startup capital and other financial and technical services is limited (even more so in rural areas).
- Young people's knowledge and skills insufficiently equip them for entrepreneurship. At school they were not taught to identify opportunities or explore markets, for example, and there was little attention for creative skills, taking initiative, building self-confidence, communication skills and working with others.
- Many young entrepreneurs end up in the informal sector, where productivity and profit margins are low, and they have little protection.
- Entrepreneurs have a relatively low social status in the focus regions.

## Promising sectors

In the consultations with young people and experts in the Netherlands and the focus regions, the agriculture sector, (sustainable) tourism and the sustainable energy sector were identified as the most promising sectors. Cross-sectoral developments like digitalisation also present both opportunities and challenges.

The Global Commission on the Economy and Climate has calculated that 65 million green jobs will have been created by 2030 if we commit to ambitious climate action. The Netherlands seeks synergy between development cooperation and climate policy by investing in the development of new sectors such as renewable energy and climate-smart agriculture. The transition to a circular economy in particular presents opportunities for young people.

# What is the Netherlands planning to do?

Within this strategy, action on employment aims to build prospects for youth in the focus regions by improving opportunities for decent work and successful enterprise, mainly by matching supply more closely with labour market demand. This is the focus of our new programmes. Within a number of existing programmes – the Dutch Good Growth Fund, for instance – we will investigate more effective ways of reaching youth as a target group.

Every programme focuses on decent work and income, for example by formalising informal jobs. Decent work is productive work that provides a stable income, with safe working conditions, respect for workers’ rights and social protection. Decent work presents young women and men with the prospect of personal development and social integration.

We devote specific attention to women within our programmes. The CFYE, for example, aims to reach at least 100,000 young women. Refugees and vulnerable youth in host communities are also a specific target group, of the Prospects programme in particular.

As with education, interventions on the theme of employment will be context-specific. The following opportunities have been identified:

- Support businesses with growth potential, e.g. local SMEs, in creating decent work for young people, including within less stable contexts. To this end, improve access to finance. The main focus is on promising local sectors, like agriculture and IT.
- Advocate constructive regulations on youth employment and employment for vulnerable groups in particular, including in the field of labour market access for refugees.

In the framework of the Prospects programme, ILO is analysing policy and regulations on labour rights and labour market access for young people, women, people with a disability and refugees in Sudan.

- Encourage the private sector to work with educational institutions to provide work placements and apprenticeships and to develop curriculums and standards that equip young people for the future world of work.
- Provide young people with better information on the labour market (e.g. current vacancies, necessary skills and potential salaries). Job markets and online platforms present good opportunities for this.  
Give targeted support to vulnerable young people, like refugees, in their search for jobs, e.g. by enabling job search clubs and providing training in job application skills. Within the Prospects partnership, ILO and UNICEF are bringing young refugees and young people from vulnerable host communities together in job search clubs in Egypt.
- Support youth enterprise and social enterprise through mentoring, technical support and funding.<sup>31</sup>  
The Orange Corners Innovation Fund will provide young entrepreneurs with access to prototype funding, startup capital and mentoring.
- Foster an enabling environment for young entrepreneurs, e.g. by charting the specific problems they encounter locally and raising these issues in diplomatic communications or supporting initiatives that address them.
- Propagate role models for young entrepreneurs, especially women entrepreneurs.

<sup>31</sup> We are improving access to finance for young entrepreneurs through the Entrepreneurial Development Bank FMO. With FMO, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is exploring how investments in startup enterprises, using venture capital from state funds, for example, can be linked most effectively to skills training for young people.



# YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICE

Political and social exclusion of youth in the focus regions prevents them from getting a good education and finding work. This was the conclusion reached in many of the talks we had with experts and young people. There is a great discrepancy between leaders' rhetoric and the changes young people perceive. Young people also have the impression that while they are much talked about, no one talks with them. The Netherlands wants to amplify young people's voice.

## Political and social position

Many young people feel excluded and unheard. The country's political and social culture and power structures that maintain the status quo of a privileged older generation play a role. Corruption and the fact that who you know is more important than what you know undermine young people's prospects. Generally speaking, leaders in the focus regions are decades older than the average citizen. According to the young people we consulted, their policies are far removed from reality and the ambitions of youth. In this context, a recent report by the UN development organisation (UNDP) calls on African governments to tackle their gerontocratic systems.<sup>32</sup>

During the consultations, young people from the focus regions pointed out that their leaders have little idea of the challenges confronting publicly-run schools or of how to prepare young people for the world of work, since the majority come from elitist backgrounds and attended high-quality private schools or schools abroad. Many countries in the focus regions have a Ministry for Youth Affairs, but this is often housed within another ministry (e.g. Sport and Culture) and has little or no influence or budget. Moreover, the political leadership in the focus regions

<sup>32</sup> UNDP, 2019. [Scaling Fences: Voices of irregular African Migrants to Europe](#)



changes on a regular basis, particularly in fragile states, forming an obstacle to a youth lobby or lobbying by youth organisations.

### **Youth participation**

The consultations showed that youth representatives consulted by the governments in the focus regions tend to come from their own elitist circles. Youth representatives seldom receive sufficient payment for their work or services, leading to exclusion of youth from poor backgrounds. Young people do not form a homogeneous group, and should not be treated as such. Regional, ethnical, social, religious or political and ideological identities and interests form divisions in both society and the political arena. Young people are often divided along the same lines.

### **International community**

'Youth' as a theme occupies a prominent place on the agenda of many countries in the focus regions and is also increasingly addressed by donor countries. For instance, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States and, increasingly, the European Union are taking action on the theme of youth, education and youth employment. We can also see this trend in international organisations like UNICEF, UNDP, ILO, IFC and the World Bank. In 2018, for instance, the UN Secretary-General launched '[Youth 2030: The UN Strategy on Youth](#)'. However, for many of these organisations 'youth' is not an overarching, organising principle; there is often little coordination between education and employment divisions. Nor in many cases is there active engagement with young people themselves.



# What is the Netherlands planning to do?

## What is the Netherlands doing already?

The importance of youth participation is getting increasing recognition in the Netherlands. Young people's need to make their voices heard is particularly evident in the field of climate action. The climate strikes are the largest global youth movement of all time.<sup>33</sup>

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is working in several ways with youth as partners, for example within projects for youth enterprise ([Orange Corners](#)) and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights ([Choice](#)). We support youth representatives, in partnership with the National Youth Council, and often engage young people in our work through our embassies. [The West Wing](#) youth think tank advises the Ministry in various ways. By listening to young people's voice, we can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the development process.<sup>34</sup> Research by partner organisations shows that the commitment, energy and self-confidence of adults improve if the organisation engages more closely with young people's needs.<sup>35</sup>

The Netherlands is going to give the specific opportunities and challenges for young people a more central place in its development policy and in the dialogue with our international partners and the private sector. In light of this, we have appointed a Special Envoy (ambassador at large) for Youth, Education and Work. We take young people's social and political position on board in our analyses. We are amplifying young people's voice in our dialogue with our international partners and the private sector.

The Netherlands also wants to engage more closely with young people in making and delivering relevant development policy. We will ensure better, more frequent assessment and measurement of the possible impact on young people as a specific target group of our policy.

## International dialogue

Because national education and employment policy has a great impact on young people's prospects, the governments of countries in the focus regions are major partners. We will enter into dialogue with them, working with our partners, including like-minded international organisations. The opportunities for and challenges confronting young people will also be given a more prominent place in our communications with international partners. The Netherlands wants to upscale its action on youth, education and employment by leading the international field and by working with partners who endorse our integrated approach.

- Young people should be able to enter into dialogue with their governments. We are therefore exploring what instruments are needed to support role models and youth organisations committed to participation, accountability and leadership.  
[The new policy framework for Strengthening Civil Society provides scope for this.](#)
- Our embassies and ministers can discuss the barriers to education and work in their dialogues with government authorities. These include outdated curriculums, too few work placements, and the high costs of starting a business. We want to pool our resources with our partners.  
[The three countries in which we plan to develop this approach are Burkina Faso, Jordan and South Sudan.](#)

<sup>33</sup> The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) recognises young people as a major social group and calls on governments to enhance political and civic participation by young people. On 12 October 2019, the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation launched the We Are Tomorrow Global Partnership.

<sup>34</sup> DFID-CSO Youth Working Group, 2010. [Youth Participation in Development: A guide for Development Agencies and Policy Makers](#)

<sup>35</sup> Rutgers International, 2016. [Operations Research on Meaningful Youth Participation in Pakistan and Essential Packages Manual](#)

- At the same time, the Netherlands will work to put the theme of youth more prominently and more tangibly on the agendas of our international partners, including the development banks, the European Union, the African Union, UN agencies and our civil society partners.

### Youth participation

To ensure our interventions are more relevant to the lives of young people in the focus regions, we strive to increasingly adopt meaningful youth participation. We want to engage more closely with young people as beneficiaries, partners and leaders in making, delivering and monitoring relevant policy. At the same time, we will provide young people with a platform, and show in our international practice that the Netherlands takes young people’s voice seriously. This is how:<sup>36</sup>

- We want the voice of youth to resonate within our new programmes. We will also work inclusively, since young people are not a homogeneous group.
  - A good example is the Challenge Fund for Youth Employment in which young people were involved in formulating the call for proposals and a panel of youth representatives and experts assesses submitted proposals.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will set up a youth committee. This committee – comprising around ten young people from the Netherlands and the three focus regions of Dutch policy – will advise on the delivery of the youth strategy and on wider policies impacting on young people.
- Working with young people in the focus regions and the Netherlands – through migrant organisations, for example – we will explore how meaningful participation can best be tailored to everyday Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation policy practice and can be monitored and measured. We plan to develop a youth participation toolkit for embassies and the Ministry, taking on board lessons learned from existing partnerships with youth organisations and networks.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will enable young people to play a meaningful part in relevant outgoing trade missions and conferences.

<sup>36</sup> Within our approach we are planning to seek non-youth champions and involve the community as a whole.

## Civic space

Young people can make their voices heard not only directly through political channels but also through civil society. Examples include trade unions, political parties, religious organisations or their youth organisations, and specific organisations and movements representing the rights and interests of young people. In many countries in the focus regions, we are seeing young people joining forces to demand both change and a voice in it. They often have few opportunities to achieve this: freedom of association and assembly and freedom of opinion are suppressed in many countries.

Technological developments and digitalisation are enabling more young people than ever before to connect with each other and the rest of the world. Though many young people have still to connect, access to the internet continues to grow, including among young people living in rural areas in the focus regions. Internet access and in some cases flourishing old media like radio enable an increasing number of young people to stay up-to-date.

The Netherlands is already committed to strengthening civil society through the Dialogue & Dissent partnerships. The VOICE programme which targets vulnerable groups like young people shares the same goal. The Netherlands invests in the online security of individuals, movements, organisations and young people through the Digital Defenders Partnership.





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