

Global Youth Status:
Where We Stand Now and
Where We Should Stand in 2030

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Never before in history have we seen such a predominant number of children and youth in the global population. (UNFPA Staff, personal communication, July 13, 2016). Today, 43% of the world population is below the age of 25 and 18% of the world population is in the range 15 to 24 years old (Youth et. al., n.d.). This specific age range, 15 to 24 years old, is a crucial demographic because it comprises the generation defined as “youth” by the United Nations since 1992 (Mansukhani et. al., 2010). This subpopulation is often referred to as the “SDG Generation” - that is, the generation for which the Sustainable Development Goals (“SDGs”) -- the 17 goals, often referred to as the 2030 Agenda, that the United Nations is striving to accomplish by the year in title to create a sustainable future for humanity and earth -- will impact most emphatically (MGCY Staff, personal communication, July 15, 2016).

By 2030, the SDG Generation will make up the majority of the workforce (UNFPA Staff, personal communication, July 13, 2016). As such, the decisions made today by local, regional, national, and international governmental structures directly impact the current youth’s future. However, a majority of today’s youth feel underrepresented in the various governmental structures. They often argue “Nothing about us, Without us” - a mantra that captures the innate frustration toward Generation X-ers who dictate the direction and related decisions for the future without consideration of the youth’s stance on such matters (World Youth Skills Day Panel, personal communication, July 15, 2016). An online survey conducted in July 2016 quantified the 15 to 24 year old population’s perception of its representation in the following levels of governments:

Level of Government	Not Enough Youth Representation	Enough Youth Representation
Local Governments	90.3%	9.7%
Regional/State Governments	96.8%	3.2%
National Governments	93.5%	6.5%
International Affairs	87.1%	12.9%

Amongst the listed levels of government above, International Affairs had the highest relative percentage of youth who felt as though there is enough representation. A primary reason for such a finding may be due to the fact that there exists youth representatives -- such as the Major Group for Children and Youth, the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth, and Youth Delegates -- in systems such as the United Nations who provide an outlet for youth's participation in international matters.

The existing youth representation within the UN is a step in the right direction; however, there is room for much improvement in aligning the interest of the youth with the actual demographic. For example, the current representation of "youth" within the UN is oftentimes skewed toward the older age range of the "youth spectrum". The Secretary General's Envoy on Youth is Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi of Jordan, who is 32 years old (Meet et. al., n.d.). Many youth question whether such a representative is, in fact, in touch with the opinions and concerns of youth currently in their teens or early 20's (Major Group for Children and Youth, personal communication, July 15, 2016). Youth-related functions -- such as the World Youth Skills Day event held this past July 15, 2016 -- often do not include enough said youth on the panels; in fact, only 3 of 24 panelists at the function were below the age of 30. The under-representation of the SDG generation youth (i.e. those in the 15 to 24 age range) is further exacerbated by the fact that only 27 of the 193 UN Member States have youth delegates, of which the

United States' youth representative is deemed not a "delegate", but a mere "observer" (United et. al., n.d.).

Since the youth comprises such a large portion of the current population, their advocacy work can potentially extend great influence in the accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals. In the previously mentioned July 2016 survey, 80.6% of youth reported that they were unaware of the Sustainable Development Goals. It is critical, then, to the success of such goals that the youth be made aware of its existence. In order to do so, the member states can pursue the following initiatives to better utilize the youth within international affairs and further advance the 2030 Agenda:

- 1) **Integrated Youth Programs** - Current youth programs within the international bodies (such as internships at the United Nations) are effective in promoting physical youth presence and involvement in international governing processes. However, the programs oftentimes do not allow for the youth to be directly involved on advocacy issues. The integration of the youth within specific NGOs can allow the youth to directly promote their youth perspective and act upon their ideas in conjunction with the NGOs specific agenda.
- 2) **Simplification of the language** - The "UN lingo" as it stands may be a barrier that deters youth (who may have unique approaches on how to advance the 2030 Agenda) from understanding and/or participating in UN events such as the recently concluded High-level Political Forum. Simplifying the language so that it is more inviting and accessible to the general public, specifically the youth, would expand awareness and understanding of the 2030 Agenda and the related Sustainable Development Goals.
- 3) **Promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals through Social Media**- Current-day youth is highly active and passionate about political movements, but are unaware that their involvement promotes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a specific context. Expanded promotion of the SDGs through

social media, and connecting trending movements with the related SDG (i.e. #blacklivesmatter with SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) will not only promote youth involvement in achieving the goals, but also expand the reach of SDG awareness.

- 4) **Youth Access to Information** - Youth delegates are often excluded from closed meetings where actual decision-making is conducted. Involving youth treatment and policies are made on the international scale. Providing the youth delegates with access to all information available (including the closed meetings) will allow them to exercise their “delegated” duties in a more informed and effective way.

Youth involvement may not be at the forefront of UN concerns due to the breadth of issues that the UN must administrate over. However, it is to the UN’s best interests to promote youth participation as an increased role by the youth in UN process can draw the necessary workforce, creative input, and progressive leadership to accomplish its many objectives, including the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Global Youth Status shows a present, but lacking, representation of youth on an international scale. While the initiatives suggested above can help increase youth involvement, the UN member states should strive toward overhauling the system in a way that allows the SDG generation to best promote their interests in their future. If, **by 2030, two-thirds of UN member states (including the United States) pledge to increase their use of youth delegates in decision making processes**, then the power invested in the two-thirds majority of the UN General Assembly will better insure that the **majority of the world’s youth will know of the UN and its SDGs**. Through integrated youth programs, simplified UN language, promotion of SDGs through social media, and youth access to information, the UN and other governmental structures can demonstrate “nothing about us, without us” is possible.

Works Cited

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Additional Reading

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