



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Social and Human
Sciences Sector



Youth-led Solutions

Amplifying youth's civic footprint and connecting youth

Youth have a unique characteristic: they build identity and make choices based both on their present experience of the world and on their expectations of what adulthood will look like in the future. They are the only group in society that is intrinsically at the cusp between the old and the new, between mainstream and innovation.

Being the largest, most educated and most interconnected youth generation to date, **they increasingly seek to influence present and future realities**. Civic engagement becomes a prime gateway in this, enabling them to transform our world for the better, integrate their societies, while also developing life skills and values.

Youth civic engagement is burgeoning. From young global advocates to social innovators; from social movements to start-ups and youth media; from community workers to international volunteers, **youth are raising their voices and providing valuable solutions** to ongoing challenges.

Yet, the youth civic footprint remains affected by capacity gaps, lack of inter- and intra-generational partnerships, restrictive legislation, and limited awareness of the value of youth civic engagement. Even if youth-led actions and solutions are developed, young people are often challenged when trying to scale or sustain them in the long-term.

▲ 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; and approximately 1.2 billion are between 10 and 19, or nearly 16 percent of the entire population. 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. Youth development and youth engagement are cross-cutting issues in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, acknowledging that young people play an important role in the realization of sustainable development and in the advancement of peace.

What UNESCO does

UNESCO believes in the value of youth civic engagement and youth-led solutions. In line with our Operational Strategy on Youth (2014-2021), our approach to meaningfully engaging with youth entails working with youth as change-makers and partners, and not solely as beneficiaries. We apply cutting-edge approaches and programmes that contribute to shaping an enabling ecosystem for meaningful, effective and sustainable youth civic engagement.

To amplify youth's civic footprint and solutions, UNESCO:

- ▲ **Builds bridges:** through tailored technical guidance, we facilitate intergenerational and multi-actor dialogues and partnerships on youth civic engagement, particularly at national and local levels.
- ▲ **Connects youth solutions:** we support youth-led spaces that enable youth-to-youth networking and collaboration to amplify youth voices and scale solutions in UNESCO's areas of competence.
- ▲ **Expands capacities:** through both in-house expertise and partnerships with high-value CSOs, we strengthen capacities of youth to initiate, test or scale their actions, social enterprises and solutions. We also develop capacities of non-youth actors to promote youth civic engagement through policy and programme design.
- ▲ **Stimulates youth-led knowledge production:** we train and engage with youth to foster youth-led action-oriented research and we channel young researchers' work into policy and programme debates and design.
- ▲ **Triggers inspiration:** through online storytelling, we share exceptional and inspiring stories of youth-led change, from a diversity of youth around the world.

In designing and delivering our own work, we strive to engage youth at all levels, from global to local. Between 2017 and 2019, over 200 staff at UNESCO headquarters and field offices have been trained on how to meaningfully engage youth in planning and delivering UNESCO's programme.



UNESCO Youth Spaces - Connecting young change makers

The UNESCO Youth Spaces Initiative (YSI) is a bottom-up approach to youth engagement, based on the principles of youth ownership, inclusion and transparency. A “Youth Space” provides a sustained and expanding opportunity for youth to continuously engage in debate, action or knowledge-sharing on a theme of common concern, within UNESCO’s fields of competence. It may be initiated through an event, project or initiative but is not limited to it, and always implies follow-up action. In 2018-2019, UNESCO enabled over 15 youth spaces at different levels, addressing a number of SDGs. The different Youth Spaces converge within a global Youth Community of Practice designed by youth, and launched at the 11th UNESCO Youth Forum (November 2019, UNESCO Headquarters, Paris).

#YouthOfUNESCO

UNESCO’s global online storytelling initiative, #YouthOfUNESCO represents the stories of change of over 200 youth who are overcoming their conditions and shaping their communities towards what they aspire them to be. Nested in UNESCO’s Youth Community on Facebook, this initiative has been inspiring over 60,000 young people around the world and showcasing the impressive work of some of the most innovative and resilient young minds in the world.

West Africa Youth Civic Engagement Initiative

Throughout 2018-2019, UNESCO trained and supported 16 youth organizations, in eight countries in West Africa (Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, Benin, Guinea and Togo) in designing and implementing action-oriented research on youth civic engagement. In parallel, through UNESCO’s new tool on youth civic engagement, a series of multi-actor intergenerational dialogue workshops were organized in Nigeria and in Côte d’Ivoire that produced a common understanding of youth civic engagement in these countries and a joint action agenda. Sixteen members of youth organizations were also trained on how to apply the tool for national dialogues in other countries in the region.

Youth Funshop on Sport and the SDGs

Part of the UNESCO Youth Spaces Initiative, the Funshop on Sport and the SDGs is a “workshop” infused with sports-inspired fun and designed to boost the capacities of young leaders to use sport for positive social transformation. The 2017 and 2019 editions of the Funshop in Asia-Pacific have enabled 93 young activists to design and implement sport-led actions that address SDGs 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 13 and 16. The initiative has also generated an online Youth and Sport Task Force bringing together all these active young leaders to exchange, learn from, and inspire one-another.

#Estamos Comprometidos

“Más Ideas, Menos quejas” – “More Ideas, less complaints”. True to its motto, this initiative supports and gives visibility to innovative, creative and collaborative actions of young change makers in Latin America that work to advance the implementation of the SDGs and address social, economic and environmental challenges. Launched in 2017, in partnership with Ashoka and Socialab, it has so far supported and connected (through its three editions) over 2,500 youth-led solutions, creating a vibrant online and offline young change makers movement, while also mobilized collaborations with 45 CSOs and private sector companies in the region.

Engaging with us

Engaging with us means recognizing the value of youth in improving our societies and providing solutions to persisting challenges. We engage with policy-makers, academia, the private sector and development actors to advance youth civic engagement, not only within established, traditional spaces and processes, but also through innovative, transformative spaces and actions owned by youth themselves.

Engaging with UNESCO on this front can take multiple forms, including:

- ▲ cooperation frameworks with national and local public authorities;
- ▲ public-private partnerships;
- ▲ technical collaboration and cross-fertilization at policy or programme level (particularly with UN agencies or other technical agencies);
- ▲ policy-research cooperation frameworks with academic institutions;
- ▲ direct support and collaboration with young change makers and youth organizations on implementing or scaling their solutions (through, for example, seed-funding, capacity development, access to networks);
- ▲ co-design and application of innovative tools and approaches to support youth civic engagement;
- ▲ media campaigns, public advocacy and outreach.

Working together means contributing to advancing the realization of Agenda 2030 (in which youth are recognized as key stakeholders) of the UN Youth Strategy, as well as of 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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**Sustainable
Development
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UNESCO
Social and Human Sciences Sector
7 place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP – France

✉ a.schischlik@unesco.org ; youth@unesco.org
🌐 en.unesco.org/youth
🐦 @UNESCO

📘 UNESCOyouth

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