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► Supporting youth employment and investment in skills in developing countries

Priorities of the EU-ILO Network of Youth Employment Experts

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Key points

This position paper was prepared under the project “[Supporting Youth Employment and Investment in Skills in Developing Countries](#)”, an initiative co-funded by the European Commission and implemented by the International Labour Organization from March 2025 to February 2027 that has worked toward creating a global Network of Youth Employment Experts with a focus on four target countries: Cambodia, the Philippines, Malawi and Rwanda. It is based on the consultations undertaken in the first year of implementation with Network members and partners, building on the situational analyses based on ILO analyses of national labour market indicators and knowledge resources, including the ones developed within the framework of the project.

The four focus countries of the Network, Cambodia, the Philippines, Malawi and Rwanda, illustrate distinct yet connected expressions of structural challenges that limit sufficient job creation for young labour entrants and result in circumstances of youth engagement in informal, insecure work, youth unemployment and/or youth disengagement. In the two Asian countries, comparatively low youth unemployment rates coexist with high informality, persistent skills mismatch and, in the Philippines, one of the region's most gendered NEET profiles. In the two African countries, rapid youth population growth is outpacing the creation of decent jobs: most young workers remain in informal, insecure work, and a rising share of young NEETs signals discouragement rather than transition.

Against this backdrop, and drawing on the evidence base consolidated through the [YouthForesight platform](#), stakeholder consultations and a member perception survey, four priority areas were identified for the focus of the Network on its knowledge sharing, peer learning and co-creation agenda:

- 1. Prepare Young People for the Labour Market:** strengthening technical and vocational education systems in response to labour market needs, and scaling up elements of work-based learning and quality apprenticeships.
- 2. Addressing youth labour market exclusion:** targeted outreach and integrated support for young people in NEET status, applying a gender and equity lens.
- 3. Facilitating transition to work:** supporting gender-responsive employment-centred policies and programmes, including employment services, active labour market policies, entrepreneurship support and national action plans for youth employment.
- 4. Meaningful youth engagement:** embedding youth voices in programme design and policy, and supporting youth-led advocacy, co-creation and peer-to-peer learning.

Across these priorities, the Network identified four sectoral entry points with the highest job-creation potential for young people, namely the just transition, agri-food systems, the care economy and the digital economy, differentiated by country context.

The paper expands on the purpose and planning within each priority area and outlines the associated activities per country to be scheduled in the Network's 2026 workplan.

1. Introduction and background

The EU–ILO Youth Employment Expert Network (hereafter “the Network”) is an initiative co-funded by the European Commission that aims to strengthen youth employment ecosystems by connecting knowledge, people and solutions. Implemented by the ILO from March 2025 to February 2027, the project operates globally with focus on four target countries — Cambodia, the Philippines, Malawi and Rwanda — and is structured around three mutually reinforcing pillars:

1. **LINK:** establish a global dynamic network of youth employment experts with a focus on four target countries, mapping and engaging existing networks, universities, think tanks, government representatives and practitioners.
2. **LEARN:** promote knowledge exchange through peer learning events, facilitate access to evidence and lessons learned, and identify knowledge gaps to support better-informed policies and practices.
3. **LEVERAGE:** enable Network members to co-create innovative solutions and align technical and financial resources to scale up impactful youth employment initiatives at the country level.

Since its launch, the Network has expanded its outreach spanning government institutions, research institutions, development and social partners, youth organizations and practitioners. Its knowledge base is anchored to the [YouthForesight platform](#), the global knowledge platform on youth employment jointly hosted by the [Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth](#) and [Generation Unlimited](#).

This paper sets out the key priority and thematic areas identified by the Network as the focus of planned knowledge sharing, peer learning and co-creation activities among stakeholders across the four focus countries through the course of the project. The priorities reflect country-specific youth employment challenges and inputs from governments, social partners, EU Delegations and practitioners, gathered through the activities implemented in the first year of the project.

Within the project's results framework, this paper constitutes the position paper foreseen under Activity A1.4 of Outcome 1 (LINK), summarizing the findings of the Year 1 gap analysis and consultations. It is designed to guide the knowledge sharing (LEARN) and co-creation (LEVERAGE) activities scheduled in the 2026 workplan. Section 6 maps each priority explicitly to those planned activities.

Structure of the paper

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 explains how the priorities were set. Sections 3 and 4 present the three building blocks on which prioritization of activities were built. Section 5 brings these three strands together in the findings of the exercise: four thematic priorities and, cutting across them, four areas with the highest job-creation potential for young people.

Sections 6 and 7 turn from analysis to action. Section 6 shows how the priorities have shaped the Network's activities to date, so that what the Network offers responds to what its members asked for, particularly at country level. Section 7 situates the Network within the wider institutional landscape, drawing on the mapping of existing youth employment networks carried out in Year 1. Section 8 concludes.

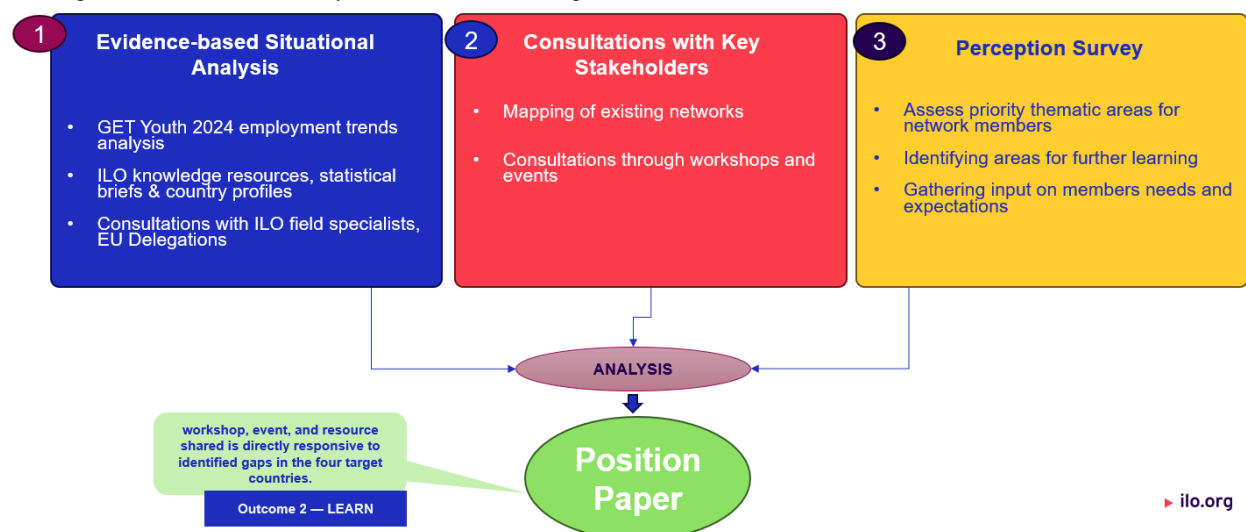
2. Methodology: how the priorities were identified

The priority areas presented in this paper result from a triangulation of evidence and stakeholder inputs, combining data with practical information of on-the-ground realities in the four focus countries.

This section explains how that triangulation was carried out. Figure 1 summarizes the process: three streams of evidence and consultation feed a single analysis, which in turn produces the priorities set out in this paper. Taken together, the three streams allow each priority to be tested from three directions: what the data show, what stakeholders working in the four countries observe, and what members themselves ask the Network to deliver.

► **Figure 1: Identification of priority areas**

From situation analysis to targeted knowledge sharing — a structured process that translates evidence and stakeholder insight into actionable network priorities across the 4 target countries in Asia-Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa.



- (1) Evidence-based situational analysis.** The project team consolidated the available evidence through the YouthForesight platform, drawing on the ILO's Global Employment Trends for Youth (2024 since the current 2026 edition was not yet available), the ILO-WB Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Active Labour Market for Youth, a list of more than fifty publications covering the four focus countries selected for Network members from the wide repository of YouthForesight, as well as country-level statistics and evaluations from the ILO, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, national statistical offices and research institutes.
- (2) Consultations through workshops and events.** Inputs were gathered from stakeholders and Network members through online and in-person workshops and events, including exchanges with EU Delegations, ILO country offices, ministries of labour, employers' and workers' organizations, and youth-led organizations in the four focus countries. These consultations were complemented by a mapping of existing youth employment networks and relevant knowledge resources across Southeast Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and globally. Conducted in April 2026, the mapping was subsequently made available to Network members through the [dedicated digital space on YouthForesight](#). The mapping assessed each entity's thematic focus, role in the ecosystem and relevance to the Network's LINK, LEARN and LEVERAGE pillars, and informs the positioning set out in Section 7.
- (3) Member perception survey.** An online survey was circulated to Network members in December 2025 to capture their views on priority themes, knowledge needs and preferred modalities of engagement. It was structured around four questions: the most pressing youth employment challenges in members' own

countries; the areas offering the greatest potential for job creation for young people; the priorities members wished to see reflected in the Network's 2026 activities; and the technical expertise members themselves could contribute. The survey was administered during the Network's first year, while its membership and engagement channels were still being consolidated. Its results are therefore presented throughout this paper as indicative signals of members' emerging priorities and should be balanced with information generated from the consultations and evidence review.

► Box 1: Perception Survey Methodology Note

Purpose and scope. The perception survey was designed as a light-touch consultation to capture Network members' views on the most pressing youth employment challenges, sectors with job-creation potential, priorities for the Network's 2026 activities and opportunities for members to contribute technical expertise.

Administration and participation. The online questionnaire was launched in December 2025 and circulated by email to members of the EC-ILO Youth Employment Expert Network, with follow-up reminders sent to encourage participation. The level of participation in the survey should be understood in the context of a Network that was still expanding and consolidating its membership and engagement channels during its first year.

Analysis and interpretation. Responses were reviewed descriptively and grouped around recurring themes. Percentages reported in this paper are rounded and, where questions allowed more than one selection, should not be expected to sum to 100 per cent. Given the voluntary nature of participation and the size of the response base, the results are presented as indicative signals of members' emerging priorities rather than as statistically representative estimates for the full Network.

Triangulation and follow-up. To strengthen their reliability, the survey findings were cross-checked against inputs from online and in-person consultations, the country-level evidence review and the mapping of relevant youth employment networks and knowledge resources. A second round of data collection is planned for Year 2, when the Network will have further expanded, to validate the emerging findings, broaden participation and establish a more robust baseline for future monitoring.

Together, these complementary sources provided the basis for identifying the Network's priority areas. Findings were triangulated to identify convergence between youth employment challenges in the four target countries, gaps and opportunities in the existing knowledge and institutional landscape, and the needs and interests expressed by Network members. Priority was given to areas supported by multiple sources and where the Network could add value through knowledge sharing, peer learning and capacity development. The priorities presented in Section 5 thus provide a common strategic framework for the Network's activities, while allowing for adaptation to country-specific contexts and emerging needs.

3. Evidence-based Situational Analysis

This section presents the first building block of the analysis: the country-level evidence for the four focus countries, drawn from the mapping of knowledge resources and from consultations with ILO field specialists and external stakeholders.

In particular, against the background of global employment trends provided by the ILO Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024 and 2026, the four focus countries face distinct youth employment challenges, shaped by their demographic profiles, economic structures and policy environments. The profiles below synthesize the evidence consolidated through the Network's publication mapping and country consultations.

3.1. Cambodia

Key statistics, latest year	General summation
Youth unemployment rate (15-24): 1.7%	Very low youth unemployment and relatively low NEET rates. High levels of informality and a significant incidence of temporary employment. Persistent skills mismatches and school-to-work transition challenges, despite relatively diversified youth employment..
NEET rate (15-24): 11.4% (MF), 10% (M), 12.6% (F)	
Youth informal employment rate (15-29): 85.8%	
Share of young employees with a temporary contract (15-29): 36%	
Share of employment (15-29) in: - agriculture: 26.2% - industry: 37.7% - services: 36.1%	

Source: ILOSTAT; ilostat.ilo.org (statistics); ILO 2026 and ILO 2024 (general summary based primarily on subregional statistics)

Cambodia's youth labour market combines low measured unemployment with widespread informality, vulnerable employment and pronounced skills mismatch. According to the 2019 Labour Force Survey, 85.8 per cent of young adult workers were in informal employment. Youth employment remains concentrated in garment manufacturing, tourism, construction and agriculture—sectors exposed to external shocks and technological and environmental change and generally lower on the spectrum of decent work (ILO, 2022). Job matching constraints are also significant: firms reported that 41 per cent of hard-to-fill vacancies were in technician and professional occupations, while inadequately skilled workers were cited as a major obstacle by 42 per cent of exporting firms, compared with 21 per cent of non-exporters (World Bank, 2024a).

The education-to-work pipeline has expanded but remains narrow. Public TVET institutions enrolled 37,998 trainees in 2021–2022, 31 per cent of them women, yet still only 1.4 per cent of 15–24-year-olds were enrolled in TVET, compared with an average of 4 per cent in lower-middle-income countries (World Bank, 2024a). The Skills Development Fund illustrates the potential of employer-linked provision: participation rose from 1,033 trainees in 2021 to 15,787 in 2023, with an early tracer study reporting 93 per cent employment three months after completion and 92 per cent employer satisfaction. These reforms complement the Decent Employment for Youth programme, whose second phase supported more than 170,000 young people through skills, entrepreneurship and employment services (ILO, 2023a). The Skills Development Roadmap 2023–2035, the Pentagonal Strategy 2023–2028 and the World Bank's Skills for Better Jobs project provide a platform to deepen work-based learning, career guidance and industry-provider collaboration.

3.2. The Philippines

Key statistics, latest year	General summation
Youth unemployment rate (15-24): 11%	Youth unemployment and NEET rates remain significant, despite recent improvements in NEET levels. Youth employment is predominantly service-based, reflecting the country's dynamic services economy. School-to-work transitions and adaptation to technological change remain important challenges.
NEET rate (15-24): 12.2%	
Youth informal employment rate (15-29): n.a.	
Share of young employees with a temporary contract (15-29): 33.4%	
Share of employment (15-29) in: - agriculture: 22% - industry: 18.5% - services: 59.5%	

Source: ILOSTAT; ilostat ilo org (statistics); ILO 2026 and ILO 2024 (general summary based primarily on subregional statistics)

The Philippines combines a dynamic services-driven economy—notably business process outsourcing, digital services and an internationally connected care workforce—with persistent difficulties in the transition from school to work. In 2025, 2.5 million of the country's approximately 20 million young people aged 15–24, or 12.2 per cent, were not in employment, education or training (ILOSTAT). The NEET rate thus represents a slight improvement from 2023 (at 12.4 per cent). Sustained investment in TVET reform, JobStart and employment services were potentially showing some positive impact (ADB, 2018; 2025).

The policy architecture offers significant assets for renewed action. ADB-supported reforms generated around 550,000 additional TVET graduates over five years, while TESDA continues to expand industry partnerships and regional innovation centres (ADB, 2025). JobStart, initially piloted in 2014–2015 and institutionalized nationally in 2016, provides a model that combines life-skills training, technical training and employer-based internships. Nevertheless, young women, out-of-school youth and young people in conflict-affected areas such as the Bangsamoro region continue to face compounded barriers. The rapid diffusion of generative AI creates an additional challenge: clerical-intensive occupations are among those most exposed, making reskilling, worker protection and pathways into higher-value digital work increasingly important (ILO, 2026). The country's strong civil society, public employment infrastructure and care economy provide a foundation for gender-responsive outreach and co-designed transition support.

3.3. Malawi

Key statistics, latest year	General summation
Youth unemployment rate (15-24): 19.2%	High youth unemployment and NEET rates, with a particularly pronounced NEET gender gap.
NEET rate (15-24): 39.4% (MF), 32.8% (M), 45.4% (F)	

Youth informal employment rate (15-29): 96.6%	Near-universal informality and widespread temporary employment constrain access to decent and stable work. Agriculture remains the main source of youth employment, pointing to the need for greater productivity and economic diversification.
Share of young employees with a temporary contract (15-29): 58.9%	
Share of employment (15-29) in: - agriculture: 45.9% - industry: 6.8% - services: 36.2%	

Source: ILOSTAT; ilostat.ilo.org (statistics); ILO 2026 and ILO 2024 (general summary based primarily on subregional statistics)

Malawi presents one of the more acute structural challenges among the focus countries. The economy is predominantly rural and agriculture-based, digital infrastructure is limited, and nearly all employed people work informally. Youth unemployment and NEET rates are high by regional standards, fitting closer to those of other Southern African countries like South Africa. A majority of employed youth are self-employed in the informal sector. NEET status is strongly gendered and linked to early marriage and care responsibilities. Low productivity, limited wage employment, weak infrastructure and restricted access to finance and markets constrain the capacity of agriculture and informal enterprise to provide decent and resilient livelihoods.

The National Youth Policy 2023–2028, coordinated by the National Youth Council of Malawi, prioritizes youth employment, skills and entrepreneurship, while a growing ecosystem of youth-led organizations and innovation hubs offers entry points for outreach and delivery.

Given the country's economic structure, agribusiness remains a central opportunity: evidence points to the value of practical training, extension services and stronger market linkages, complemented by climate-resilient production and digital tools. However, limited connectivity and institutional capacity mean that interventions must be sequenced realistically and linked to finance, social protection and measures that reduce the care constraints faced by young women.

3.4. Rwanda

Key statistics, latest year	General summation
Youth unemployment rate (15-24): 8.6%	Moderate youth unemployment but persistent NEET rates, particularly among young women. High informality and widespread temporary employment remain major job-quality challenges. Agriculture remains the largest source of youth employment, alongside a substantial and growing role for services.
NEET rate (15-24): 15.3% (MF), 12.7% (M), 17.8% (F)	
Youth informal employment rate (15-29): 92.4%	
Share of young employees with a temporary contract (15-29): 64%	

Share of employment (15-29) in: - agriculture: 45.2% - industry: 14.5% - services: 40.3%	
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Source: ILOSTAT; ilostat ilo org (statistics); ILO 2026 and ILO 2024 (general summary based primarily on subregional statistics)

Rwanda pairs an ambitious digital economy agenda with a strong and actively implemented youth employment policy framework, but job quality and transition outcomes remain major concerns. Youth unemployment rates and NEET rates are low by regional comparison, but still more than nine in ten young adult workers work informally. Sectoral patterns are gendered, with young men finding more opportunities outside the agricultural sector compared to young women. Fewer than 40 per cent of young men, but just over 50 per cent of young women, worked in agriculture. These figures underline the need to connect skills policy to labour demand, enterprise productivity and decent-work conditions.

Institutional commitment and programme reach are substantial. The National Employment Programme and successor strategies, the Rwanda TVET Board and the Skills Development Fund reached 24,000 NEET youth between 2017 and 2024—nearly half young women—and aim to reach a further 70,000 by the end of 2026. The US\$200 million World Bank-financed Priority Skills for Growth and Youth Empowerment operation targets more than 200,000 young people through short-term, industry-aligned training (World Bank, 2024b). Earlier implementation experience also offers lessons: the Huguka Dukore Akazi Kanoze programme trained 40,097 youth in 25 districts, reported a 68.1 per cent employment rate and supported the creation of 5,780 youth businesses (EDC, 2021). Yet experimental evidence comparing vocational training with cash grants found that liquidity support produced stronger medium-term economic outcomes on several measures, cautioning against training-only approaches and reinforcing the case for integrated packages combining skills, finance, employment services and follow-up support (McIntosh and Zeitlin, 2022).

4. What members told us: consultations and survey findings

This Section presents the second and third building blocks of the analysis: what Network members themselves identified as their priorities and needs, gathered through the consultations and the perception survey described in Section 2.

The following points summarize the key findings on the youth employment issues identified by Network members as those worthy of prioritized attention over the course of the project.

(1) Skills mismatch is the dominant concern, as a hindrance to productive growth in core sectors.

Roughly seven in ten responding members identified the gap between what education and training systems produce and what employers demand as the single most pressing youth employment challenge in their country. This concern was strongest among members from Cambodia and Malawi. Members from Cambodia and the Philippines most frequently selected the digital economy and care economy as high-potential sectors; members from Malawi and Rwanda emphasized agri-food systems and green jobs linked to the just transition. This regional differentiation directly informs the sector focus set out in Section 5.

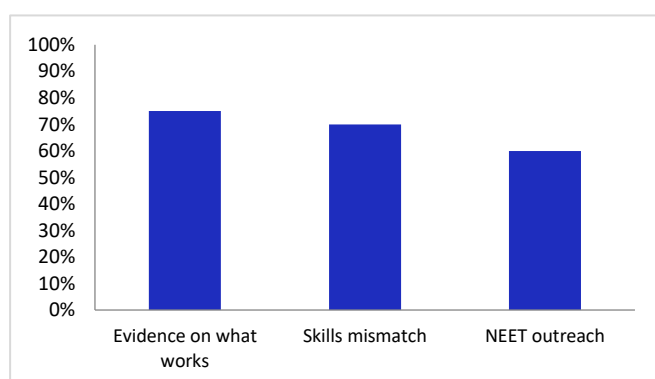
► **Table 1: Sector selection identified by Network members through the perception survey**

Sector	Share of sector selections (%)
Green Economy	26.7%
Agriculture	31.7%
Digital Economy	33.3%
Care Economy	8.3%

The table presents the distribution of sector selections made by Network members in response to Question 8 of the perception survey launched in December 2025. Respondents could select up to two sectors. Percentages therefore represent the share of total sector selections rather than the share of respondents.

► **Figure 2. Top 3 priorities identified by the Network**

(Source: Perception Survey 2025)



(2) Numbers of youth in NEET status are too high, especially among young women. Around six in ten respondents placed outreach to youth in NEET status among their top three priorities, with members from the Philippines and Malawi most likely to emphasize the disproportionate NEET burden carried by young women, consistent with national statistics in both countries.

(3) Evidence on “what works” can be better utilized for youth employment policymaking.

Approximately three quarters of respondents rated “access to practical, synthesized evidence on what works” as more valuable than new primary research, and over half requested country-specific policy briefs and peer exchange with counterparts facing similar challenges. Beyond access to synthesized evidence on what works,

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members expressed a need for tools and guidance that can support the operationalization and implementation of youth employment policies and programmes.

When asked what most limits the scale-up of effective youth employment interventions, respondents pointed first to fragmented coordination among actors, and second to insufficient or short-term financing, a finding that validates the Network's LEVERAGE pillar and its emphasis on aligning technical and financial resources rather than creating parallel structures.

► **Table 2: Scaling constraints and implications for Network delivery (source: perception survey 2025)**

Order reported	Constraint	What members indicated	Programme implication
1	Fragmented coordination among actors	Most frequently cited binding constraint	Reinforces the Network's convening and alignment role under LEVERAGE.
2	Insufficient or short-term financing	Second most frequently cited binding constraint	Supports donor mapping, co-ideation and the development of financeable concepts.
3	Lack of practical tools and guidance to operationalize youth employment programmes	1 in 3 respondents referred to this issue in different open-ended questions of the survey	Prioritize usable evidence products and live peer-learning formats.

5. The Network's priorities: findings and analysis

This Section sets out the findings of the analysis, drawing on the evidence and consultations described above. The building blocks presented in Sections 3 and 4 converge on four thematic priorities and, cutting across them, four areas in which the potential for creating decent jobs for young people is highest, especially in the four focus countries. For each, the rationale is summarized together with the Network's intended contribution to strengthening members' capacity under the LINK, LEARN and LEVERAGE pillars. Across all four priorities, through peer-to-peer learning, evidence sharing and capacity-development activities, the Network enables members to exchange implementation experience, reflect on evidence, and co-develop practical approaches that can inform their work in different national contexts.

Priority 1 – Prepare young people for the labour market through heightened focus on TVET and skills development

Links to Challenge Areas identified

► **Area 1:** Skills Mismatch

► **Area 3:** Better use of Evidence

Rationale. Skills mismatch is consistently documented as a key barrier to youth employment across the four focus countries, and growing youth unemployment rates raise the stakes of getting skills systems right. Work-based learning and quality apprenticeships remain under-developed in all four countries relative to demand.

Where this priority comes from: Identified as a leading constraint in the country summary for Cambodia and Malawi, and as a secondary constraint in Rwanda. Ranked first by members: roughly seven in ten respondents identified the gap between what education and training systems produce and what employers demand as the single most pressing youth employment challenge in their country, with the strongest signal coming from members in Cambodia and Malawi.

Project contribution. Strengthen members' knowledge and practical understanding of approaches to work-based learning and quality apprenticeships through peer-to-peer learning, exchange with national TVET authorities (such as TESDA in the Philippines and the Rwanda TVET Board), and other capacity-development activities. Members have been sharing experience on TVET financing, digital and green skills, and identify practices that can be adapted to their own contexts through collaborative ideation.

Priority 2 – Address youth labour market exclusion

Links to Challenge Areas identified

► **Area 2:** NEETs

► **Area 3:** Better use of Evidence

Rationale. With 257 million young people in NEET status globally and rates rising in nearly all subregions, exclusion is the sharpest expression of youth labour market failure, and it is heavily gendered. In the focus countries, NEET status is associated with early marriage and unpaid care work (Malawi), out-of-school status and regional disparities (the Philippines), and rural disconnection from services (all four).

Where this priority comes from. Ranked second by members: around six in ten respondents placed outreach to young people in NEET status among their top three priorities, with members from the Philippines and Malawi most likely to emphasize the disproportionate burden carried by young women.

Project contribution. Facilitate peer-to-peer learning and exchange on approaches to reaching and supporting young people in NEET status, with particular attention to gender and equity considerations. Members will examine implementation experiences from initiatives such as the Skills Development Fund's NEET-targeted training in Rwanda and JobStart in the Philippines, and discuss how these approaches have addressed different barriers to labour market participation. Capacity-development activities, including a webinar on the rising NEET rates and associated solutions, will enable members and prospective members to engage with the latest evidence and reflect on how these lessons can inform solutions adapted to their national and institutional contexts.

Priority 3 – Facilitate transitions to work

Links to Challenge Areas identified

► **Area 1:** Skills Mismatch

► **Area 3:** Better use of Evidence

► **Area 2:** NEETs

Rationale. Skills interventions alone do not create jobs. Impact evaluations show that supply-side measures deliver limited gains where labour demand is weak. Employment-centred macroeconomic and sectoral policies, effective employment services, active labour market policies and entrepreneurship support are needed to convert skills into decent work.

Where this priority comes from. Emerges from the global evidence on the limits of supply-side measures where labour demand is weak and from all four country summaries, where skills investment has outpaced job creation. Confirmed by members from a different angle: asked what most limits the scale-up of effective youth employment interventions, respondents pointed first to fragmented coordination among actors and second to insufficient or short-term financing, and one in three raised the absence of practical tools to operationalize youth employment programmes.

Project contribution. Support the strengthening of members' knowledge and understanding of employment-centred policies and programmes, including public employment services, active labour market policies, youth entrepreneurship support and national action plans for youth employment. Peer-to-peer learning will help members compare policy solutions and exchange practical experience on implementation. Capacity development and the co-ideation of solutions will draw from comparative evidence on what works, including knowledge products supported by the project, such as the ILO–World Bank Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Active Labour Market Programmes for Youth, finalized under the project and presented to members in March 2026.

► **Box 2. What works on youth employment: key findings from the ILO-WB Systematic Review of ALMPs for Youth**

Finalized under the project and presented to Network members in March 2026, the [ILO–World Bank Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Active Labour Market Programmes \(ALMPs\) for Youth](#) synthesizes 228 reports covering 62 countries, 220 interventions and 5,051 effect sizes spanning 1990–2022. Key findings include:

4. ALMPs improve youth employment and earnings on average. More recent programmes (started in or after 2008) show larger impacts than earlier ones, and impacts are larger in low- and middle-income countries than in high-income countries, especially on earnings.
5. Youth entrepreneurship support and skills training show the largest average impacts globally. In low- and middle-income countries, entrepreneurship support and employment services yield the largest gains; in high-income countries, skills training and wage subsidies perform best.
5. Design matters. Programmes that combine intervention types, integrate soft-skills training, provide certification for job matching, build partnerships between public and non-public actors, and run for longer durations tend to be more effective, particularly in reaching young women, low-income and low-educated youth, and those under 25.
7. Benefits tend to exceed costs, but sustainability is a concern. Among the 70 of 228 reports with cost data, 73 per cent found benefits exceeding costs, at a median cost of around US\$500 per participant. However, impacts tend to decline within a year of programme exit, underlining the value of follow-up support.

Source: [ILO-WB \(2026\) The impact of Active Labour Programmes on Youth](#)

Priority 4 – Meaningful youth engagement

Links to Challenge Areas identified

► **Area 1:** Skills Mismatch

► **Area 3:** Better use of Evidence

► **Area 2:** NEETs

Rationale. Young people are not just passive recipients of employment policies and programmes - they are rights-holders, innovators, and agents of change. Yet, too often, decisions that affect their lives are made without their meaningful participation. Policies designed without young people routinely miss the barriers young people actually face. Youth-led organizations in all four countries, from national youth councils to innovation hubs, are increasingly expected, by governments and donors alike, to be partners rather than beneficiaries.

Where this priority comes from. Raised consistently in consultations, particularly by youth-led organizations in the four focus countries, and reflected in members' demand for co-creation formats rather than one-way knowledge transfer.

Project contribution. Strengthen members' capacity to engage young people as active stakeholders across programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, moving beyond one-off consultation towards continuous participation, influence and accountability. Drawing on the ILO training package [Meaningful youth engagement for decent work](#), capacity-development activities will equip members to apply the five dimensions of meaningful engagement, i.e. voice, space, audience, influence and accountability, and identify opportunities throughout the programme cycle. Through peer-to-peer learning with young practitioners and youth organization representatives from the focus countries, members will exchange approaches to progress from consulting young

people to enabling their contribution, partnership and leadership, with particular attention to inclusive outreach and youth facing additional barriers.

Cross cutting: Focus on sectors with the highest job creation potential for young people

In relation to its Link-Learn-Leverage activities in the four priority areas, the Network will concentrate on the sectors identified in the consultations and surveys as having high potential for decent job creation for young people. The focus sectors thus include:

Sectors linked to a Just transition

A just transition can create significant opportunities for youth employment by supporting the shift towards more environmentally sustainable economies while ensuring that young people are equipped to access the decent work opportunities this transformation generates. Expanding areas such as renewable energy, climate-smart agriculture and environmental services offer potential for job creation across the four focus countries. At the same time, realizing this potential requires addressing barriers that may prevent young people from benefiting from these opportunities, including skills gaps and unequal access to training and employment pathways. Existing regional initiatives on green and digital skills provide opportunities for partnerships, knowledge exchange and capacity development, particularly in Southeast Asia.

Agri-food systems

Agri-food systems remain an important source of current and potential employment for young people, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and rural areas of Asia. Opportunities extend beyond primary agricultural production to value chain development, agro-processing, food technology, service provision and rural entrepreneurship, offering pathways to more productive and diversified employment. In Malawi, where agriculture continues to underpin the livelihoods of a large share of young people, evidence points to agribusiness, combined with effective extension services and practical skills development, as an important pathway towards improved employment and income opportunities. In Rwanda, horticultural value chains and youth-focused agri-hub models provide promising entry points for young people across different segments of the agri-food system. Existing regional initiatives promoting job-rich investment in agriculture also provide opportunities for partnerships, knowledge exchange and the potential scaling of effective approaches.

Care economy

Health, childcare, elder care and social services hold significant potential for female youth employment, with demand expected to grow further as a result of demographic and social changes. The care economy is particularly strategic from a youth employment perspective. On the one hand, it can generate employment opportunities that are especially relevant for young women, while greater access to care services can help reduce the unpaid care responsibilities that contribute to their disproportionate representation among young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). On the other hand, care work is often characterized by significant decent work deficits, making the quality of employment, and not only the creation of jobs, an important policy consideration. The Philippines, with its large and internationally connected care workforce, offers particularly relevant experiences and lessons for exchange within the Network.

Digital economy

The digital economy offers growing opportunities for youth employment, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas, across areas such as ICT, e-commerce, fintech, digital services and platform-based work. Rwanda's digital transformation agenda and the Philippines' established digital services sector illustrate the potential for young people to access emerging employment opportunities, while Malawi highlights the importance of addressing

enabling conditions, including digital infrastructure, connectivity and access to relevant skills. Rapid advances in generative artificial intelligence are also reshaping these opportunities. While demand for advanced digital and technology-related skills is expected to grow, some occupations and tasks, particularly those involving routine clerical and administrative work, may face greater exposure to automation and transformation. Supporting young people to develop adaptable and future-oriented skills will therefore be increasingly important to ensure that they can benefit from, and navigate, changes in the digital economy.

6. From priorities to action: tailoring the Network's activities to the emerged priorities

The priorities identified through this analysis have informed the adaptation and implementation of the Network's activities. While the project's overall scope remains unchanged, the analysis has helped shape the thematic focus, sequencing and delivery of activities to better reflect members' needs and the specific contexts of Cambodia, Malawi, the Philippines and Rwanda.

This approach strengthens both the **relevance** and **sustainability** of the Network. Anchoring knowledge sharing, peer learning and capacity development in identified needs and national priorities helps connect global and cross-country knowledge with concrete policy and implementation challenges. At the same time, engaging national institutions in the design and delivery of activities fosters country ownership, strengthens capacities and relationships, and supports knowledge exchange and institutional cooperation that can continue beyond the project period.

This section hence illustrates, priority by priority, how the Network's activities respond to the priorities emerging from the analysis.

Priority 1 – Prepare young people for the labour market through heightened focus on TVET and skills development

Strengthening technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and skills development is a key area of focus for the Network, particularly in response to priorities identified in Malawi and Rwanda. The planned regional workshop for Africa will provide an opportunity to examine approaches to strengthening and scaling up TVET in sectors with significant potential for youth employment, including agriculture. Through exchanges among practitioners and institutions, the Network will facilitate the sharing of experiences on how skills development systems can better respond to labour market needs and support young people's transitions into decent work.

Priority 2 – Address youth labour market exclusion

The Network's activities also seek to deepen understanding of the factors contributing to young people's exclusion from employment, education and training and of the policy responses available to address them. In August 2026, the Network organized a webinar on young people not in employment, education or training (NEET), timed to coincide with International Youth Day and the release of the *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2026*. The webinar brought the latest global and regional evidence on NEET trends into dialogue with country experiences and policy perspectives, responding in particular to members' interest in better understanding and measuring youth labour market exclusion. Further activities will continue to provide opportunities to exchange knowledge on policies and interventions targeting young people facing multiple barriers to labour market participation.

Priority 3 – Facilitate transitions to work

Supporting effective transitions from education and training into employment is reflected across several Network activities. The planned regional workshop for Asia, bringing together participants from Cambodia and the Philippines, will include an exchange on the role of public employment services in supporting young people's transitions to work, drawing on collaboration with the [INTERGEN](#) and the [Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection](#) initiatives. This will complement the Network's broader engagement on integrated employment and social protection approaches, including a planned webinar on youth employment and social protection with the Global Accelerator.

These activities build on earlier knowledge-sharing initiatives, including the webinar on evidence from Active Labour Market Programmes for young people, organized with the World Bank and with the contribution from the European Commission. Together, these exchanges enable Network members to engage with evidence on different policy instruments and consider their relevance across national and institutional contexts.

Priority 4 – Meaningful youth engagement

Meaningful youth engagement is both a substantive priority and an important principle underpinning the Network's approach. Activities under this priority seek to strengthen understanding of how young people can participate meaningfully in the design, implementation and assessment of policies and programmes affecting their employment prospects. The Network has already organized a dedicated webinar on meaningful youth engagement, providing a basis for further exchange and application of these approaches.

The planned regional learning event for Africa, organized in collaboration with the [PROSPECTS](#) partnership, will further explore this priority in the context of youth employment in vulnerable settings. A dedicated focus on meaningful youth engagement will provide an opportunity to consider how young people, including those facing displacement and other forms of vulnerability, can contribute to shaping employment responses that reflect their needs and aspirations.

Cross-cutting sectors

Alongside the four priority areas, the Network's activities reflect the sectors identified through the analysis as offering significant opportunities for decent job creation for young people. These themes are integrated across the programme of work rather than treated as stand-alone areas of intervention. The planned regional workshop for Africa, for example, will include a focus on digital jobs for young people, while the regional workshop for Asia will address green skills and their role in supporting a just transition. A webinar on youth employment in the care economy, with a particular focus on the Philippines, is also planned for January 2027. Agriculture and agri-food systems will similarly feature in discussions on TVET and skills development, particularly in the African context.

Beyond activities associated with individual priorities, the Network will continue to support their application through processes aimed at translating knowledge and peer learning into practical outputs. Co-ideation sessions embedded in regional activities will enable members to identify concrete recommendations and operational insights, which may subsequently inform the development of light concept notes in consultation with participating institutions. The lessons-learned product planned towards the end of the project will consolidate experiences and practices emerging from the Network, while the Year 2 review of National Action Plans for youth employment will provide an additional resource for connecting the priorities identified in this paper with national policy frameworks.

7. Positioning the Network in the institutional landscape

As part of its Year 1 activities, the project carried out a mapping of existing networks on youth employment in Africa and Asia. Completed in April 2026 and available to members in the dedicated space on the YouthForesight platform, it identified more than 40 networks, expert groups, research institutions and youth organizations active on skills development and youth employment across Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and globally, and assessed each of them against three criteria: its thematic focus, its role in the ecosystem, and its relevance to the Network's LINK, LEARN and LEVERAGE pillars.

The mapping establishes where the Network should place itself, and alongside whom. Its purpose was deliberately not to generate further priorities, but to test the priorities already identified against what the institutional landscape already offers. The Network can then be oriented to filling gaps and strengthening synergies, rather than duplicating networks and initiatives that already serve these constituencies well. In particular, a couple of considerations follow:

The landscape is crowded; the Network must connect, not duplicate. In Southeast Asia, regional policy networks, TVET knowledge platforms and multi-country programmes already convene ministries, researchers and practitioners around skills and employment. In Sub-Saharan Africa, continental strategies, research consortia and large foundation-funded programmes structure the field. Globally, expert coalitions and knowledge platforms — including Solutions for Youth Employment and UNESCO-UNEVOC — perform knowledge brokerage at scale. The Network's comparative advantage lies in its country focus, its tripartite anchoring within the ILO, its EU partnership, and its ability to bridge the Southeast Asian and Sub-Saharan African evidence communities, which currently interact very little.

Each pillar has natural partners. For LINK, national anchors such as TVET authorities, national youth councils and innovation hubs provide operational entry points. For LEARN, research networks conducting rigorous evaluations and knowledge platforms can supply and amplify evidence, with YouthForesight as the Network's hosting platform. For LEVERAGE, development banks, bilateral programmes and foundations with active youth employment portfolios in the focus countries represent the financing and scaling partners the Network's members most need to reach.

8. Conclusions

The evidence presented in this paper points to a common challenge across the four focus countries: creating more and better opportunities for young people to access decent work requires coordinated action across skills development, labour market policies, inclusion and meaningful youth engagement, especially in sectors with high potential for youth employment. While national contexts differ, Network members have identified a shared set of priorities around which knowledge exchange and collaboration can generate added value.

The EU–ILO Network of Youth Employment Experts does not seek to duplicate existing initiatives. Rather, it provides a platform for connecting ILO tripartite partners, other institutions, practitioners and evidence across regions, enabling members to learn from one another's experience and jointly explore practical responses to common challenges. By combining peer learning, ILO-led capacity building, access to evidence and collaborative problem-solving, the Network aims to support more informed policy dialogue and stronger partnerships on youth employment.

The priorities presented in this paper will guide the Network's activities through the remainder of the project and provide a basis for continued engagement beyond its lifetime. As new evidence emerges and the Network grows, these priorities will continue to be reviewed with members to ensure that the Network remains responsive to evolving youth employment challenges and opportunities.

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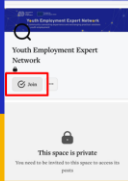
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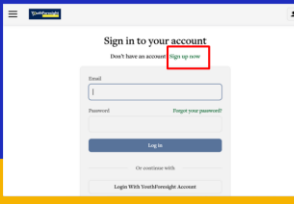
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*Registration to YouthForesight is required

► References and further readings

The full annotated publication list (over fifty entries) and the complete mapping of existing networks are available to members on the dedicated space in YouthForesight platform. Key sources include:

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