



The World Programme of Action for Youth – a guide for action on youth development

The emergence of a United Nations Youth agenda

Young women and men are vital for developing the societies in which they live – their imagination, ideals and energy are all invaluable resources. The UN Member States first acknowledged this officially in 1965 when they endorsed the Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples.

Two decades later, the UN General Assembly observed 1985 as the first International Youth Year, themed “Participation, Development and Peace”. The Year drew worldwide attention to the important role of young people globally. In particular, it focused on their contributions towards development and the goals of the United Nations Charter.

While there are slight variations of the definition of “youth”, the population is typically defined by the United Nations as individuals between the ages of 15 to 24. Historically, young people have been perceived simply as the future generation. However, as youth constitute nearly one-fifth of the world’s population, their sheer numbers situate young people as major constituents in the world today.

The World Programme of Action for Youth

In 1995, on the tenth anniversary of the first International Youth Year, the United Nations adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY). The Programme of Action provides a framework to guide public, private and international action on youth development. It concretely illustrates the international community’s commitment to young people and its resolve to address the development challenges they face comprehensively.

The World Programme of Action for Youth initially identified 10 priority areas to guide policy and action in the area of youth development. In 2005, the General Assembly added five additional priority areas to better align the Programme of Action to the new challenges of the twenty-first century. The additional areas of Globalization, Information and Communication Technology, HIV/AIDS, Armed Conflict and Intergenerational issues were elaborated in a supplement to the WPAY, which was adopted at the sixty-second session of the General Assembly in 2007.

For each priority area, the WPAY outlines the challenges and presents action-oriented proposals to advance the well-being of young people. It also outlines the means of implementing the Programme of Action with Governments taking the lead and the international community providing technical support.

The 15 priority areas of the WPAY are clearly interrelated. Cutting across the speciality fields through the United Nations system, they provide a foundation for coordination and collaboration among the entities of the system. Focusing on independent areas of expertise, United Nations system offices have addressed many of the issues, goals and objectives of the WPAY and provided advisory and other services to Governments.





15 Priority areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth

- Education
- Employment
- Hunger and poverty
- Health
- Environment
- Drug abuse
- Juvenile delinquency
- Leisure-time activities
- Girls and young women
- Youth participation in society and in decision-making
- Globalization
- Information and communications technology
- HIV/AIDS
- Armed conflict
- Intergenerational issues

Looking ahead

In recent years, increased attention has been given to the significance and relevance of integrating youth in development efforts. Through the proclamation of the second International Year of Youth and the decision to hold the UN Conference on Youth, Member States have demonstrated their commitment to advancing the youth development agenda in order to better address challenges facing youth and achieve internationally agreed upon development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

