

**Challenge** With approximately 1.2 billion young people aged 15-24 in the world today—the largest youth population ever, **youth have tremendous capacity to contribute to the labor force, and drive positive change in their communities and around the world, individually and through highly interconnected networks.** Young people must be equipped with the right skills to navigate complexity in the world they will lead today—with rapidly changing technological advances, rising inequalities and complex economic, social, environmental challenges.




**Solution** IREX's Youth Essential Skills (YES) Toolkit is a comprehensive training resource that prepares young people for the opportunities and challenges of the future by developing their crucial soft-skills and preparing them to become adaptable learners in a time of rapid change. These skills are so important that we call them essential skills. The research-backed essential skills have been proven to contribute to workforce and entrepreneurial success, civic participation, resilience and youth leadership.



## 1. What is YES?

The toolkit is designed for young people between the ages of 14 to 29 who have completed some secondary education develops the essential skills they need to thrive today and in the future.

We offer three customizable training options:

 YES Edu	 YES Work	 YES Lead
<b>YES for Education</b> helps educators strengthen youth essential skills in school or after-school and informs skills assessment approaches.	<b>YES for Work</b> helps strengthen essential skills of workers and entrepreneurs, improves their performance, and informs assessments.	<b>YES for Leadership</b> helps youth strengthen essential skills in order to lead and contribute in their communities.

## How we developed the toolkit

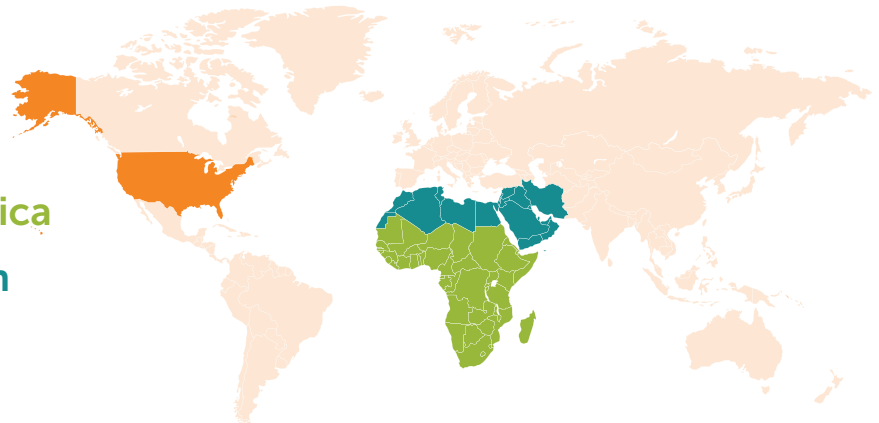
The YES Training Toolkit was developed with input and consultation from IREX's youth-serving programs around the world, research on soft-skills development for youth globally, and it draws on IREX's 50 years of experience with training and positive youth development programs worldwide. Through this process, the set of ten essential skills (See 2: The Essential Skills) was determined.




## Evidence that YES achieves results

The toolkit has been adapted to train youth across a variety of contexts; **600 youth in 18 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, MENA, and the United States.**



in Sub-Saharan Africa  
in the MENA region  
U.S.A



 YES Edu	 YES Work	 YES Lead
In Kenya, the toolkit was piloted with a group of youth at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology and showed over 30 percent growth in the essential skills that the training focused on.	In Nigeria, the toolkit was leveraged to train young employees at a scaling start-up company where 100 percent reported satisfaction with the style of the training, the value, knowledge, and skills gained.	In Tunisia, the toolkit was used to train young people in underserved communities to be leaders and community organizers who empower other youth. Within 3 months, these leaders strengthened the skills and resilience of hundreds of other youth—demonstrating their own leadership capabilities within their community.

## 2. Why YES?

Recognizing that youth have the ability to lead themselves and others, YES equips them to be in the driver's seat of their own skills development journey through fun, practical, and engaging learning. Young people need to adapt, continuously learn and navigate changes and uncertainties of complex economic, social, political and environmental realities. The key elements of YES that help achieve this embed the spirit of young people, their needs and futures at the core of the design:












- **Skills-focus:** Soft skills are essential for all the areas of the lives of young people. In addition, the labor market of the future will be won by those who can bring the skills to navigate it<sup>1</sup>.
- **Modular learning:** YES enables learning and training in small blocs where learners incorporate learning as bite-size moments into their daily lives or trainers combine YES activities into building blocs for standalone trainings or integrate them into existing curricula.
- **Youth-driven:** YES provides opportunities for youth to leverage their strengths, practice leadership roles and support other youth through peer-learning. This enables authentic and social learning.
- **Self-driven lifelong learning:** A rapidly changing world requires youth to take initiative and drive their learning as well as contribute actively; YES activates and emboldens them to do that with tools to stay motivated, on track and to personalize their own lifelong learning journey.
- **Play:** Youth are energized by amusement. YES provides opportunities for playful learning where youth are able to make decisions, exercise curiosity, and take delight in the activities.<sup>2</sup>
- **Reflection:** YES incorporates opportunities for youth to gain awareness of their own skills development processes and practice recognizing and articulating benchmarks of their learning and growth.

1 Lu, Jian. "Skills, Not Job Titles, Are the New Metric for the Labour Market." World Economic Forum, [www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/07/skills-not-job-titles-are-the-new-metric-for-the-labour-market/](http://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/07/skills-not-job-titles-are-the-new-metric-for-the-labour-market/).

2 <https://pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Towards%20a%20Pedagogy%20of%20Play.pdf>

### 3. The Essential Skills




While “soft skills,” “socio-emotional skills”, and “life skills” are commonly-used terms for describing the skills that this toolkit focuses on, we use the term “essential skills” to articulate the importance of this set of skills to a young people’s successful participation in economic and civic life. The ten essential skills were determined based on research on the skills that are not only needed today, but are also critical for youth to develop to be successful in the future.

Skill	Definition
<b>Higher Order Thinking</b> 	The ability to see an issue, take in information about it, consider the options available, and organize those options by order of priority to reach a reasonable conclusion. It includes problem solving, critical thinking, and reasoning.
<b>Collaboration</b> 	The ability to work effectively and respectfully with diverse individuals. It includes coordination, collaborative decision making, conflict resolution, negotiation, and communication within teams.
<b>Positive Self-concept</b> 	The ability to for a person to demonstrate an understanding of their own strengths and potential. It includes self-awareness, self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-worth, and sense of well-being and being valued.
<b>Adaptability</b> 	The ability to recognize, understand, learn from and adjust to changes in people, places, and circumstances. It includes the ability to embrace and make the best of the unknown.
<b>Interdisciplinarity</b> 	The ability to draw connections between different types of experiences and information. It includes applying knowledge from one area of life to another, such as sports and health or home life and school life. like health.
<b>Resilience</b> 	The ability to continue working towards goals and tasks despite difficulties. It includes developing connections with others, seeking support when dealing with challenges, and asking for help.
<b>Entrepreneurial Thinking</b> 	The ability to see and experience problems as opportunities to create value for oneself and others. It includes understanding the needs and interests of people who are affected by a problem or an opportunity. It requires obtaining available resources, thinking creatively about solutions to a problem, embracing risk, and things that are unknown.
<b>Communication</b> 	The ability to effectively express oneself. It includes active listening, knowing how to reach your audience, storytelling, making a case, and professional communication with others.
<b>Empathy</b> 	The ability to feel and understand what someone else is feeling. It involves putting yourself in another person’s shoes and seeing what it looks like from there. It includes naming emotions and understanding a person’s environment.
<b>Inclusiveness</b> 	The ability to consider or involve diverse people and treat them fair and equal. It includes considering who is present, who is missing, and who something is intended for.
<b>Learning to Learn</b> 	The practice of learning how to learn on your own by using a curious, humble and growth-focused mindset. The habit of using an ongoing reflective practice process. This requires self-motivation, embracing discomfort, struggle, risk and failure. It includes setting and tracking goals, finding support and using feedback.

## 4. Who is YES for?





The YES Toolkit is highly adaptable, enabling implementers in different locations and with diverse needs to leverage the activities, digital learning tools, lifelong learning framework and assessment resources to meet their unique set of needs to train diverse groups of youth.

Below we have outlined distinct beneficiaries and purposes for which YES can be adapted and contextualized for delivery. In all contexts, implementers can leverage diverse, accessible and affordable digital platforms, apply measurement tools to assess the impact of skill building and incorporate YES' lifelong learning tool and framework for practicing and applying skills during and after trainings.

Context	 YES Edu	 YES Work	 YES Lead
<b>Beneficiaries</b>	Educators Students	Employers Workers	Youth Serving-Programs Youth Leaders Youth in communities
<b>Purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In-school activities alongside education curriculum</li> <li>After-school programing</li> <li>Inform assessment approaches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skills development activities for workers</li> <li>Inform worker skills development goals and plan</li> <li>Inform professional development priorities and strategies for workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skills development activities for youth</li> <li>Youth program design and implementation</li> <li>Inform program and training design of assessments</li> <li>Youth leaders or trainers develop skills of other youth</li> </ul>

## 5. How can each component of this toolkit be used?

The YES Toolkit encompasses four key elements:

Component	Purpose
 Lifelong Learning Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For understanding stages in skills development</li> <li>For reflection on personal process toward skill mastery</li> <li>For evaluation of personal skill mastery</li> </ul>
 Youth Essential Skills Training Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For experiential activities that enable essential skills development</li> <li>For facilitation with a Positive Youth Development Approach</li> <li>For activity customization tips for diverse target groups</li> </ul>
 Digital Guidance and Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For digital templates and activities that complement training activities</li> <li>For practical resources on using digital platforms to help with continued learning (post-training)</li> <li>For opportunities for youth to reflect on their skills-building journey and communicate it to others using a free digital platform</li> </ul>
 Assessment Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For tailored assessment processes for measuring acquisition of skills</li> <li>For evaluation indicators for each skill</li> <li>For templates for delivering evaluations</li> </ul>

## 6. YES is Developed with Key Principles and Approaches

The following approaches and principles were prioritized to develop the toolkit based on research methodologies for youth soft skills development. The training, assessment and digital delivery methodologies draw from external research and IREX's 50 years of experience with training and positive youth development programs worldwide.

### Learning Principles:

- **Youth Leadership Development** - YES Toolkit provides opportunities for youth to practice personal leadership through self-assessment and personal reflection that enables them to own and navigate their skills development journey. In addition, youth can practice leadership within groups by opting to lead discussions in peer groups and practicing various facilitation roles that strengthen their leadership abilities.
- **Experiential:** The activities throughout the curriculum are experiential to encourage learning by doing. This approach allows for active youth participation and creates an interactive environment where participants can learn through experience and play.
- **Gender and Social Inclusion (GESI):** YES instills values and provides opportunities that ensure safety and meaningful inclusion of diverse youth, particularly marginalized youth in order to enable awareness and access to opportunity.

### Approaches:

- **Positive Youth Development (PYD):** YES incorporates a comprehensive and intentional strength-based approach to working with or on behalf of youth to increase opportunities for learning, development, leadership, positive relationships, and community engagement so that youth reach their fullest potential.
- **In-person or online learning:** The training combines online and in-person activities. The resources also offer digital learning guidance and tools for digital delivery opportunities that implementers can incorporate.
- **Tailored for audience:** YES is designed to be highly contextualizable. It recognizes that youth globally represent different cultures and live in different circumstances. The curriculum provides the opportunity to customize activities based on the needs of youth in a specific region or country and to be inclusive of youth living within different realities.
- **Learner-centered:** YES provides ways to consider the environment that youth live in and come from which contributes to their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs individually and collectively in order to inform the appropriate skills development journey.
- **Integrative:** YES complements hard skills instruction and provides opportunities where hard skills focused learning can be integrated. It is designed to be able to incorporate instruction on hard skills, including financial services, customer service, and digital literacy.