



UNITED
NATIONS

WORLD YOUTH REPORT

YOUTH AND THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE *World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, prepared by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, examines the mutually supportive roles of the new agenda and current youth development efforts. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs provides an interface between global policies in the economic, social and environmental spheres and national action. The United Nations *World Youth Report*, a biennial flagship publication, offers Member States and other stakeholders information and analysis to take stock of progress made in addressing youth issues, assess policy gaps and chart possible policy responses.

This *Report* provides insight into the role of young people in sustainable development in the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and related frameworks, in particular the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development and the World Programme of Action for Youth. The *Report* considers the role the 2030 Agenda can play in enhancing youth development efforts and examines how evidence-based youth policies can help accelerate youth-related objectives. In doing so, the *Report* explores the critical role young people have in the implementation of sustainable development efforts at all levels.

YOUTH AND THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: ADVANCING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Far from being mere beneficiaries of the 2030 Agenda, young people have been active architects in its development and continue to be engaged in the frameworks and processes that support its implementation, follow-up and review. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda represented the culmination of an extensive three-year process involving Member States and civil society, including youth organizations, in the development of specific goals and targets—and marked the beginning of a 15-year journey to achieve sustainable development by 2030.

YOUTH AND THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT





Today, there are 1.2 billion young people aged 15 to 24 years, accounting for 16 per cent of the global population.¹ The active engagement of youth in sustainable development efforts is central to achieving sustainable, inclusive and stable societies by the target date, and to averting the worst threats and challenges to sustainable development, including the impacts of climate change, unemployment, poverty, gender inequality, conflict, and migration.

While all the Sustainable Development Goals are critical to youth development, this *Report* focuses primarily on the areas of education and employment, underlining the realization of targets under these Goals as fundamental to overall youth development. Issues related to other Goals—including gender equality, good health, reducing inequality, combating poverty and hunger, and action on environmental issues and climate change—are also addressed briefly within the scope of the *Report*.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION IN THE 2030 AGENDA

More than two years into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, unacceptably high numbers of young people are still experiencing poor education and employment outcomes.

In education, 142 million youth of upper secondary age are out of school, and upper secondary enrolment rates average only 14 per cent in low-income countries. Moreover, almost 30 per cent of the poorest 12- to 14-year olds have never attended school, and many of the youth of the future are still unable to obtain an acceptable primary education. In many regions, young women face particular challenges in terms of securing and completing an education. Disparities within and between countries

in educational participation among youth are stark, with female gender, poverty, rurality, disability, and migrant/refugee status all being major elements of disadvantage. Inequalities in access are reinforced by discrimination and violence often directed towards these same groups.

Even though the global economy has started to recover, youth employment has worsened in recent years. There are presently 71 million young people unemployed, and many millions more are in precarious or informal work. ILO estimates that 156 million youth in low- and middle-income countries are living in poverty even though they are employed.

The challenges of securing and retaining decent work are even more serious and complex for vulnerable and marginalized youth including young women, those living in humanitarian settings, youth with disabilities, migrant youth, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth. While entrepreneurship offers opportunities for some youth, a diverse and robust employment strategy must include options and opportunities for all young people in society.

At the level of global policy, finance and measurement are major issues that need to be addressed as part of worldwide youth development efforts. At the national level, policy and programmatic responses to the Sustainable Development Goals have been slow and should be accelerated. The *Report* includes case studies to highlight ways of building successful programmes that address the individual and socioeconomic contexts in which young people actually live, rather than simply repeating the skills-for-employability rhetoric which supposes that there are formal sector jobs available if only young people were not so unprepared. Equally, such programmes view entrepreneurship practically, as a part of livelihood strategy, rather than through an ideological lens. They believe young people can succeed in business but need support and face risks.

¹ United Nations, *World Population Prospects 2017*, available from <https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/>.



It is important to recognize that the human rights and flourishing of youth are about more than successful transitions to employment. Young people have aspirations that are far broader and that need to be valued and supported. Approaches that focus on prioritizing youth participation, respecting youth rights, and addressing youth aspirations are key. Rather than rating the success of programmes on narrow measures of educational or employment attainment, it is crucial that institutional, programme and policy evaluations be more firmly grounded in young people's own accounts of what they value for their human development and for the sustainable development of their communities and this shared planet.

In the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal 17, developed nations are pledging to fully implement official development assistance (ODA) obligations, and many are committed to focusing that aid on countries most in need. In this regard, the 2030 Agenda requests donor countries to consider providing at least 0.20 per cent of gross national income (GNI) as ODA to least developed countries. On top of this, Goal 17 sets a number of targets related to technology transfer, investment and trade aimed at encouraging greater investment in developing countries in ways that promote sustainable development.

Beyond these broad commitments, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda provides for mechanisms to boost collaboration between governments, civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders in the areas of technology, infrastructure development and investment, and poverty alleviation. Importantly for the youth employment challenge, the Agenda specifically commits countries to promoting stable and affordable access to finance in support of small and medium-sized enterprises, which are essential for promoting job creation. For developed countries, the Agenda provides important targets for increasing foreign aid.

YOUTH POLICIES AND EVIDENCE FOR THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The *World Youth Report* looks at the role data and evidence play in the development and implementation of policies for achieving the Goals and targets set out in the 2030 Agenda. Evidence-based youth policies, tailored and adapted to national and (where possible) local contexts, help ensure that youth development challenges are addressed. The *Report* highlights key elements that help ensure a youth policy is effective, including providing political leadership and strategic vision; securing adequate budget and resource allocations; using timely and accurate data on the situation of young people; utilizing the knowledge, experience and expertise of young people in the design, implementation and evaluation of the youth policy; mainstreaming and integrating youth policies across sectors; taking into account the linkages and impacts of policy objectives; and developing a transparent monitoring and accountability framework.

The *Report* also makes the case that relevant and timely data on how much and how well public financial resources have been utilized to achieve youth-related goals are essential for addressing gaps and improving the effectiveness of existing spending. There are important lessons to be learned from recent efforts to monitor spending in other cross-cutting areas such as gender, children and climate.

The *Report* further underlines the need to strengthen youth participation mechanisms to facilitate young people's engagement in policies and activities that enhance sustainable development efforts. Particular attention should be given to increasing youth involvement in national sustainable development coordination councils, working with national youth councils, expanding the United Nations Youth Delegate Programme and other



opportunities for youth representation, and ensuring that young people contribute to voluntary national reviews of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals.

One of the most serious impediments to effectively meeting youth development challenges under the 2030 Agenda is the lack of timely and accurate age-disaggregated data on the situation of youth. While 90 of the 232 indicators developed to measure implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals can be considered relevant to young people, efforts to collect data on these indicators reveal a widespread lack of age-disaggregated data. The statistical annex to the present *Report* details the available data and data gaps. Bridging the large gaps in data availability and addressing data inequalities between and within countries will require significant capacity-building, substantial financial investment, and innovative approaches to the collection, use and dissemination of accurate and timely data, especially in the least developed countries.

If appropriately leveraged, the data revolution and the emergence of new technologies can provide enormous opportunities to amass a significant amount of data on the situation of youth. Greater efforts to foster public-private partnerships between the Government, the private sector, civil society and academia are critical in this context.

LOCALIZING THE 2030 AGENDA: THE ROLE OF YOUTH

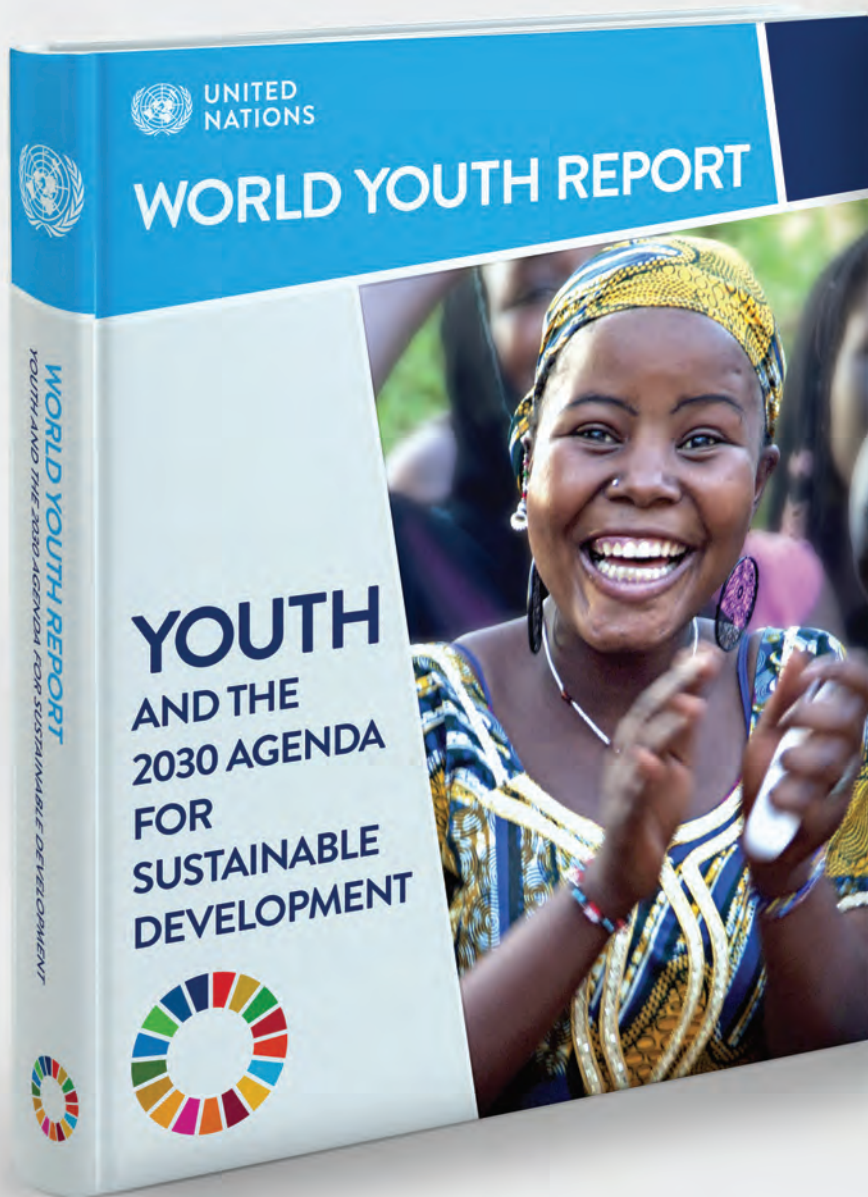
While the international community will play an essential role in providing overall leadership by bringing stakeholders together, channelling international financial support, and providing technical assistance, real solutions to the economic and social challenges facing youth will begin

and end at home. Governments should therefore support those youth initiatives and activities at the grass-roots and national levels that contribute to the realization of the 2030 Agenda.

Critical to the success of the 2030 Agenda are the role of young people in engaging with local and national government in delivering on policies and programmes on the ground; the role of public-private partnerships in driving the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including financing and harnessing technology for data collection and utilization; and the role of youth participation in informing equitable and diverse policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

CONCLUSION

The *World Youth Report* emphasizes that the Goals, targets and instruments incorporated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development offer increased opportunities to advance youth development objectives in the context of social, economic and environmental sustainable development efforts. When coupled with existing efforts to advance youth policy development and implementation, both through targeted youth policies and the mainstreaming of youth issues, the new development landscape offers innumerable opportunities for young people to thrive. However, for these efforts to be successful, much more is needed in terms of political commitment, financing, measurement, data collection, and targeted interventions in support of youth. In the areas of education and employment, large gaps remain in the input needed to realize the Goals and targets set out in Agenda 2030 and complementary frameworks.



<http://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/world-youth-report/wyr2018.html>