

The Dakar Compact of Young Women and Men of West Africa and the Sahel for the Promotion of Decent Work and Education in Emergencies

**An intergenerational commitment for a
more just, resilient and inclusive future**

August 2025

► 1. Background

Initiated by the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), the International Labour Organization (ILO), and in partnership with United Nations agencies, regional organizations, national institutions, youth, employer and workers' organizations and civil society, the **West African and Sahel Youth Forum** was held in Dakar from 26 to 28 August 2025.

The Forum took place under the theme: *"Employment and Education in Emergencies for Young Women and Men: Building a Peaceful and Secure West Africa and Sahel"*.

United around this major issue, young women and men from the 17 countries of West Africa and the Sahel adopted the Dakar Compact of Young Women and Men of West Africa and the Sahel for the Promotion of Decent Jobs Work and Education in Emergencies ("Dakar Youth Compact") a commitment put in place following a participatory and inclusive process. This Compact identifies priorities, challenges and solutions related to youth employment, vocational training, education in crisis contexts, migration, and youth participation in public policies.

In the Compact, young people affirm their commitment to be actors of peace, sustainable development and community resilience, in partnership with Governments, regional institutions, technical and financial partners, and the United Nations system.

The Compact was developed in full conformity with existing frameworks such as the African Union's Agenda 2063, the United Nations 2030 Agenda, the United Nations System's Youth Strategy 2030, the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), as well as United Nations Security Council resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018), 2535 (2020) and 2601 (2021) related to youth, Peace and Security, the Protection of Education during Conflict and the AU-ILO Youth Employment Strategy for Africa (2025).

► 2. Preamble

Governments, social partners, young women and men, as well as technical and financial partners met in Dakar as part of the 4th edition of the Regional Youth Forum. **Acknowledging** the urgency of investing in the future of young people in West Africa and the Sahel, **noting** the fragilities accentuated by the security, climate and economic crises, and **affirming** their commitment to building peaceful and inclusive societies and more resilient education systems: it is in this spirit that the participants adopted the Dakar Youth Compact, based on findings and commitments.:

Together, they:

1. **Recognize** that millions of young people are excluded from the formal labour market, forced into informality and exposed to economic precariousness.
2. **Stress** that access to quality education remains severely compromised in areas of conflict, forced displacement and humanitarian crises.
3. **Affirm** that youth, including young migrants, refugees and young people from host communities, represent a key force for peace and post-crisis recovery.
4. **Recognize** that young people, especially young women and marginalized groups, remain underrepresented in governance and decision-making spaces.
5. **Alert** that attacks on schools are now the main threat to education in the region, leading to the closure of thousands of schools and depriving millions of children and young people of their right to education and training.
6. **Highlight** that public responses often remain fragmented, insufficiently coordinated across sectors and poorly appropriated by young people themselves.

► 3. Youth vision

The future we want is an Africa where every young woman and man, without distinction, can reach their full potential, access decent work and contribute to peaceful and sustainable societies. This vision is based on values **of justice, equity and inclusion**, and the belief that youth are a force of resilience and innovation for the future of the continent.

Key principles:

1. **Inclusion:** Ensure that all – including young women, persons with disabilities, migrants, refugees, displaced persons – are fully involved in the processes of consideration and implementation of solutions. Inclusion is based on respect for human rights, equal treatment and the active participation of all components of society. The government and public institutions are committed to implementing inclusive policies that ensure that every individual, regardless of age, origin, gender, social status or disability, is fully recognized and has effective and equitable access to resources, services and decision-making processes.

2. **Justice, equity and equality:** Promoting equitable opportunities, ensuring respect for human rights and ensuring a balanced distribution of resources and opportunities for all.
3. **Resilience:** Empowering young people to adapt and thrive in the face of security, climate, and economic crises.
4. **Meaningful and quality participation:** Ensure the presence, effective representation and expression of young people; ensure their full involvement in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies; and recognize their legitimate place in all political, advisory, decision-making and development processes, in accordance with the principles of inclusive governance and respect for fundamental rights. Encourage the development of multi-stakeholder partnerships and participatory governance mechanisms to make youth a central pillar of peace and sustainable development in West Africa and the Sahel. Ensure the effectiveness of the political participation, consciousness and accessibility (technical and financial) of young people.
5. **Innovation and solidarity:** Encouraging creativity and co-creation among young people and strengthening cooperation between generations and countries to build a common future. Support and finance inclusive and innovative initiatives that promote their economic, social and political empowerment, and strengthen regional and interregional cooperation.

► 4. Priority commitments

Together, the parties to the Dakar Youth Compact commit to transforming these findings into concrete actions through the following priority commitments:

1. **Accelerate the creation of decent and accessible jobs** for young people through integrated pro-employment policies, promoting the just transition to green, blue, orange, digital and inclusive economies, while facilitating fair and demand-driven labour migration, with the mutual recognition of skills and the portability of social security entitlements;
2. **Ensure equitable access to quality education and training** in emergencies (fragile states, forced displacement, climate crises), and strengthen the recognition of prior learning and qualifications;
3. **Promote the meaningful participation of young people** in the development, implementation and monitoring of national and regional policies through institutionalized mechanisms of representation;
4. **Strengthen intergenerational cooperation** and social inclusion, including marginalized youth (young women, persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons, migrants and refugees);
5. **Invest in innovative youth-led solutions**, through tailored financing and better coordination between partners to go beyond survival employment and promote sustainable entrepreneurship.

► 5. Calls to stakeholders

The Dakar Youth Compact makes the following calls to key stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation of the commitments made:

- **To Governments:** Adopt and implement multisectoral national policies, with dedicated budgets, to ensure access to decent work opportunities, inclusive education and vocational training in crisis contexts for young people, in particular young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), and young people in fragile areas;
- **Regional organizations:** Institutionalize a "youth" pillar in all regional strategies, with mechanisms for monitoring, financing and representation of young people in regional decision-making bodies;
- **To technical and financial partners:** Increase the mobilization of innovative and flexible resources for youth-led projects, with simplified access mechanisms and guarantee funds;
- **To the United Nations system:** to strengthen the anchoring of young people in peace, development and resilience processes. Institutionalize youth participation in UN cooperation plans and frameworks in the region.

► 6. Recommendations

The Dakar Youth Compact makes the following calls to key stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation of the commitments made:

Axis 1: Decent work

In the field of employment, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Place the creation of decent and inclusive productive jobs at the centre** of economic policies, with pro-employment budgeting and results-based monitoring, including in crisis and post-crisis contexts, where the imperative of job creation must guide public action;
- **Conduct a sectoral approach to employment promotion and structural transformation** by directing efforts towards sectors with a higher capacity to absorb labour, with clear objectives to formalize the process;
- **Encourage the formalization of the informal sector and call on governments to reduce taxes and** reduce administrative procedures;
- **Accelerate equitable green, blue, orange and digital transitions** by focusing on innovation and raising the quality of employment, with support through (re)qualification and social dialogue;

- **Increase public investment and direct private investment** towards job-creating sectors and infrastructures (favouring, where possible, labour-intensive techniques, including local ones); foster a more enabling environment for business, improve and facilitate access to sustainable finance for young people, including in crisis contexts;
- **Aligning education and training with labour market demands:**
 - Launch sectoral skills councils and institutionalise mechanisms for anticipating skills requirements of economic sectors,
 - Develop practical curricula focused on trades and skills,
 - Expand work-based learning, pre-employment internships, and career mentoring and guidance, while valuing informal and renewed learning,
 - Strengthen the recognition of prior experiential learning and non-formal learning,
 - Consolidate labour market information systems,
 - Make professional training available in local languages
 - Integrate vocational training into the education system
 - Establish sectoral guidance and vocational integration centres
 - Enable an efficient and effective labour market information system
- **Facilitate fair and demand-driven labour migration**, based on a regional labour market information system, integrating the protection of migrant workers with mutual (inter-state) recognition of their skills:
 - Ensure the portability of social security benefits
 - Adapt employment services and training-to-employment bridges to displaced youth.
 - Deploy active employment programmes in a targeted manner and strengthen public employment services, prioritising young women, persons with disabilities and NEETs.
 - Give effect to all agreements and protocols concerning the free movement of goods and services as well as the Protocol of Rights
 - Prioritize areas affected by insecurity and areas of internally displaced persons
- **Guarantee rights at work as well as social protection** for all, especially for young workers in vulnerable situations;
- **Strengthen labour market governance and transparency** by developing robust labour market information systems, providing real-time employment data, and ensuring that recruitment processes are transparent, fair and free from exploitation;
- **Promote youth entrepreneurship with dignity** by supporting youth-led, viable and scalable businesses through financing, tax incentives, incubators and mentoring to go beyond just survival employment.

Axis 2: Education in emergency situations

In the field of education, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **In the context of community school security**, strengthen the citizen's anchoring in school safety through an approach of co-production and integration into the curricula. Encourage proactive watchfulness ("See something, say something") and local ownership of security reforms to ensure their sustainability;
- **As part of strategic financing for education**, reposition education as a priority investment. Increase domestic and external resources, including through innovative mechanisms, to ensure educational continuity in crisis contexts;
- **In the area of emergency information systems**, set up a regional mechanism and a digital platform for the collection and management of education data in emergency situations, in support of national education information and management systems (EMIS) and professional training, for evidence-based planning;
- **In terms of inclusive education and care for out-of-school children in crisis contexts**, strengthen inclusive strategies and high-impact educational alternatives, including distance education, so as to facilitate employment or transition to the formal education system to ensure access to education for girls, people with special needs or reduced autonomy, and vulnerable groups, building on existing good practices;
- **Ensure that all** – including young women, persons with disabilities, migrants, refugees, displaced persons and marginalised youth – **have uninterrupted access to learning** through alternative programmes, language support, psychosocial assistance, health and protection services;
- **Recognition of prior learning and qualifications**: promote the recognition of prior learning and qualifications, including through initiatives to validate skills acquired through experience. This approach would enable young people to transform their experience and know-how into concrete opportunities for decent employment and professional mobility at regional and international level.

Axis 3: Participation, governance, conflict prevention, peace and security

In the area of participation, governance, conflict prevention, peace and security, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Call for the meaningful engagement of young people**: ensure their participation in all stages of public policy management – from design to implementation, monitoring and evaluation – by considering them as active and leading partners, and by strengthening the capacities of youth organizations, by making appropriate resources available to them. Establish formal and informal spaces for youth participation in governance, peace and security policies, including in crisis situations, and through social dialogue mechanisms;
- **Intergenerational commitments**: encourage dialogue between generations to promote the transmission of knowledge, prevent social divides and promote concerted solutions; develop mentoring, sponsorship or co-construction initiatives between

generations; enhance traditional mediation mechanisms and combine them with innovative approaches;

- **Participatory, transparent and accountable governance:** promote governance based on transparency, accountability and citizen participation, in particular through access to information and citizen monitoring and control mechanisms;
- **Inclusion of women, youth and marginalized groups:** ensure the active and equitable participation of women, youth and historically excluded groups in governance, mediation and decision-making processes; adopt specific measures to remove structural barriers to the participation of young women and vulnerable people;
- **Conflict prevention, management and resolution:** establish sustainable, community-based and institutional mechanisms for conflict prevention and management, including young people as key actors; strengthen early warning mechanisms, community mediations and field actions led by young people trained in peacebuilding;
- **Promotion of the culture of peace and human security;** develop education programmes for peace, tolerance and intercultural dialogue, both within and outside the education system; strengthen the culture of dialogue, non-violence and mutual respect, especially in areas of tension; Promote human security while respecting fundamental rights, ensuring the protection of young people from violence and exclusion.

Axis 4. Monitoring and implementation

Regarding monitoring and implementation, the following recommendations are put forward:

- **Establishment of a national post-forum follow-up committee** composed of government representatives, private sector actors, young people and trade union organizations;
- **Structuring of the monitoring committee** with a presidency, a general secretariat and thematic commissions; development of an action plan and definition of monitoring indicators for the implementation of the Dakar Youth Compact;
- **Use of digital tools** (collaborative platforms and digital solutions) to strengthen communication, transparency and effective monitoring;
- **Creation of a dedicated and harmonized platform** for monitoring and evaluation.
- **Use of social networks** to ensure wide dissemination of Dakar Youth Compact initiatives.
