

YOUTH2030

WORKING WITH AND FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



UNITED NATIONS YOUTH STRATEGY

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UN Youth Strategy

1. Context

The world today is home to the largest generation of young people in history, 1.8 billion¹. Close to 90 per cent of them live in developing countries, where they constitute a large proportion of the population.

Connected to each other like never before, young people want to and already contribute to the resilience of their communities, proposing innovative solutions, driving social progress and inspiring political change, in urban as well as rural contexts. Young people constitute a tremendous and essential asset worth investing in, opening the door to an unparalleled multiplier effect.

At the same time, young people are also facing incredible challenges and even life-threatening risks, disproportionately carried by girls and young women in many parts of the world. These arise when accessing their rights, including to quality education, healthcare or decent work. They also arise in situations of conflict, or when young

people flee home in search of survival, or move for better opportunities. Young people also suffer interpersonal violence, are affected by the slow onsets of climate change or frontline impacts of disasters. They experience intersecting forms of marginalization, and struggle with the brunt of a global erosion of human rights and impeded access to justice.

The way in which the shifting demographics in the world are leveraged, and how young people navigate their transition into adulthood, are critical for the progress of humankind and the health of the planet. With this large and increasing number of young people across the globe, it is abundantly clear that it is only by engaging and working with them, supporting them in standing up for their rights and creating the conditions allowing them to progress and play an active role, that the international community will be able to achieve peace, security, justice, climate resilience and sustainable development for all.

¹ Aged 10 to 24 years. Noting that there is no universally agreed international definition of youth and while recognizing that the UN Secretariat for statistical purposes defines 'youth' as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, this Strategy considers other definitions in use by Agencies, Programmes and/or Member States without prejudice.

2. Role of the UN

Building on its unique global convening role, its mandate to serve the world's peoples and its role as a partner and broker, the United Nations² is uniquely placed to act as a source of protection and support for young people and a platform through which their needs can be addressed, their voice can be amplified, and their engagement can be advanced.

Moreover, youth development and youth engagement are cross-cutting issues in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development³, other internationally agreed frameworks as well as a central aspect of Security Council Resolutions 2250 (2015) and 2419 (2018), acknowledging that young people play an important and positive role in the realization of sustainable development, in the prevention of crises and in the advancement of peace.

This Youth Strategy acts as an umbrella framework to guide the entire UN as it steps up its work with and for young people across its three pillars – peace and security, human rights, and sustainable development – in all contexts. It seeks to significantly strengthen the UN's capacity to engage young people and benefit from their views, insights and ideas. It seeks to ensure the UN's work on youth issues is pursued in a coordinated, coherent and holistic manner. Doing so is an imperative, as the Secretary-General advances a series of reforms aimed at reinforcing the relevance and effectiveness of the UN, ensuring that its work delivers the maximum benefit for those it serves.

The UN fully embraces young people's diversity in all its forms. Therefore, the UN seeks to employ and advocate for methods and approaches reflective of this diversity so all young people can reach their full engagement, empowerment and development. The UN recognizes young people as rights-holders, and promotes and facilitates transparency, accountability, and responsiveness from duty bearers toward young people. The strategy uses a human-rights-based, gender-transformative, -sensitive and -responsive approach.

3. Vision

A world in which the human rights of every young person are realized; that ensures every young person is empowered to achieve their full potential; and that recognizes young people's agency, resilience and their positive contributions as agents of change.

4. Objective of the UN Youth Strategy

The Strategy aims to facilitate increased impact and expanded global, regional and country-level action to address the needs, build the agency and advance the rights of young people in all their diversity around the world, and to ensure their engagement and participation in the implementation, review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as other relevant global agendas and frameworks.

² In this document UN stands for the UN System at large and includes UN agencies, funds and programmes at the global, regional and national level.

³ Youth related targets are under several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and are interrelated.

5. Strengthening the foundations for a UN that delivers with and for young people

Young people's empowerment, development and engagement is an end in itself, as well as a means to build a better world. The UN recognizes it cannot achieve its mission without partnering with young people and ensuring they are not only heard but understood, not only engaged but empowered, and not only supporting but leading global efforts and processes. Young people need to be full-fledged partners in the United Nations work to build a better world for all, as they are both beneficiaries and partners.

Through its Youth Strategy, the UN seeks to become a Leadership Example, Knowledge and Innovation Pioneer, an Investment and Solution Catalyst, and an Accountability Leader, by converging toward commitments and carefully selected actions giving life to each of these.

These cross-cutting system-wide actions and interventions, listed below, will support the overall capacity of the UN to advance and deliver on the five key priority areas outlined in the subsequent section of this strategy.

A Leadership Example:

The UN will support youth leadership across the organization and build staff awareness and capacity on youth-related issues.

Mainstreaming structures: Ensure a Youth Focal Point function in each UN country team and mission, to support the system-wide country level coordination on youth.

Youth engagement platforms: Consider putting in place mechanisms, such as e.g. youth advisory boards, within each relevant UN entity, to provide a channel for input and feedback from young people on UN work. This should be done in ways that reflect the diversity of young people and their organisations

Dialogue opportunities: Establish regular online and offline engagements between young people and UN Senior managers, including the Secretary-General.

Capacity building: Provide orientation briefing on youth issues to Resident Coordinators, UN Entity representatives, and other senior management positions. Build the capacity of staff to understand and address youth needs including by exploring the integration of training and capacity building components into existing training and capacity building programmes across the UN system.

Roster of experts: Combine existing rosters of experts on youth issues and expand it to become more diverse.

Strengthening internship programmes: Engage with relevant decision-making bodies and identify innovative solutions with a view of establishing minimum quality standards across the UN for internship programmes and advance efforts to ensure adequate compensation of interns and widening of the intern pool.

Talent management: Expand and replicate in UN entities successful human resource modalities for attracting young talent, such as the Young Professional Programme, Management Reassignment Programme, fellowship programmes and UN youth volunteers. Promote across the UN system mobility and support career development of young staff.

A Knowledge and Innovation Pioneer:

The UN will strengthen knowledge production and management systems; become a credible source of expertise on youth development and engagement; and facilitate evidence-based global awareness on the realities and needs of the world's young people.

Data tool: Set forth comprehensive data tool for monitoring global, regional and national progress in young people's development using SDG, WPAY, and other indicators, with continued efforts to expand the availability of disaggregated data.

Online knowledge platform: Develop a system-wide repository with easy access to all youth-related knowledge and programmes across the UN; this could include a clearinghouse of good practices, case studies, research material, etc.

UN Youth Academy: Organize a recurring UN Youth Academy bringing together the UN System and diverse stakeholders to discuss youth realities, trends and prospects while sharing knowledge and experiences.

Analysis: Establish a streamlined approach to country-level youth situation analysis and youth-specific indicators as part of the UNDAF/UNSF/Common Country Assessments and national development frameworks, and explore regional and global youth reporting that connects these national youth situation analyses.

Common research agenda: Identify subjects of common interest and new joint and forward-looking research, including under-recognised challenges and potentials of young people.

Youth Innovation Labs: Drawing on accurate diagnostics, convene multi-stakeholders working group at the country-level to reflect on innovative solutions to existing challenges.

Youth-led innovation: Provide targeted and enabling support to youth-led organizations and initiatives to pilot new models and interventions. Disseminate results widely.

Polling: Undertake polling initiatives among young people at global, regional, national and local levels to gather their perspectives and inform the UN's work and dedicated processes.

An Investment and Solution Catalyst:

The UN will accelerate resource mobilization efforts and facilitate partnership solutions to advance the implementation of the UN Youth Strategy and strengthen the funding base and mechanisms for youth-focused programming and youth-led actions at all levels.

A Global Youth Investment and Partnership Platform⁴: Create an online umbrella platform to attract and direct investment in youth-related programming towards strengthening existing UN funds that support youth and key UN youth initiatives.

A common resource mobilization strategy: Formulate a common, innovative and coordinated resource mobilization strategy with a specific focus on mainstreaming youth across existing funding mechanisms and identifying funding solutions for under-financed areas, such as support for youth-led initiatives, movements, networks and organisations, youth participation mechanisms and youth policy work.

Results-based communications: Adopt a system-wide results-based communications approach for donors to clearly see the impact of their investments.

Solution-based partnerships: Develop pilot initiatives exploring different models of shared responsibility and actions between the UN and young people. This could include co-conducting evaluations with young people.

Youth participation funding: Identify ways to ensure dedicated funding for youth participation in all relevant UN entities and at all levels.

Joint Programmes: Mobilize greater resources at the country level by strengthening and expanding UN joint programmes on youth.

⁴ The exact set up and modalities are to be explored in further details.

An Accountability Leader:

The UN will seek to ensure UN entities successfully address youth issues through their programming; effectively and meaningfully engage young people in their work; and track budget allocations and expenditures.

Guidelines: Prepare general guidelines for all UN entities to respect the principles of responsive youth development and meaningful youth engagement.

Markers: Employ a youth marker system to track progress and ensure UN programming contributes to youth empowerment and intergenerational equity.

Commitments: Encourage youth-related commitments and goals by senior UN management as part of their annual compacts.

Evaluation: Develop a system-wide approach to impartial impact evaluation of the UN's youth programming.

Review: Conduct an annual review of implementation of the Youth Strategy (see section 7).

Transparency: Make public information on the implementation of the Youth Strategy.

6. Priority Areas of the UN Youth Strategy

The UN is committed to strengthening its capacity to meet new demands and deliver more effectively with and for young people, in line with the ongoing UN Reforms. To do so, the UN must intensify its evidence-based advocacy, policy engagement, partnership and programme

efforts to strengthen international, regional and national commitments to prioritize, invest in, engage and empower young people. In this regard, the UN will leverage both existing and forthcoming system-wide initiatives⁵ and step up its efforts in the interconnected priority areas outlined below, which will be operationalized and further substantiated through the Strategy's action plan⁶.

⁵ Such as the Global Partnership for Education, the UN Secretary-General's Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health, the Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescent, the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action and other relevant frameworks, existing and forthcoming.

⁶ Action Plan forthcoming

FIRST PRIORITY:

Engagement, Participation and Advocacy
- Amplify youth voices for the promotion
of a peaceful, just and sustainable world

The UN will:

Mainstream: Incorporate across all entities of the UN and work relating to all UN pillars, the need to meaningfully and sustainably engage and partner with young people and their organizations, networks and movements, through formal and informal mechanisms and platforms to realize universal rights-based youth participation;

Expand: Review, improve and widen existing UN modalities for cooperation, dialogue and partnerships with youth-led organizations, networks and movements, as well as young people outside of organizations, with a view to ensure concerted efforts to engage those representing most marginalized young people, at international, regional, national and local levels;

Assist: Provide guidance and technical support to UN entities for the establishment (where absent) or strengthening of youth engagement mechanisms (building on lessons learned);

Engage: Advocate for expanded and meaningful youth participation in intergovernmental forums at the global and regional levels, particularly those related to the SDGs, including through extensive and streamlined support to youth delegates and representatives;

Set standards: Advocate for governments to transform the way in which they engage young

people nationally and locally, and apply the principles of meaningful and sustainable youth participation;

Connect: Enhance how the UN reaches out, communicates with, listens to and responds to young people, including through a strategic use of its convening capacity and partnerships with tech and communications companies for expansion of large-scale, multi-media outreach and campaigns relevant to young people;

Strengthen: Reinforce and expand the UN's capacities and resources to identify, value and showcase contributions of diverse young people;

Amplify: Partner with young people who globally, nationally or locally advocate for the values of the UN to amplify and reinforce their voices and increase the reach and impact of global youth movements they are building, including in the context of major UN Summits such as the HLPF under the General Assembly, the Secretary-General's Climate Summit, the 75th anniversary of the UN in 2020, etc.

SECOND PRIORITY:

Informed and Healthy Foundations -
Support young people's greater access to
quality education and health services

The UN will:

Advocate for quality education: Engage Member States and other partners to ensure universal access to quality education; develop and deliver quality and inclusive education for young people that is learner-centered, adopts a lifelong learning approach, is relevant to their lives and the social,

economic and environmental needs of their communities, promotes sustainable lifestyles and sustainable development;

Promote non-formal education: Support and advance youth policy frameworks that include support to non-formal education and its role in the development of young people's knowledge, skills and competencies;

Ensure accessible and youth-responsive health services and healthy environments: Incorporate an approach that is inclusive of young people in the UN's support to strengthening national health systems, and promote efforts to provide universal health coverage while addressing social determinants of young people's health and wellbeing;

Support youth-friendly mental health services: Ensure accessibility of youth-friendly mental health services, within the greater context of universal health coverage;

Support sexual and reproductive health and rights: Leverage the UN's advocacy and programmatic capacities to expand young people's access to youth-friendly and rights-based sexual and reproductive health services, comprehensive sexuality education and information.

THIRD PRIORITY:

Economic Empowerment through Decent Work - Support young people's greater access to decent work and productive employment

The UN will:

Uphold global commitment: Renew and strengthen efforts toward decent work for young people by focusing on evidence-based, scalable and innovative solutions and alliances, that translate into positive outcomes for all, locally and globally, including in fragile situations;

Advocate for a balanced approach: Engage Member States and other partners to advocate for a balanced approach to stimulate the youth labour demand and prompt improvements in skills development systems, with the objective of easing the school-to-work transition and reducing the youth NEET⁷ rate, particularly among young women and disadvantaged youth;

Guide and support: Support Member States and other partners in their efforts to create youth-enabling employment and self-employment ecosystems and to develop and operationalize strategies that prioritize the improvement of both the quantity and quality of jobs for young people through, e.g. public and private investments, economic and labour market policies, skills development, transition to the formal economy, social protection, youth rights at work, and active youth engagement;

Promote access to services and productive assets: Ensure access of young people - who are navigating a school-to-work transition in an increasingly dynamic context - to integrated and adequate services as well as productive resources, such as land, finance, digital and other technology related resources, both in rural and urban areas;

⁷ Not in education, employment, or training

Foster a just transition to a low-carbon and green economy:

Engage Member States and other partners to accelerate the transition towards green and climate friendly economies through mitigation and adaptation strategies that improve energy efficiency and limit greenhouse gas emissions; and similarly, support Member States and other partners in enhancing the capacity of the green economy to create more and better employment opportunities for young people, in wage and self-employment.

FOURTH PRIORITY:

Youth and Human Rights – Protect and promote the rights of young people and support their civic and political engagement

The UN will:

Protect and promote young people's human rights:

Prioritize advocacy, policy development and programming to safeguard the human rights of young people and prevent and address widespread and grave human rights violations experienced by young people and ensure a strengthened focus on young people experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination and abuse, as well as young people's access to justice;

Raise awareness about the specific situation of young people's rights:

Promote a deeper understanding of the youth-specific barriers and challenges young people face in accessing their human rights; use this information to identify and advocate for actions that could facilitate young people's access to their rights;

Mainstream human rights:

Promote the mainstreaming of all rights of young people (including their right to participate in public affairs) into the work of treaty bodies, special procedures and other human rights mechanisms, and highlight the importance of protecting young human rights defenders and their organizations;

Promote participation in political and public affairs:

Leverage the capacity of the UN to promote young people's right to participate in public affairs, including in political and civic processes, platforms and institutions at all levels, such as elections, constitution-making processes, political parties and parliaments;

Develop capacity and human rights education:

Increase UN's efforts to promote human rights education and training for youth, as well as global citizenship and sustainable development education, without discrimination, to foster civic awareness and participation, volunteerism and a culture of peace and non-violence among young people.

FIFTH PRIORITY:

Peace and Resilience Building – Support young people as catalysts for Peace and Security & Humanitarian Action

The UN will:

Promote an enabling environment:

Recognize young people's important and positive contribution to peace and security, prevention of violence, disaster risk reduction, humanitarian and climate action, and foster and protect an

environment conducive to young people's actions (including through reintegration, recovery and resilience activities for youth affected by conflict);

Promote youth participation in formal peace processes: Encourage and facilitate the meaningful participation of young people in all phases of formal peace and peacebuilding processes;

Promote safe public spaces: Ensure young people have physical areas to gather to live, learn and work, especially in conflict situations, informal settlements, slums, and refugee camps;

Convene and buttress partnerships: Strengthen local, national, regional and global partnerships and collaboration, including between youth-led organizations and governments, including through youth, peace and security coalitions, as well as climate change mitigation and adaptation, and disaster risk reduction initiatives;

Foster continuous dialogue: Establish and support inclusive, representative, democratic and structured dialogue and consultation platforms for young people's contribution to peace, security, humanitarian and climate actions;

Reinforce capacity: Reinforce the capacity of youth-led organizations involved in peace, security, humanitarian and climate action to increase the impact of their work and their organizational sustainability, as well as reinforce capacity of institutional actors to work with young people;

Expand opportunities: Create spaces for young people to contribute to the promotion of a culture of peace through participation in intercultural and interreligious dialogue to prevent conflict. Create and promote opportunities for young people to use their skills and networks to develop and foster counter-narratives to messages of violence, extremism and radicalization;

Protect and support youth in humanitarian settings: Ensure integrated support for young people in humanitarian settings with a focus on their protection (particularly young women and girls), as well as their engagement in all phases of humanitarian action, including by building their capacity.

7. Coordination, Governance and Operationalization

The ownership of the UN Youth Strategy is equally shared by all members of the UN system at the global, regional and national levels.

The Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth will be the public face of the UN Youth Strategy and will lead global advocacy efforts and its High-Level Steering Committee in support of its successful implementation.

COORDINATION AND GOVERNANCE:

The governance of the UN Youth Strategy will be rooted in existing global, regional and national mechanisms and reinforced by a High-Level Steering Committee.

A successful implementation of the UN Youth Strategy will directly depend on effective and efficient collaboration between UN entities as well as ingenious synergies among the priorities and actions outlined in the Strategy and its Action Plan.

The implementation of the UN Youth Strategy will benefit from the strategic guidance of a High-Level Steering Committee composed of:

- a) The Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth
- b) The IANYD co-chairs
- c) a select number of biennially rotating UN Entities (one or two per priority area whose work is central to the Strategy (at ASG level)
- d) 2 biennially rotating representatives of a global youth-led platform/organization.

The High-Level Steering Committee will be chaired by the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth (as the Secretary-General’s representative on youth issues).

The High-Level Steering Committee will also seek to ensure alignment with other UN processes and the UN reform, guide effective linkages and synergies at all levels, and guide the efforts to mobilize resources and leverage partnerships in support of the strategy. The High-Level Steering Committee will identify a suitable arrangement for its interactions with and reporting to the UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) and will ensure the active engagement of parts of the UN Secretariat and System that address areas of the Strategy that go beyond sustainable development.

Annual reports on Strategy’s implementation progress will be prepared by the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth with input from the IANYD and will be discussed by the High-Level Steering Committee, and submitted to the UNSDG and the Secretary-General’s Executive Committee.

At the global level, the Interagency Network on Youth Development (IANYD) will pursue its objective to “increase the effectiveness of UN work in youth development by strengthening collaboration and exchange among all relevant UN entities” and support the implementation of the Youth Strategy in cooperation with the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth.

This work includes reviewing overall implementation progress, gathering and analyzing data, generating and sharing lessons learned, providing input to reports, etc.

OPERATIONALIZATION:

With a view to ensure efficient exchange of information and ideas between the country level and the High-level Steering Committee, Regional Interagency coordination mechanisms on youth will be regularly engaged by the Global IANYD to contribute input. It is expected that Regional IANYDs will closely collaborate with UN Country Teams on the Strategy’s implementation and review.

While the strategy will span 12 years until 2030, an initial action plan will be developed and presented to an expanded Senior Management Group meeting (include relevant specialized agencies) for information. The initial action plan will cover the first four years, to then be reviewed, adjusted and renewed for the subsequent quadrennial phases.

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