

# HOW CAN THE EU SUPPORT YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN UGANDA?



**OVER 78%**  
OF UGANDA'S 41.6M  
CITIZENS ARE UNDER  
30 YEARS OLD

**HIV PREVALENCE,  
OTHER STIs,  
REPRODUCTIVE  
HEALTH  
COMPLICATIONS,  
POSE A HEAVY  
BURDEN ON YOUTH**

**66%**  
OF NEW HIV  
INFECTIONS ARE  
AMONG ADOLESCENT  
GIRLS

## The status of young people in Uganda

Uganda currently has the second youngest population in the world; over 78 percent of its 41.6 million citizens are under 30 years old.<sup>1</sup> The total fertility rate (TFR) averages 5.4 lifetime births per woman.<sup>2</sup> With a growth of 3.3 percent per year, it is estimated that by 2060, the population will expand to around 104 million. This development, together with early child bearing for young people aged 10-14 years and a 13.3 percent unemployment rate for youth aged 18-30 merits a deep dive on the status of youth in Uganda.

## What challenges do youth in Uganda face?

Uganda's youthful population continues to face serious challenges like **unemployment, disease, and conflict related contingencies** despite a number of helpful policies the Government of Uganda put in place,<sup>3</sup> including the enactment of the 1993 National Youth Council, and the 2001 National Youth Policy. Both policies aim to increase meaningful youth engagement at national and local levels. However, **young adolescents in Uganda still face numerous reproductive health challenges**. High prevalence of HIV and AIDS (with **adolescent girls accounting for 66%** of all the new HIV infections<sup>4</sup>), Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), and reproductive health complications, like unsafe abortions, high mortality rates, and fistula pose a heavy burden on young people. Almost 28% of maternal deaths in Uganda are attributed to young girls aged 15–24 years.<sup>5</sup> Worse still, increased cases of teenage pregnancies were compounded by the lack of reliable transport to health facilities during the COVID-19 curfews.<sup>6</sup>

## Why is it important to invest in youth empowerment in Uganda?

Youth empowerment in Uganda will help address the above mentioned challenges and provide young people with the tools and knowledge to bring about positive change. It will also contribute to the attainment of the Vision 2040 and the Sustainable Development Goals. Specifically, it contributes to SDG 3, which seeks to promote wellbeing for all, SDG 5 that seeks to advance gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, SDG 10, which seeks to reduce inequality, and SDG 16, which promotes inclusivity at all levels. Taking this into account, youth empowerment remains important for meaningful youth participation in Uganda, ensuring young people's voices are heard and their needs are addressed and taken into account. **Collaborative efforts between the Government of Uganda and the European Union could contribute to removing barriers that inhibit sustainable economic growth.**

<sup>1</sup> United Nations in Uganda 2015: Youth Engagement and Employment (YEE)

<sup>2</sup> State of Uganda Population Report 2020: Impact of Covid-19 on population and development: challenges, opportunities and preparedness

<sup>3</sup> These include the National Development Plan (NDP III), the National Employment Policy of Uganda, the Uganda Skilling Strategic plan 2012-2022, National Adolescent Health Policy and Service Standards 2012, and the Uganda Vision 2040.

<sup>4</sup> UNFPA Uganda, Uganda's Youthful Population – Quick facts

<sup>5</sup> Republic of Uganda. Investments Case. Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health Sharpened Plan for Uganda

<sup>6</sup> This view emanated from the DSW/A4HU (2020) Budget Study. Lubowa, Uganda

## KEY FACTS



**46 million**  
population<sup>7</sup>



**25%**  
teenage pregnancy rate<sup>8</sup>



**5.4**  
fertility rate<sup>9</sup>



**28%**  
of married women have an unmet  
need for family planning<sup>10</sup>



**73.5%**  
average literacy rate<sup>11</sup>

## GREATER INVESTMENTS IN SRHR SERVICES ARE CRITICAL

### What are our recommendations?

The interconnected nature of health, economic stability, gender equality, and other critical issues have been underscored by the COVID-19 crisis. Hence, the need for greater investment in the country's health system, particularly sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services remains critical. Whereas the Government of Uganda has put in place policies like the National Development Plan (NDP III), the National Employment Policy of Uganda, the Uganda Skilling Strategic plan 2012-2022, National Adolescent Health Policy and Service Standards 2012, and the Uganda Vision 2040, more investments need to be made for the realisation of youth potential. Action for Health Uganda (A4HU) continues to be at the forefront of empowering youth to address structural inequalities and build more inclusive societies.

### How can the EU support?

- ▶ The EU should consider investing in SRHR programming among young people as a key priority area, in order to enable gender equality and women and youth empowerment as projected in the new EU Gender Action Plan for 2021–2025 (GAP III).
- ▶ The European Union Delegation in Uganda should consider **supporting the health system to ensure access to youth friendly services** that address the negative outcomes of the COVID-19 crisis.
- ▶ The EU should actively **engage civil society organisations working on health and youth empowerment** in implementing the Neighborhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe.
- ▶ EU programming should adopt a comprehensive multi-sectoral approach to ensure **effective youth empowerment interventions** are implemented.
- ▶ The EU should collaborate with the Ugandan Government to **fast track the approval of family planning/ SRHR related policies** like the National Adolescent Health policy, the National Sexual Reproductive Health Rights policy among others.
- ▶ EU programming should **prioritise economic empowerment** so that young people engage in income-generating activities, which help reduce vulnerability in terms of not being able to afford health care.
- ▶ The EU should invest in **environmental initiatives** that involve young people, who can become agents to support a greener agenda.

<sup>7</sup> Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2020. Statistical Abstract

<sup>8</sup> Uganda. Demographic and Health Survey 2016

<sup>9</sup> Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2020. Statistical Abstract

<sup>10</sup> Uganda. Demographic and Health Survey 2016

<sup>11</sup> Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2020. Statistical Abstract

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