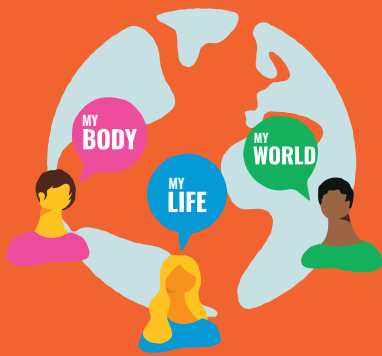


# Rights and choices for all adolescents and youth: a UNFPA global strategy





# “MY BODY, MY LIFE, MY WORLD!” IS UNFPA’S NEW GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This document has been conceptualized and produced by the Adolescent and Youth team of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Branch in UNFPA's Technical Division, under the guidance of Benoit Kalasa and Anneka Knutsson. It has been written by Danielle Engel, Irem Tümer, Cecile Mazzacurati, Mandira Paul, Satvika Chalasani, Ilya Zhukov, Bente Faugli, José Roberto Luna and Soyoltuya Bayaraa. It has benefited from the inputs and comments of UNFPA's regional office youth focal points as well as select country office colleagues.

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It puts young people—their talents, hopes, perspectives and unique needs—at the very centre of sustainable development. In doing so, it backs achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and aligns with the new United Nations Strategy on Youth as well as the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018-2021.

Everything UNFPA does rests on the commitments to sexual and reproductive health and rights for all embodied in the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and its Programme of Action. These commitments are crucial for adolescents and youth.

Young people realizing their rights to make informed choices about their own bodies, their own lives and the world they live in is a matter of justice and a driver of a lifetime of returns.



## DR. NATALIA KANEM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund

In 1994, at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, the world committed to realizing the sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights of people, particularly women, everywhere. Today, millions of women and girls, couples and families around the world enjoy better lives because of that landmark agreement.

Twenty-five years ago, many of these women were girls. In the decades since, we at UNFPA have had the privilege and challenge of accompanying countless girls on their journey from girlhood to womanhood, traversing the pivotal path of adolescence along the way. The journey brought opportunities; the journey brought obstacles. Nevertheless, the girls persisted, as did we in supporting them to make informed choices and exercise their rights.



### **"MY BODY, MY LIFE, MY WORLD!" IS UNFPA'S APPROACH TO COLLABORATE WITH, INVEST IN AND CHAMPION YOUNG PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD**

As a global organization committed to the rights of young people, we and our partners have learned a lot about what girls and boys need – often from their own voices and perspectives. We know considerably more about the kind of investments it takes to ensure they enjoy their adolescence and are prepared for young adulthood – investments that can help countries with large populations of young people accelerate sustainable development and reap a demographic dividend.

All of this learning is encapsulated in our updated and reinvigorated approach to collaborating with, investing in and championing young people around the world. "My Body, My Life, My World!", UNFPA's new strategy on adolescents and youth, supports the implementation of Youth 2030, the United Nations Youth Strategy launched in 2018. It is integral to UNFPA's efforts to achieve three transformative results by 2030 – zero unmet need for family planning, zero preventable maternal deaths, and zero gender-based violence and harmful practices. These can only be achieved with the leadership and innovation of young people for young people, in development, in humanitarian action and in sustaining peace.

"My Body, My Life, My World!" comes at an opportune time.

As we celebrate our successes since the ICPD, let us also challenge ourselves to do better by the world's 1.8 billion young people, in all their diversity. With an eye to 2030, to delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals and to leaving no one behind, UNFPA is committed to achieving the vision laid out herein, with our partners, with young people and with the communities they call home.



## YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY: WHAT SETS THEM APART?

YOUNG PEOPLE  
CHANGING THE  
WORLD



**GRETA THUNBERG**  
kicked off a global  
movement to combat  
climate change at the  
age of 15

200  
MILLION

ADOLESCENTS AGED  
12-17 ARE NOT IN  
SECONDARY SCHOOL

Today's adolescents and youth, **1.8 billion strong**, are a quarter of the global population. Growing up in a world churning with historic transformations—political, social, economic and environmental—they have both acute concerns and high expectations for themselves and their societies.

Young people today are demanding more from their governments and societies, and more from the global community. Amid pressures transcending borders, from **changing labour markets to conflicts to climate change**, some see solutions in collective action. They are shaping social and economic development, challenging discriminatory norms, and building a foundation for a better future. In early 2019, for instance, hundreds of

thousands of students in more than 100 countries, from the South Pacific to the edge of the Arctic Circle, mobilized in one of the largest international actions ever to protest the lack of tough action on global warming.

**This generation is more connected through technology, media and the Internet than any other generation in human history. A full 70 per cent are online, putting them at the forefront of Internet adoption.<sup>1</sup>**

Consuming media, however, is not the same as participating in the digital economy, and adolescent and youth growing up in poverty are the least likely of all cohorts to use technology or develop digital skills. The odds worsen for girls or people with a disability. Moreover, being connected online is not a substitute for having safe

# 1.8 BILLION

ARE ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH,  
A QUARTER OF THE GLOBAL  
POPULATION



spaces for human interaction which many adolescents and youth need and seek. **This new generation on balance is the most educated and healthiest ever. Yet 200 million adolescents aged 12-17 are not in secondary school, and far too many young refugees are still being denied access to quality education.**<sup>2</sup> Many young people who enter the labour market end up **underemployed, in vulnerable jobs or living in poverty** despite working hard. Gender and social inequalities favouring boys and men as well as certain social and ethnic groups over others persist in education and employment.

Adolescence is a time where young people gain skills to make choices, including on their sexual and reproductive health. Trends vary significantly

among regions. **Mean ages at first sexual experience, first marriage and first birth have all risen in sub-Saharan Africa, and risen for first marriage and first birth in Asia and Northern Africa.**

In contrast, in Latin America and the Caribbean, the timing of first birth has not changed significantly, and the regional mean age at first sexual experience has substantially declined.<sup>3</sup>

For adolescents and youth today, **transformative change is a desire** and a possibility in every part of the world. What needs to be done so that every young person can realize all of the rights and choices that they want and deserve? UNFPA has defined some top priorities based on what we have learned as a long-time, trusted partner of the next generation.

# 23%

OF REFUGEE  
ADOLESCENTS  
ATTEND SCHOOL

# 70%

OF YOUNG PEOPLE  
ARE ONLINE

1. International Telecommunication Union. ICT Facts and Figures. 2017.
2. UNHCR. Turn the Tide: Refugee Education in Crisis. 2018. ; UNESCO. Fact Sheet No.48. 2018.
3. Bongaarts et al. Trends in the age at reproductive transitions in the developing world: The role of education. 2017.



**“ THE CASE FOR  
UNIVERSALLY REALIZING  
YOUNG PEOPLE'S  
RIGHTS AND CHOICES  
HAS NEVER BEEN MORE  
CLEAR AND URGENT.**

# THE CASE FOR ACTING NOW

Upholding human rights. Achieving sustainable development. Attaining peace and prosperity. If we want to make progress towards these global aspirations, we have to fulfill commitments to young people. The case for universally realizing their rights and choices has never been more clear or urgent.



## THE RIGHTS IMPERATIVE

**Every individual has the right to make informed choices about their body and life, and to participate as an active citizen.** Some of the most consequential choices occur early in life. They include affirming sexual orientation and gender identity; choosing whether, when and whom to marry; determining whether and when to have children and how many; and deciding when and with whom to have sex.



## THE DEVELOPMENT IMPERATIVE

Sustainable development can only be achieved through investing in adolescents and youth at levels that guarantee their rights and choices. Their future depends on being healthy and educated, empowered to make informed decisions, and resilient in the face of change. **Investing in adolescents and youth also means maximizing the human capital<sup>4</sup> necessary for countries' sustainable development. The first priority: intensifying support to those left furthest behind.**



## THE DEMOGRAPHIC IMPERATIVE

All countries must invest in human well-being at all times, but **countries with large shares of adolescents and youth have an opportunity to accelerate development known as the demographic dividend.** It largely depends on prioritizing investment in their health, education, participation, social security and employment.

4. The World Bank Human Capital Project emphasizes the need to accelerate investments in health, education and skills of people for greater equity and economic growth, in particular in Africa <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/publication/africa-human-capital-plan>.



## UNFPA'S VISION: A WORLD WHERE EVERY YOUNG PERSON CAN MAKE THEIR CHOICES AND ENJOY THEIR RIGHTS.



“My Body, My Life, My World!”, UNFPA’s new global strategy for adolescents and youth, puts young people at the centre of sustainable development. It is a **rallying cry for every young person to have the knowledge and power to make informed choices about their bodies and lives, and to participate in transforming their world.**

The strategy embraces all adolescents (aged 10 to 19) and youth (aged 15 to 24), celebrating their rich diversity. It recognizes the heterogeneity of their needs and desires, and is fully committed to ending the inequities many still face. It accounts for gender, sexual orientation and ability status, and affirms sexuality as a positive dimension of personality. It also considers other intersections such as ethnicity, social status and religion.

The strategy draws on **sound evidence in designing comprehensive strategies to deliver rights and choices.** Through

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