



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Social and Human  
Sciences Sector



# Advancing Youth Rights

## Participatory approaches for youth policy design

In today's rapidly changing world, the potential of the SDGs to be truly transformative requires inclusive approaches that can mobilize new and diverse constituencies. Recognizing and advancing the rights of the most educated, interconnected and agile youth generation ever, is critical in this quest. An appropriate, enabling environment can trigger youth innovation, creativity and solutions.

Inclusive and efficient youth policies are the cornerstone to building such environment. While no global binding framework exists, there is a growing international consensus on principles for youth policy-making, rooted in the UN World Programme of Action for Youth adopted in 1995 and in the 1998 and 2019 Lisbon Declarations on Youth Policies and Programmes.

Efficient youth policies require whole-of-society approaches to addressing youth issues, broad ownership and cross-sector engagement. They also necessitate meaningful engagement of youth in all their diversity – particularly those furthest behind: the most vulnerable and marginalized, the potentially or effectively radicalized, the ones engaging in violence and those suffering the scourge of conflict.

▲ **Today, an estimated 1.2 billion people in the world are between the ages of 15 and 24, or one out of every six people worldwide.** Close to 90 per cent of them live in developing countries, where they constitute a large proportion of the population. By 2030, the target date for achieving the SDGs, the number of youth is expected to have grown by 7 percent, to nearly 1.3 billion.

▲ **In 2014, 122 countries had instituted a national youth policy or law – a 50% increase compared to 2013.** A further 37 countries were either developing a new or revising their current youth policy. These numbers show that national governments are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that adequate legislation and policies are needed to respond to young peoples' concerns, aspirations, ideas and demands.

# What UNESCO does

UNESCO's Operational Strategy on Youth 2014-2021 recognizes the importance of youth policies and aims to support national youth policy processes across the globe. Thanks to its multidisciplinary mandate (spanning from education to the sciences, culture and communication) UNESCO's work on youth leverages the wealth of knowledge, expertise and capacity in all these areas and translates them into comprehensive and systemic interventions with, for and by youth.

A policy process is complex and incorporates a variety of layers: from elaboration to implementation, and from monitoring and evaluation to policy revision. These processes engage a multitude of stakeholders from different levels of governance, specializations, population groups and sectors. UNESCO provides four types of support for the elaboration, implementation and revision of youth policies, with a focus on engaging all stakeholders, particularly youth and youth organizations.

## Examples of what UNESCO does

- ▲ Generates and provides **youth-specific policy advice, knowledge and standards** in multiple policy areas within UNESCO's mandate including education, employability, social development, democratic representation, civic engagement, science, culture, sport, communication and health;
- ▲ Contextualizes and applies **technical guidance for whole-of-society and whole-of-government processes** for the participatory development or revision of transversal and inclusive National youth policies;
- ▲ Develops/enhances **youth capacities** to engage in public debate and policy processes, including through tailored training on leadership, civic skills, policy analysis and dialogue, strategic planning and advocacy, media production and monitoring, strategic communication;
- ▲ Encourages **national dialogues** and building stakeholders' capacities on holistic youth development;
- ▲ Promotes and advocates for safe **spaces and methodologies for youth engagement** at different levels of the policy process or cycle.





### ***Vietnam (2018-2019)***

In 2018-2019, UNESCO worked with the government and the Youth Union of Vietnam to design and apply a participatory policy design process to promote youth rights in the country. In this context, a Youth Advisory Group was set up, representing the diversity of youth in Vietnam (including the LGBT community, ethnic minority groups, youth with disabilities, Entrepreneurs etc.), as an independent body to influence the development of the revised National Youth Law and to ensure that it is inclusive and relevant to the realities of youth in Vietnam. Since August 2018, this group of 30 members have been invited to a series of multi-stakeholder consultation meetings and given the chance to lay out their needs and priorities for the Youth Law. They were also trained by UNESCO on holistic youth development and youth civic engagement, as well as on collecting and generating knowledge on youth needs in Vietnam.

### ***NET-MED Youth (Networks of Mediterranean Youth, 2014-2018)***

NET-MED Youth was a regional and intersectorial flagship project funded by the European Union and implemented by UNESCO in 9 countries from the Eastern and Western Basins of the Mediterranean Sea. Since its launch in 2014, NET-MED Youth supported the planning and revision of youth policies in 8 Arab countries (Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia) with the active and unprecedented participation of partner youth CSOs. In addition, the project facilitated the exchange of experiences, tools and knowledge between youth organizations and stakeholders from the concerned countries, with a view to facilitate the implementation of existing legal and policy frameworks related to youth, as well as their alignment with the SDGs.

### ***Zambia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Tonga, Sudan, South Sudan, among others***

Between 2012-2019, UNESCO has supported the participatory development and revision of a number of National youth policies in different countries in all regions. These processes engaged various stakeholders, from government to civil society, multilateral donors and agencies, academia, as well as young people. Youth engagement and participation was facilitated from the design of the review process to its implementation and finalization, through the direct involvement of the national youth councils/platforms, as well as of other youth NGOs and associations representing all provinces and different groups of youth.

### ***El Salvador***

In 2016, UNESCO supported the establishment of a multi-partisan Group of Young Parliamentarians, composed of members of parliament below the age of 35, the group worked to develop an agenda of inclusive policies with an intergenerational perspective, and promote mechanisms for youth participation in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policies.

# Engaging with us

Engaging with us means committing to building the mid-term and long-term conditions for youth to thrive, both as individuals and as members of their societies. It means building, with us and with youth, an appropriate environment where youth are enabled to engage meaningfully, realize their rights and transform our societies for the better. Engaging with UNESCO on this front implies a commitment to:

- ▲ **Evidence-informed approaches:** our work respects specific contexts and realities – there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Each policy project includes a phase of evidence and data collection about the characteristics of youth, the different stakeholders concerned, and the various quantitative and qualitative youth development indicators.
- ▲ **Shared ownership:** our intervention seeks to ensure ownership by all primary stakeholders, including government and youth, in all their diversity. This is done primarily through methods that allow for multi-stakeholder consultations and the joint design and management of policy initiatives.
- ▲ **Youth at the table:** we work to engage young people to meaningfully participate and co-drive policy processes, from design through to implementation and evaluation.
- ▲ **Building alliances across groups and sectors:** our intervention seeks to identify, bring together, and collaborate with all actors working on or influencing specific aspects of the policy process, in addition to the public authorities and youth organizations. From UN agencies and UN country teams to research institutions, NGOs, bilateral organizations or other intergovernmental organizations, UNESCO pays particular attention to maximizing efficiency by combining efforts and expertise around common objectives.

Working together allows advancing the realization of Agenda 2030, in which youth are recognized as key stakeholders, of the UN Youth Strategy, as well as of the UN Security Council Resolutions 2250 and 2419 on Youth, Peace and Security. It also supports the implementation of regional frameworks and commitments to youth, such as the African Youth Charter and the Ibero-American Convention on Youth Rights.



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