

*Concept Note for the First*

# Global Forum on Youth Policies

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*28-30 October 2014*

## **1. Summary and overview**

In 2014, of 198 countries, 122 countries (62%) have a national youth policy, up from 99 (50%) in the previous year. These numbers show that governments are increasingly aware of the need for legal and policy frameworks that respond adequately to young peoples' needs, aspirations and demands.

Despite these advances and commitments, however, a number of challenges affect the efficiency and inclusiveness of youth policies, from fragmented responsibilities for youth issues and challenged youth participation structures to the lack of reliable knowledge and the absence of appropriate resources.

Against this backdrop, the first Global Forum on Youth Policies will revisit the global blueprint for national youth policies provided by the World Programme of Action for Youth, develop a common understanding of the needs for and rationales of systemic and cross-sectoral approaches to youth policy, and build a common understanding of guiding principles for integrated youth policy development.

The Forum will take place between 28 and 30 October 2014 and will bring together 700 youth policy experts—from governments and parliaments, youth networks and movements, research and development communities—at a time when renewed interest in and momentum for youth policies struggles with multiple dilemmas and obstacles.

By renewing the commitment of the World Programme of Action for Youth to sincere public policies on youth issues, the Forum will be a milestone in defining and exemplifying what it means to take young people and youth policies seriously in the twenty-first century.

The website of the Forum will go live in June 2014 at [www.youthpolicyforum.org](http://www.youthpolicyforum.org). We look forward to welcoming you online soon, and to meeting you in October at the Forum.

## 2. Context and background

### 2.1. The global context

In 1995, the Member States of the United Nations directed the international community's response to youth issues by adopting the "World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (WPAY)". Complemented (officially) in 2007,<sup>1</sup> the WPAY not only provides a policy framework and practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the situation of youth around the world, it also constitutes the first global blueprint for effective national youth policies.

The role of a National Policy on Youth is crucial in that it provides the overarching vision for all programs and activities relating to youth in one country. The 15 priority areas of the WPAY indicate the range of policy areas to be covered through its 15 priority areas: Education; Employment; Hunger and Poverty; Health; Environment; Drug abuse; Juvenile delinquency; Leisure-time activities; Girls and young women; Full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision making; Globalization; Information and communications technology; HIV/AIDS; Armed conflict; and Intergenerational Issues.

In 2009, the UN Economic and Social Council has identified a series of goals and targets for monitoring the progress of youth in the areas covered by the World Programme of Action for Youth.<sup>2</sup> These goals and targets address youth as a specific socio-demographic group and focus on the issues that impinge directly on youth development. In 2012, the United Nations Secretary-General has made working with and for young people a priority of his Five-Year Action Agenda. He requested the Inter-agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD), a group of close to 40 UN entities working together to advance youth issues, to develop a System-wide Action Plan on Youth (Youth-SWAP). Endorsed in 2013, the Youth-SWAP provides strategic guidance to the UN system as a whole in its work with and for young people, based on the mandate of the WPAY, and incorporates an important focus on policy development and implementation with and for youth.

Developing and effectively implementing inclusive and participatory public policies on youth is not a simple task: it entails a cycle of actions, a series of parameters that cannot be objectively measured and significant challenges throughout the different stages of the process. Such policies require wide-based consultations, an effective and sustainable coordination among Ministries, as well as the integration of the National Policy on Youth in the National Development plans. At the same time, the effort to develop and implement inclusive and participatory policies on youth is by itself a step forward. Provided that it is followed up by effective measures and resources, it constitutes a long-term investment that opens up a series of opportunities for all stakeholders involved.

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<sup>1</sup> A/RES/50/81 (10 thematic areas) and A/RES/58/133 and A/RES/62/126 (5 additional thematic areas – supplement to the World Programme of Action for Youth). The full World Programme of Action for Youth is available at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/wpay2010.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> The determination of these goals and targets was conducted through a participatory process involving experts from the various organizations of the UN System, academia and representatives of youth organizations. For further details: Commission for Social Development Res. 45/2; UN General Assembly Res. 62/162; Reports of the Secretary General on the follow-up to the WPAY (A/62/61/Add.1-E/2007/7 and A/64/61-E/2009/3).

## 2.2. The policy context

According to the “[State of youth policy 2014](#)”, produced by youthpolicy.org, “as of April 2014, of 198 countries, 122 countries (62%) have a national youth policy, up from 99 (50%) in 2013. Across all continents, 37 states (19%) are either developing a new or revising their current youth policy, down from 56 (28%) in 2013. 31 countries have no national youth policy at the moment (16%), down from 43 (22%) in 2013. Of those, 14 are in Africa, 9 in Asia, 5 in the Americas, and 3 in Europe.”<sup>3</sup> These numbers show that national governments are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that adequate legislation and policies are needed to respond to young peoples’ needs, aspirations and demands. The content of such policies can in turn inform national, regional and global youth initiatives, programs and projects of development partners that focus on youth issues.

At its sixtieth session, the General Assembly adopted a resolution ([60/2](#)) on *policies and programmes involving youth*, requesting that the United Nations establish a broad set of indicators related to youth, which Governments and other actors may choose to use to monitor the situation of young people related to the priority areas identified in the World Programme of Action for Youth. In December 2005, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, held an Expert Group Meeting to define a set of indicators.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of these advances and commitments, a number of challenges, including funding, legal and institutional frameworks, affect the efficiency and inclusiveness of National policies on Youth:

Firstly, currently, one can find numerous examples of countries where the National Policies on Youth are managed by Youth Ministries with limited political power and resources. At the same time, sectoral Ministries tend to act independently on issues that affect youth, without mainstreaming youth concerns in their interventions in line with the National Policy on Youth. In some cases, this is further exacerbated by significant institutional gaps between the legislative sector and the executive sector (e.g. Ministry of Youth Affairs, Youth Commissions, etc.). This reality of fragmentation is reflected in all stages of development of a National Policy on Youth and constitutes a significant drawback in the implementation, the monitoring and, ultimately, the effectiveness of the policy. It also directly relates to the lack of broad macroeconomic policies affecting youth that are integrated into national development plans, gaps in identifying clearly the costs of programs and sources of funding, as well as the lack of government capacity to undertake comprehensive monitoring and evaluative processes.

Secondly, in many countries, youth participation structures are heavily challenged, both in terms of inclusiveness and in terms of efficiency. Opportunities for participation may be constrained or obfuscated and vary depending on a series of additional factors. Although certain avenues for participation are available through youth organizations, many of them lack funding and resources, and coordination across organizations tends to be absent or weak. Addressing these challenges is not only vital in terms of

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.youthpolicy.org/blog/2014/05/state-of-youth-policy-2014/>  
<http://www.youthpolicy.org/blog/2013/10/200-fact-sheets-in-200-days-worldwide-youth-policies-at-a-glance/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://undesadspd.org/Youth/OurWork/Youthdevelopmentindicators.aspx>

making decisions more relevant, sustainable and legitimate, but is equally needed in recognition of the special role that youth led-organizations play in giving young people power over their own lives. Legal, political and economic conditions for youth-led organizations need to improve and reflect their democratic and societal function.

Thirdly, the lack of reliable and accurate knowledge, as well as the lack of comparable data within and across countries and regions, remains a key challenge in the development of policies on youth.<sup>5</sup> Coupled with the limited research specifically on youth issues, this severely hampers the development of evidence-based policies that can confidently and timely address specific concerns within specific contexts.

Further challenges include addressing vulnerable groups, counting on the appropriate resources (financial and other), and effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

### 3. Conceptual framework

#### 3.1. The First Global Forum on Youth Policies: key questions

The frameworks developed and adopted by Members States, UN entities, and regional organizations, such as the African Union (African Youth Charter), the Council of Europe (Advisory Council on Youth, co-management system and Ministerial conferences) and the Organización Iberoamericana de Juventud (Iberoamerican Charter of Youth Rights),<sup>6</sup> to advance youth issues stress the importance of putting commitments to action by developing or reviewing and implementing effective and inclusive youth policies. Key elements that need to be considered in this effort include:

- **Common denominators for youth policies:** What should the main elements of a youth policy be? Are there common denominators of what a youth policy should include, such as youth legislation, youth budget, youth information policy, youth research, and inter-ministerial cooperation?<sup>7</sup> Should such elements cut across spatial levels, from local and subnational to national, regional and global? What should the role of regional frameworks be, both in informing national as well as global frameworks? Should a certain set of indicators be integrated in national, regional and/or global frameworks? There is clearly a need to develop a shared understanding of ‘common denominators’ as well as a coordinated approach by stakeholders including youth, government, civil society, the UN system and other development partners, in the development, implementation and monitoring of youth policy. This shared understanding should ideally include ways in which public policies define youth as well as key benefits, key rights and key protections that should apply to young people.

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<sup>5</sup> Kwabena Gyimah-Brempong and Mwangi S. Kimenyi (2013). Youth Policy and the Future of African Development. Africa Growth Initiative - Brookings Institution. The working paper is available at <http://www.brookings.edu>.

<sup>6</sup> The frameworks adopted by these regional organizations are all available online: African Youth Charter ([pdf](#)), the European Agenda 2020 ([pdf](#)) and the Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Youth ([pdf](#)).

<sup>7</sup> These are some of the 11 indicators of a national youth policy originally introduced in 2001 and later summarized by the European Youth Forum in 2007 in a document that is available [here](#) ([pdf](#)).

- ***Coherent cross-sectoral frameworks:*** Youth policy, by its very nature, cuts across many policy domains. In most countries, however, legislation and policies affecting young people remain deeply fragmented. In recent years there has been a recognizable shift towards revising national youth policies away from thematic silos towards cross-sectorally integrated policy frameworks. Devising regional and global mechanisms, tools and processes that can support the creation of such youth policy systems and frameworks is going to be a key task of the coming years. Such support systems should help, among others, to adjust and expand existing methodologies for the development, implementation and assessment of youth policies in line with the emerging systemic and integrated approach to public policies for young people. They should also allow identifying effective and flexible mechanisms and processes to translate and implement national policy provisions at the subnational, community or local level, across and within policy sectors.
- ***Sincere participation and engagement structures:*** For youth policy to be empowering as well as effective, youth knowledge, expectations, frustrations and aspirations must be brought in to inform the development of appropriate interventions and services. A youth policy that is developed with the involvement of youth stands a much greater chance of success, as interventions will have greater relevance for and legitimacy among youth. Youth participation in political processes also makes decisions more sustainable and easier to implement, while enabling young people to learn about and engage in democratic processes and at the same time developing and deepening democracy. Ideally, youth involvement would be framed by a set of mutually agreed principles of engagement.<sup>8</sup> In constrained political and social environments, particular attention would need to be given to ensure that any youth policy ensures the inclusion and participation of the poorest and most disadvantaged young women and men.
- ***Transparent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms:*** Public policies targeting young people are as much subject to changing circumstances as any other policy instrument. Monitoring which elements work in practice and which don't is crucial to ensure adaptability and continued relevance and, through instruments ranging from peer assessment to external evaluation, provides the basis for accountability and transparency.
- ***Sharing experiences and practices:*** As reflected above, countries around the world are at various stages of youth policy development and implementation, with multiple ambitions and varied approaches, with different incentives and numerous frameworks – and in consequence also with diverse results, some intentional, others unexpected. Platforms for international, inter- and intra-regional cooperation need to be created to enable sharing of experiences and knowledge, as well as tools and mechanisms, so that stakeholders and partners may together advance inclusive, transparent and responsive youth policy around the globe.

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<sup>8</sup> Examples of such principles include “Working together: Partnership Principles” by Oxfam (2012), available online [here](#), and “Guidelines on Partnerships with Southern CSOs” by Dóchas, the Irish Association of NGOs (2013), available online [here](#).

## 3.2. The First Global Forum on Youth Policies: objectives and outcomes

The Global Forum on Youth Policy emerges from the need to provide a physical platform for youth policy stakeholders around the globe to discuss and respond to the key questions outlined above. The Forum will be a true global expert gathering of around 700 youth policy practitioners to give a new impetus to evidence-based, inclusive, participatory and effective youth policies.

### *The Forum seeks to address these five key objectives:*

- To advance a current overview of the state of youth policy and a reflection on the social and developmental role of youth policies, particularly in view of the post-2015 period;
- To develop a common understanding of the needs for and rationales of systemic and cross-sectoral approaches to youth policy;
- To share experiences and examples of participatory and evidence-based youth policies, their rationales and realities, their successes and shortcomings;
- To build a common understanding of guiding principles for integrated youth policy development and of the dynamics between concerned stakeholders at different levels;
- To share plans for follow-up and to develop a shared commitment to take youth policy forward.

### *For each of the above key objectives, the Forum aims to deliver the following related key outcomes:*

- A current overview of the state of youth policy and its relation to development frameworks;
- A shared understanding of rationales underpinning and principles guiding youth policy worldwide;
- A lively community spanning governmental, nongovernmental and research networks and experts;
- A strong commitment of that community of experts to integrated, participatory policy frameworks;
- A realistic set of follow-up activities with shared responsibilities to improve youth policies globally.

## 4. Organisational framework

### 4.1. The First Global Forum on Youth Policies: participants profile

#### *The Forum seeks to bring together around 700 participants:*

- Ministers, state secretaries and senior government officials from not only Youth but also Planning, Development and related Ministries and Agencies with responsibility for policy development and implementation that affect young people;
- Parliamentarians responsible for reviewing and allocating budgets and drafting and approving legislation affecting youth populations;
- Nongovernmental experts of youth-led organizations and movements working on youth policy;
- Youth experts of global and regional intergovernmental organizations working on youth policy;
- Research experts from institutes, universities and think tanks with a focus on youth policy;
- Development experts from organizations, agencies and institutions in the youth sector;
- Programming experts from donors active in supporting policy change in the youth field.

## 4.2. The First Global Forum on Youth Policies: convening and hosting

The Global Forum on Youth Policies will be convened by the United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth together with UNDP, UNESCO and the Council of Europe. The 2014 Global Forum on Youth Policies will be hosted by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in the Republic of Azerbaijan in the framework of Azerbaijan's Chairmanship of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers.<sup>9</sup> The team of youthpolicy.org will support the Global Forum. Subsequent (likely) biennial editions will rotate geographically and respective regional organizations will be invited to co-convene the Forum accordingly.

## 4.3. The First Global Forum on Youth Policies: preparation and consultation

The convenors of the Forum have set up a Core Planning Group which is responsible for the preparation and running of the First Global Forum on Youth Policies. Regular consultations will be conducted to guide and frame the preparation of the event through a Reference Group. This group will include youth-focused structures of regional organizations (such as the Youth Division of African Union Commission and the Ibero-American Youth Organization), youth-led organizations and platforms (such as the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organizations), and youth-focused interagency structures (such as the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development).

## 4.4. Youth policy in the host country

Young people constitute more than 31% of the population in Azerbaijan. Under the umbrella of *Vision 2020*, youth policy is an integral part of the legal and institutional framework. The Ministry of Youth and Sport is the main state institution responsible for the coordination of all national action plans on youth and seeks to provide a multi-sectoral approach to youth policy in the country. Azerbaijan is currently strengthening its legislative basis through the development of youth infrastructure and the institutionalization of youth participation. The support of different youth institutions such as youth NGOs, national forums, student youth organizations, and youth centres aims at the inclusion of wider youth groups.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The priorities of the Azerbaijani Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe are available online at [https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM/Inf\(2014\)13](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM/Inf(2014)13).

<sup>10</sup> For additional information, see <http://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/azerbaijan>.