



MY BODY, MY LIFE, MY WORLD
OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE

MODULE 8
**YOUNG PEOPLE
AND HUMAN
RIGHTS**

YOUNG PEOPLE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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For any questions or feedback, please contact tumer@unfpa.org.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSE	comprehensive sexuality education
DFID	UK Department for International Development
ESARO	East and Southern Africa Regional Office
GBV	gender-based violence
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
HRBA	human rights-based approach
HRC	Human Rights Council
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
LGBTQ+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/non-cisgender identities (such as gender non-binary/non-conforming and agender)
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRH	sexual and reproductive health
SRHR	sexual and reproductive health and rights
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
VNR	Voluntary National Review

MY BODY

1. ADOLESCENT SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS
2. GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

MY LIFE

3. COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION
4. HARMFUL PRACTICES

MY WORLD

5. YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION
6. YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY
7. HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

CROSS-CUTTING

8. HUMAN RIGHTS
9. ADVOCACY AND POLICY DIALOGUE



INTRODUCTION

Human rights are universal; inalienable; and indivisible and interdependent. They are **universal** because everyone is born with and possesses the same rights, regardless of where they live, their gender or race, or their religious, cultural or ethnic background. They are **inalienable** because people's rights can never be taken away. And they are **indivisible and interdependent** because all rights – political, civil, social, cultural and economic – are equal in importance and none can be fully enjoyed without the others. Human rights are upheld by the rule of law and strengthened through legitimate claims for duty bearers to be accountable to international standards.

UNFPA supports efforts to operationalize the human rights-based dimensions of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action and strengthen its normative framework. UNFPA applies a human rights-based approach to all stages of its programming and focuses on:

- ensuring that policies and programmes are aligned with international human rights norms and standards and help advance human rights
- addressing the underlying determinants of discrimination regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and other areas of focus
- supporting transformative change in the lives of people and groups that are left behind
- advancing accountability for the ICPD Programme of Action.

This module focuses on young people and human rights as part of UNFPA's global strategy for adolescents and youth, *My Body, My Life, My World*. It unpacks the concept of “young people's rights” and presents approaches to advance the human rights of youth, including promoting and mainstreaming the human rights of young people, supporting young people's participation in human rights mechanisms, promoting youth-led accountability and leaving no one behind.



→ WHAT ARE “YOUNG PEOPLE’S RIGHTS”?

The human rights of young people means the full enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms by young people.¹ Adolescents and youth are transitioning between childhood and adulthood. Promoting their human rights entails addressing the specific challenges and barriers they face during this time, in health – including sexual and reproductive health (SRH) – as well as education, employment, and participation in civil society and politics. Young people are often the ones who “need to claim their rights the most, but enjoy them the least”² because of age-related barriers.

No specific framework or instrument sets out the particular rights of young people at a global level. There is no international human rights instrument dedicated to young people, as there is for children (Convention on the Rights of the Child or CRC) and for women (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women or CEDAW). Human rights norms applicable to young people are instead dispersed across a number of civil, political, economic and social rights frameworks.

For under-18s, the CRC is an important safeguard in ensuring that their rights are protected and promoted, given the particular vulnerabilities they face. For older youth (aged 18 and above), other instruments protecting human rights are applicable, and several human rights frameworks contain norms specifically addressing the youth dimension of certain rights, such as CEDAW and the ICPD Programme of Action. The Programme of Action, although not a binding document, provides a policy framework and practical guidelines for national and international action to improve the rights of youth. However, young people are often subsumed under women’s and children’s rights, which results in recommendations that do not specifically address the concrete needs and aspirations of young women and men.



¹ For more information, see the OHCHR brief *Human Rights of Youth*.
² *Youth Participation in Development: A Guide for Development Agencies and Policy Makers* (DFID, 2010).

→ WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE'S RIGHTS MATTER TO UNFPA?

The vision of “My Body” in *My Body, My Life, My World* emphasises that the case for realising young people’s rights and choices has never been more clear or urgent:



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.

UNFPA is well placed to help, as it works for and with young people all over the world. In many countries **UNFPA leads and supports analysis** of the profiles, aspirations and needs of adolescents and youth, and assesses the discrimination and challenges they face in accessing their civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights.



UNFPA supports youth-led organizations and movements that advocate for young people’s rights, and supports the recommendations of a 2018 study (A/HRC/39/33) by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) by:

- **supporting the mainstreaming of the rights of young people in existing human rights mechanisms.** In addition to the thematic possibilities of specific special procedures or treaty bodies, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is particularly suitable for establishing young people’s rights as a cross-cutting priority because of its comprehensive basis of review (see p. 24).
- **prioritizing and advocating for better data collection and reporting** on the human rights challenges faced by young people
- **preparing guidance** on rights-based approaches to national youth policies
- advocating for a mechanism to **ensure permanent, structured youth participation** in national human rights processes, such as an annual youth forum
- **promoting youth-led accountability**
- **ensuring that the human rights of marginalized young people are addressed**, especially for young people with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/non-cisgender (LGBTQ+) young people.

UNFPA country offices and their partner youth-led organizations can play a critical role in bringing the human rights challenges faced by young people to the attention of international human rights mechanisms, including the UPR and all 10 UN Treaty Monitoring Bodies, in addition to the CRC. The commitments made by states at the ICPD Nairobi Summit in 2019 – 42 per cent of which are youth-related – resonate strongly with human rights norms and standards. This can help close the current normative and operational gaps in the work of human rights mechanisms on young people’s rights.

→ CONSIDERATIONS FOR WORKING ON YOUTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS

LACK OF AN AGREED LEGAL DEFINITION OF YOUTH

There is no agreed legal definition of the term “youth”. UNFPA’s strategy – and this Operational Guidance – uses the common UN working definition of “young people” as an umbrella term for “adolescents” and “youth”, spanning the ages 10 to 24. The CRC refers to “adolescence” as a period of childhood from age 10 until the 18th birthday. However, apart from the CRC’s definition of children as those below the age of 18, there is no ratified definition of youth. This makes it harder to designate youth as a separate category of rights-holders: while youth up to the age of 18 are within the CRC’s scope, those above 18 are rights-holders in the same way as adults of any age.

The variety of approaches to defining youth across countries and regions reflects the reality that youth is a fluid and non-homogeneous category, rather than a fixed age group:



Youth, unlike other forms of identity, such as gender, ethnicity, caste or race, is a transitory phase of life, a transition from dependence to independence and full autonomy. It is difficult to define youth by focusing purely on chronological age, as the term can differ depending on sociocultural settings. What must be acknowledged is that the transition from childhood to adulthood, from dependence to independence and autonomy, occurs at different times in relation to different rights. For example, in the labour market, in education and in sexual and reproductive health, independence and autonomy are achieved at different moments.

Youth and Human Rights: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/HRC/39/33, 2018)

EVOLVING CAPACITIES AS AN IMPORTANT LENS

The lack of a fixed definition of “youth” or “young people” makes it even more important to use frameworks like “evolving capacities” to frame young people’s rights, while also taking into account the local definition of youth, when raising these issues in front of human rights bodies. The concept of **evolving capacities**, which is anchored in the CRC, is a powerful tool to advance youth agency, empowerment and rights.



The Convention on the Rights of the Child introduces for the first time in an international human rights treaty the concept of the ‘evolving capacities’ of the child. This principle has been described as a new principle of interpretation in international law, recognizing that, as children acquire enhanced competencies, there is a diminishing need for protection and a greater capacity to take responsibility for decisions affecting their lives. The Convention allows for the recognition that children in different environments and cultures, and faced with diverse life experiences, will acquire competencies at different ages. Action is needed in law, policy and practice so that the contributions children make and the capacities they hold are acknowledged.

The Evolving Capacities of the Child (UNICEF, 2005)

Understanding and applying the concept of evolving capacities is key to meeting the needs of young people through their transitions, which can occur at different times in relation to different rights. That is why a life-cycle approach that fully recognizes the full implications of these transitions is important. For more information, see Module 1.

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PROTECTION VS EMPOWERMENT: WHAT IS THE RIGHT BALANCE?

Finding the balance between protection and empowerment measures is not easy, as it often depends on the evolving and developmental capacity of each individual. For instance, legal age limits have protected adolescents from human rights violations, such as by preventing child marriage. However, in other cases, minimum age requirements have been used to limit the autonomy of adolescents and restrict their access to SRH services and information, which are critical to empower them in their transition from adolescence to adulthood.

In the absence of an international human rights instrument on the specific rights of youth, young people tend to be subsumed under the CRC, and the recommendations issued by human rights review mechanisms tend to emphasize protection over empowerment measures.

In recent years there has been discussion about youth and human rights at the Human Rights Council, including whether a dedicated human rights instrument for youth is needed, and what it might look like. There are also conflicting views on how such an instrument would approach the rights of youth, with some viewing youth as empowered rights-holders with the ability to make their own autonomous decisions, and others promoting the concept of “protection of the family” as taking precedence over the individual concerns of young people.

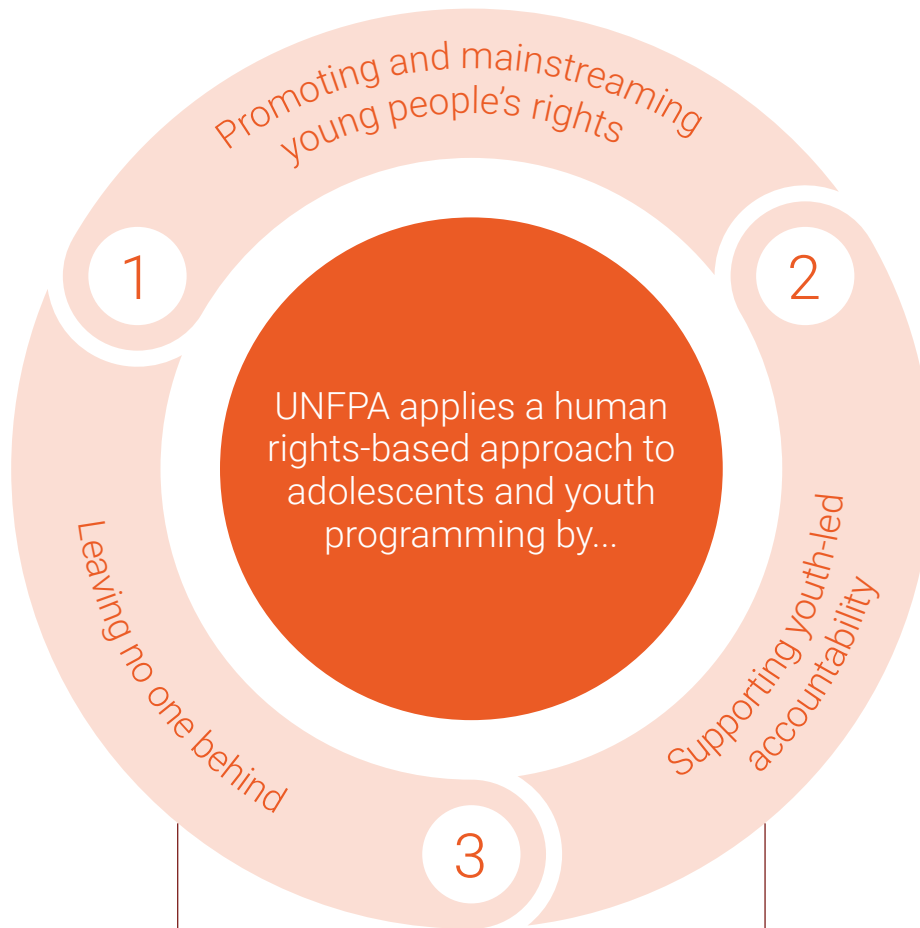






HOW TO ADDRESS THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

UNFPA promotes and helps realize the human rights of young people by applying a human rights-based approach to its adolescent and youth programming. This entails three main components, which are detailed in this section:



Leaving no one behind

Supporting youth-led accountability

- Young people with disabilities
- LGBTQ+ young people

- Human rights mechanisms (UPR etc.)
- Other mechanisms (VNR etc.)

WHAT IS A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH?

A human rights-based approach (HRBA) to development is a conceptual framework for sustainable development that is based on international human rights standards and principles and operationally directed at promoting and protecting human rights.

Under a HRBA, the plans, policies and processes of development are anchored in a system of rights and corresponding obligations established by international law, including all civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, and the right to development. A HRBA to programming requires focusing on the most marginalized and excluded groups, including young people.

HRBA requires human rights principles (equality and non-discrimination, participation, accountability) to guide UN development cooperation, and focuses on capacity development of both duty bearers to meet their obligations and rights-holders to claim their rights.



RESOURCES

- ▼ [*Guidance Note for Applying a Human Rights-Based Approach to Programming in UNFPA* \(UNFPA, 2020\).](#)
- ▼ [*A Human Rights-based Approach to Programming: Practical Implementation Manual and Training Materials* \(UNFPA, 2010\).](#)

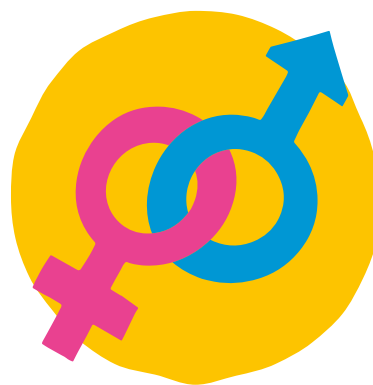
→ PROMOTING AND MAINSTREAMING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

UNFPA should promote key human rights of young people, particularly those that relate to its mandate areas. This section provides an outline of the youth rights framework that UNFPA is committed to promote.

THE RIGHT TO HEALTH, INCLUDING SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Adolescent girls and young women aged 15-19 account for 11 per cent of all births globally. In some countries, parental notification is required for young people to access SRH services, such as contraception. This, as well as a high legal age of consent to sex, can discourage access to SRH information and services, which hinders adolescents' ability to take measures to prevent unwanted pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections. UNFPA country offices must be aware of the legal and policy environment for the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of adolescents, noting the CRC recommendation that consensual sexual activity of adolescents should not be criminalized, and the presumption of competence to consent to SRH services. The SRHR that should be promoted and safeguarded include:

- the right to make one's own free and informed choices and to have control over one's SRH and life, free from coercion, violence, discrimination and abuse
- the right to bodily integrity, including the right to consent to or refuse medical treatment
- access to free and safe SRH services (including safe abortion care to the full extent of the law, and free contraception)
- freedom from violence, and the right to consensual marriage.



See the table for a more comprehensive list of human rights underpinning sexual and reproductive health.

📄 RESOURCES

- *Young People and the Law: Laws and Policies Impacting Young People's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in the Asia-Pacific region (2020 Update)* (UNFPA, 2021).
- *Rights Versus Protection: Marriage, Sexual Consent and Medical Treatment* (UNFPA, 2021).

HUMAN RIGHTS AND INDICATIVE STATE OBLIGATIONS UNDERPINNING SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH (AS SET OUT IN HUMAN RIGHTS NORMS AND BY UNITED NATIONS TREATY BODIES)

The Right to Life

- Prevent maternal mortality and morbidity through safe mother-hood programmes;
- Ensure access to safe abortion services at least when the life and health of the pregnant woman is at risk and in case of rape and severe fetal impairment.

The Right to Health

- Ensure adolescents have access to the full range of sexual and reproductive health care services and information;
- Ensure SRH services are available, accessible, acceptable and of good quality.

The Right to Education and Information

- Ensure school curricula include comprehensive, evidence-based, and non-discriminatory sexuality education;
- Ensure accurate public education campaigns on the prevention of HIV transmission

The Right to Equality and Non-Discrimination

- Prohibit discrimination in access to health care on grounds of sex, age, disability, race, religion, nationality, economic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, health status including HIV, etc;
- Do not deny access to health services that only women need.

The Right to Decide Number and Spacing of Children

- Ensure the full range of modern contraceptive methods;
- Ensure women are given comprehensive and accurate information to ensure informed consent to contraceptive methods, including sterilization.

The Right to Privacy

- Ensure the right to bodily autonomy and decision-making around SRH issues;
- Guarantee confidentiality and privacy with regards to patient health-care information, including prohibiting third-party consent, such as spousal and parental, to SRH services.

The Right to Consent to Marriage and Equality in Marriage

- Prohibit and punish child, early and forced marriages;
- Set the age limit for marriage at 18, equality for boys and girls.

The Right to be Free from Torture or Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

- Guarantee access to emergency contraception, especially in case of rape;
- Guarantee access to termination of pregnancy when a woman's life or health is in danger, in cases of rape and fetal impairment.

The Right to be Free from Practices that Harm Women and Girls

- Prohibit and punish all forms of femal genital mutilation.

The Right to be Free from Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

- Ensure gender-based violence, including domestic and intimate partner violence, is effectively prohibited and punished in law and in practice;
- Prohibit and punish all forms of rape, in peacetime and in conflict and including marital rape;
- Prohibit and punish all forms of violence perpetrated because of sexual orientation.

The Right to an Effective Remedy

- Ensure effective mechanisms are in place for women to complain of SRHR violations;
- Ensure access to effective counsel for women who are unable to afford a lawyer.

Source: A Guide in Support of National Human Rights Institutions (UNFPA, 2019)

THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

The world has achieved equality in primary education between girls and boys, but few countries have achieved that target at all levels of education. Research shows that a majority of young people lack sufficient knowledge about their SRH, leaving them vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections, adolescent pregnancy and a host of other concerns. Equipping women and girls with the ability to choose the timing and number of their children also helps them stay in school. Rights to education for young people include:



- the right to make decisions related to education
- the right to health education, including access to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)
- the right to access education on active citizenship and on human rights
- access to education as a preventive measure for child marriage.

Equipping women and girls with the ability to choose the timing and number of their children also helps them stay in school.

THE RIGHT TO WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Young people worldwide are three times more likely than adults to be unemployed. Young people who do have employment often lack high-quality jobs and face precarious working conditions without access to social protection. Working poverty disproportionately affects young people, with 145 million young workers living in poverty. In some cases, youth poverty is linked to subminimum youth wages, which go against the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. Rights to be promoted include:

- the right to work, decent employment opportunities and effective livelihood skills
- protection from exploitation, and against direct or indirect discrimination based on age.

145M

young workers
living in poverty

THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION AND THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

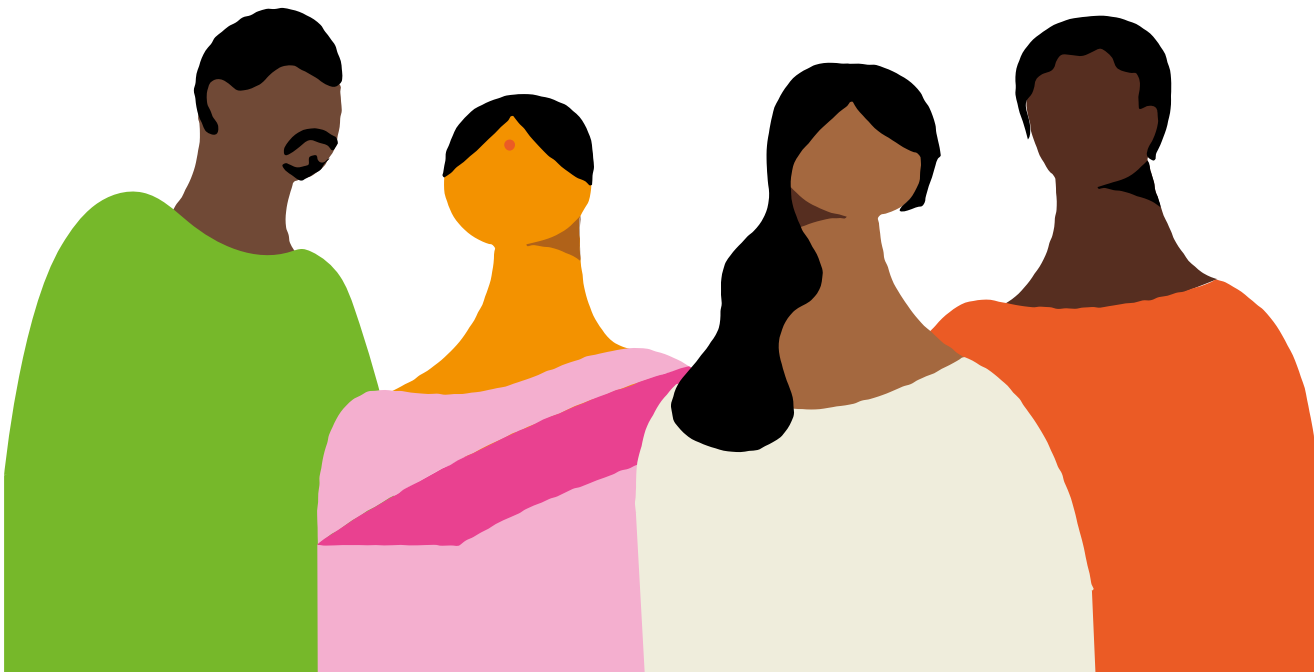
Youth are under-represented in political institutions, with less than 2 per cent of parliamentarians worldwide aged under 30. Moreover, the age of candidacy for national parliaments, and especially for higher office, is not always aligned with the minimum voting age. The views of children and young people are often inadequately represented in political and legal decisions which affect them. Rights to be promoted include:

- the right to vote and participate in politics
- freedom of speech, at school, off campus and in other public forums.

THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

Young people face many global challenges, including globalization, migration and climate change. The right to development calls for young people to be given an opportunity to participate in and contribute to development, so that they can help shape their own futures. Young migrants – including asylum-seekers and refugees, young people in conflict with the law and young people with disabilities – face additional challenges due to their specific situation. Age is one characteristic that often intersects with, adds to and multiplies discrimination based on other grounds, thus preventing many young people from enjoying equal opportunities and substantive equality.

< 2% parliamentarians worldwide aged under 30



It is also important to ensure mainstreaming of the human rights of young people through existing mechanisms, policies and programmes. Consider the following in all programming related to young people:

- **Consider which young people benefit:** Even though young people may constitute an excluded population, there are marginalized subgroups of young people with additional needs and concerns. These include adolescent mothers, migrant youth, married adolescents, young people living with disabilities, and young people without parents or family support. Make sure you are familiar with different groups' situations, social dynamics, access to services and level of engagement in the community. For example, young people who attend youth clubs are often those who already have the most access to information. Be sure to apply a gender- and age-sensitive lens. You might want to know, for example:
 - Are girls attending the youth club?
 - What age groups of young people are attending?
 - Is a youth club an accessible service for a married 12-year-old girl?
 - Are Indigenous young people and/or young people of ethnic minorities attending?
 - Is it accessible to out-of-school young people?
- **Consider how youth-related policies and laws are being implemented:** Many countries have excellent youth policies on paper, but implementation can be weak. Consider laws and policies that affect young people, and check action plans, budgets, and monitoring and evaluation plans to see what is actually being implemented. At the same time, many laws discriminate against youth – such as laws requiring children to be of a certain age to access SRH services – so it is important to support revisions to laws to ensure they are aligned with young people's rights.
- **Consider responsibilities as well as rights:** Young people have civic responsibilities as well as rights, and human rights-based programmes should take this into account. Often the focus of capacity-building for young people is to empower them to articulate and claim their rights. It is equally important to develop their capacities to become “good citizens”, which includes knowing and accepting their responsibilities – such as not violating the human rights of others, and participating in civic life (e.g. by voting).
- **Apply a gender- and age-sensitive lens.**
- **Involve youth organizations, networks, groups and youth-led structures** in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes or strategies affecting young people's rights, and in decision-making more broadly.





COVID-19, YOUNG PEOPLE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

International human rights law guarantees everyone's dignity, protection and fundamental freedoms. During life-threatening public health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, measures like curfews can restrict some human rights or fundamental freedoms. Such regulations should observe international standards of human rights.

In 2021, Resolution [A/HRC/48/L.26/Rev.1](#) was adopted on the human rights implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for young people. It recognizes that the consequences of the pandemic disproportionately affect the enjoyment of human rights by young people, in particular young women and girls, including with regard to their right to work, right to education and right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. The resolution also stresses the need to address all forms of discrimination as well as attitudes and behaviours that cause or perpetuate discrimination and violence against women and girls.

There are three areas where UNFPA can act to support the human rights of young people as they are directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 1. Protection:** Guaranteeing the right to health for young people means ensuring that they have access to information, prevention and treatment for COVID-19. In addition, UNFPA should advocate for continued access for young people to SRH services, prevention and treatment of HIV, and protection from gender-based violence (GBV), and to social protections (employment, housing, food security etc.), while observing their right to privacy and confidentiality.
- 2. Prevention** is critical to reducing the spread of the virus, and it is essential to guarantee the right to information for young people, including access to accurate, age-appropriate and culturally appropriate information about COVID-19. It is also vital to guarantee young people's right to education, including CSE in and out of school, despite the challenges caused by the pandemic. This means ensuring continued access to education through all available channels, including face to face wherever possible, and also through virtual, radio and community platforms. Particular emphasis should be placed on access to education for the most vulnerable, including adolescent girls at risk of harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation.
- 3. Participation** of young people as a right should be upheld during emergencies, and during COVID-19 in particular, in order to reduce the infection curve. Young people will have insights and ideas to offer to keep themselves and their communities healthy. The right to freedom of expression, the right to defend rights, the right to freedom and security of the person and other fundamental freedoms must be guaranteed, so that the pandemic emergency makes it possible to build societies that are more respectful of people's dignity. Young people on the move, refugees, the internally displaced and those affected by protracted crises may need relevant approaches to facilitate their participation. Youth activists should have access to the Internet and other channels of communication for accountability and the protection of human rights.



Coca-Cola
Special Olympics
SROPI

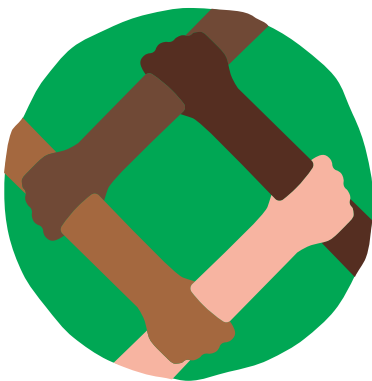
Special Olympics
SROPI

→ SUPPORTING YOUTH-LED ACCOUNTABILITY

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS

The UN works to promote and protect human rights in several ways:³

- The OHCHR is the UN entity responsible for promoting and protecting human rights. It works in cooperation with other UN agencies and parts of the UN system.
- International human rights treaties establish Treaty Bodies, committees of independent experts responsible for monitoring implementation by Member States.
- Intergovernmental bodies of Member States discuss human rights; the primary of these is the Human Rights Council (HRC), which is supported by independent experts known as Special Procedures. The HRC is also responsible for the UPR, a monitoring mechanism.
- All UN agencies work to protect, promote and operationalize human rights in their respective work areas through human rights-based approaches in all their programming and through their interplay with different parts of the human rights architecture.



Overall, there is a gap in the promotion of young people's participation in intergovernmental bodies, Geneva-based bodies and human rights review mechanisms. This section focuses on participation in the UPR process - a model which can also be applied to different human rights mechanisms - and provides an overview of youth reporting to CEDAW. It also focuses on Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) that support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Although not a human rights mechanism, VNRs are an important entry point for the promotion of human rights of young people.

³ *Civil Society Space and the United Nations Human Rights System: A Practical Guide for Civil Society* (OHCHR).

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN THE UPR PROCESS

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a peer-review mechanism of the HRC, whereby all Member States make and receive human rights recommendations. Member States are reviewed on a 4.5-year cycle, with four phases:

- **Reporting:** The review is based on a set of documents including a National Report, Summary of Stakeholders' Information and Compilation of UN Information.
- **Review:** Reviews take place through an interactive discussion between the State under review and other UN Member States. Recommendations are then reflected in the report of the UPR Working Group.
- **Adoption:** Four months after the review, the report is adopted at a plenary session of the HRC.
- **Implementation:** This takes place at the country level.

UPR can be an entry point for young people's participation, because it is universal in its scope of Member States and human rights obligations, and as a relatively newer human rights mechanism it has a simple structure. It is a largely political process, which makes it well suited for advocacy, but its voluntary nature can make its outcomes weaker.

There are several entry points for youth organizations in the UPR process:

- **Reporting:** UNFPA can support youth organizations to prepare Stakeholders' Submissions. Deadline for submission is 7-8 months prior to the review. [Click here](#) for further information on reporting deadlines.
- **Between reporting and review:** Pre-sessions organized by UPR Info one month prior to the review offer youth organizations an international platform to directly advocate to State delegations ahead of the UPR session. Advocacy can also be undertaken bilaterally with embassies and permanent missions in order to position youth-specific recommendations in the review.
- **Between review and adoption:** States under review must decide whether recommendations will finally be accepted or rejected before the adoption of the UPR outcome report at the HRC. Youth organizations can engage in advocacy work with States at the capital level to ensure that the highest number of recommendations is finally accepted.
- **Adoption:** Youth organizations can deliver a statement during the adoption of the UPR outcome report at the HRC.
- **Implementation:** Youth organizations can actively participate in government-led National Implementation Plans and National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up to implement and track UPR recommendations.

RESOURCES

- Maximizing the use of the Universal Periodic Review at Country Level: Practical Guidance (OHCHR, 2019)
- Lessons from the Second Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UNFPA, 2018)



YOUTH-LED ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE UPR

Mozambique

UNFPA played a pivotal role in elevating young people's SRHR in the country's UPR process. A participatory and inclusive process prioritizing the perspectives and needs of Mozambican young people in the revision of the country's UPR implementation plan led to genuine policy dialogue between young people and the government. UNFPA Mozambique trained more than 400 young people across 11 provinces and organized meetings between youth platforms, civil society actors and government officials to discuss the UPR implementation efforts. This dialogue encouraged the government to take forward SRHR recommendations that it had accepted but not yet implemented, such as to repeal legislation requiring the transfer of pregnant girls to night-time schools and ensure unrestricted access to education for pregnant students. Following dialogue with the youth groups, a committee was formed at the Ministry of Education to address this issue and review the relevant legislation.

Maldives

The UNFPA offices in Geneva and Maldives made it possible for a youth representative from Maldives to deliver a statement during the adoption of Maldives' UPR outcomes at the 46th session of the HRC in 2021. This was particularly important since many of the recommendations made by States, and later accepted by Maldives, were related to SRHR and young people. The statement read by the youth representative from Maldives advocated for access to SRH information and services and the right to women and girls' bodily autonomy, and called for nationwide access to CSE.



YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN CEDAW

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, or CEDAW, is an international legal instrument that requires countries to eliminate discrimination against women in all areas and promotes women's equal rights. CEDAW is often described as the international bill of rights for women. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (also CEDAW) is the body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention.

CEDAW is important because it is a treaty, which means that it is part of international law and is legally binding for countries that have ratified it. It is of particular importance to UNFPA as it is the only human rights treaty affirming the reproductive rights of women with a special focus on impacts of culture and tradition on gender roles and family relations.

In terms of youth participation, CEDAW can be a powerful entry point for promotion of young people's SRHR. One downside is that not all Member States have ratified CEDAW, and some have ratified it with reservations, making it less universal than UPR.

Youth organizations can mainly participate in CEDAW by influencing the List of Issues during the pre-sessional working group as well as influencing the actual State Review, or by submitting a shadow report on their own or together with other NGOs.

RESOURCES

- [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\) for Youth](#) (UN Women, 2016)
- [Toolkit for Reporting to CEDAW on Youth SRHR](#) (Right Here Right Now, 2021)

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN OTHER MECHANISMS

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN THE VNR PROCESS

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encourages Member States to ensure regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels which are both country-led and country-driven. These Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) serve as a basis for the regular reviews by the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), meeting under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Although not a human rights mechanism as such, VNRs are an important entry point for promoting young people's human right to shape the world they live in.

- **Advocate, support and allocate resources for young people's engagement** in a multi-stakeholder VNR review. Amplifying the youth voice in VNR processes is an effective way to ensure issues affecting adolescents and youth are well reflected. This includes consultations, youth-led research,

youth-led advocacy, representation in national meetings and consultations, and engagement in working groups, thematic stakeholder consultations and drafting teams. Likewise, support young people's engagement in follow-up and review processes at global, regional and national levels. Leverage ongoing relationships with youth-led organizations.

➤ **Make a strategic investment to develop youth organizations' capacity.**

Inform and build the capacity of young people from different backgrounds on both the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and monitoring processes. This includes conducting SDG and ICPD awareness-raising activities, including translating the SDGs into local dialects and symbols, and rolling out media campaigns to engage in advocacy and accountability.

➤ **Encourage and learn from shadow/spotlight/parallel youth-led reports.**

Participatory action research (see Module 3, p. 19) is one approach to engage youth in generating evidence and contributing to national conversations on ICPD to help inform work towards the 2030 Agenda. UNFPA can push for more youth-related data and evidence in country analysis, fact sheets and policy briefs, and leverage data related to VNR.



YOUTH-LED ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE VNR

In **Tanzania**, UNFPA collaborated with partners on a consultation of youth and civil society organizations (CSOs) which gathered 50 representatives of youth-led, youth-based organizations. Young people's inputs were featured in a national VNR report through the CSOs' VNR report, as well as a special report with a key focus on young people's engagement in SDG implementation.

In **Moldova**, UNFPA engaged young people in the consultation process for the VNR through the national campaign "Youth for Sustainable Development Goals". The campaign consulted young people about the level of SDG implementation in Moldova and promoted their understanding of the SDGs and how they could contribute to realizing the goals. The campaign led to a Youth Report that was integrated in the national government VNR report, with youth voices and messages for each of the SDGs.

In **Eswatini**, young people were among the stakeholders consulted for the national VNR in 2019. Sixty youth leaders participated in roundtable discussions and provided input on implementation of the SDGs, with a focus on achievements and challenges, impact, priorities and lessons learned. The consultation report identified priority areas for youth development in the country and was used to mobilize resources for their implementation.

In **Lesotho**, representatives of young people participated in district- and community-level multi-stakeholder consultations in preparation for the VNR in 2019. There were community-based dialogues on SDGs, a radio programme, and consultations with young people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups such as herd boys and rural adolescents and youth. The UN Youth Advisory Panel participated in the development of the national report to ensure issues of young people were included. Fifty young people participated in the national validation process and three panel members gave reports on their engagement with young people.

The majority of UN processes can be suitable for youth-led accountability efforts, but some have more established avenues for young people's participation or have established concentrated participation by young people. Important gatherings at the global level, such as the **UN General Assembly, Commission on the Status of Women, Commission on Population and Development** and the **HLPF on Sustainable Development**, are checkpoints around which youth-led organizations and young leaders come together. For these events, the Major Group for Children and Youth often plays an organizational role and also holds preparatory meetings for youth advocates. With the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an even broader opportunity for young people to participate in the main programme and side events of these processes through online platforms.



All these global processes typically involve national-level actions (such as consultations with government, civil society meetings etc.) which are an important opportunity to connect young people's participation at the local level to their work at the global level. Make sure your country office is advocating for youth representation and has allocated resources to support specific processes for youth engagement and capacity-building.

DEVELOPING CAPACITY FOR YOUTH-LED ACCOUNTABILITY

Youth-led accountability means young people holding duty bearers directly to account for their conduct and performance in upholding national, regional and global priorities and commitments, such as delivering services, improving people's welfare and protecting people's rights. UNFPA has been a key player in youth-led accountability discussions and has supported the Global Consensus Statement on Youth-Led Accountability, which was launched at the Nairobi Summit.

THE ACCOUNTABILITY CYCLE

The accountability cycle⁴ is based on three enablers defined by young people themselves as critical in enabling them to take the lead in holding decision-makers to account:

- 1. Increase capacity:** Empower young people with data, skills and networks.
- 2. Enable access:** Connect them to meaningful opportunities to participate in review processes and dialogue and engage with decision-makers.
- 3. Strengthen agency:** Assign young people to report back on progress and respond to the communities they represent.

⁴ Youth Leadership, Participation and Accountability 2.0 Part 2: The Model (UNFPA ESARO, 2019)

In order to apply the accountability cycle, UNFPA country offices can adopt an eight-step model to design accountability initiatives.



Source: Youth Leadership, Participation and Accountability 2.0 Part 2: The Model (UNFPA ESARO, 2019)

- 1. Identify your accountability focus:** Choose a commitment that young people and the community have identified as a priority. The commitment needs to be validated with the community, and aligned with national, regional and global commitments to SRHR and gender equality.
- 2. Map your accountability ecosystem:** An accountability ecosystem looks at the different organizations and individuals with a stake in the issue you are working on. Your accountability ecosystem may include personal contacts, broader civil society stakeholders, institutions and ministries, key decision-makers, elected officials etc.

- 3. Build your accountability network:** Having mapped your accountability ecosystem, identify the stakeholders with whom you want to work most closely. These organizations and individuals will form part of your accountability network. Consider linking up with established networks. Make your network diverse, assign roles based on expertise, and include decision-makers in your network.
- 4. Establish measurable indicators:** Identify relevant indicators (or develop complementary ones, if needed) to guide data collection. For example, start with global and/or regional indicators that already exist, move to national indicators and then map indicators across your network. Ensure community input and validation of the indicators.
- 5. Identify available data on your issue, and where required, generate your own:** Collecting evidence is an important step to understanding why commitments linked to your accountability focus may be off track. Begin by researching what data currently exist, and assess the quality of those data. If there are gaps in the data, generate your own. Involve young people and marginalized groups in data collection, be inclusive, and make advocating for open data part of your work.
- 6. Analyse your data to inform the development of key advocacy messages:** Refer back to your indicators and map your data findings against them. This will help you to understand how much progress has been made towards achieving a specific commitment, and define what needs to change to accelerate further action. Find interactive and accessible ways to present your data analysis, such as storytelling, graphs and infographics.
- 7. Seek accountability and make your case heard by targeted decision-makers:** There is a range of approaches to seeking accountability, such as reports (including shadow reports), campaigns, petitions and public hearings, ensuring representation, sharing findings with the media and on social media, and connecting your recommendations to national, regional and global platforms.
- 8. Give feedback on progress to your community and continue monitoring progress or commitments:** Where commitments are made by decision-makers, use these as new targets to monitor. Develop and implement an accountability scorecard for young people, develop a report on community perspectives, and run community events.

RESOURCES

- Detailed step-by-step guidance is available in [*Youth Leadership, Participation and Accountability 2.0 Part 2: The Model*](#) (UNFPA ESARO, 2019).
- More on the recommendations for better youth-led accountability can be found in [*Youth Leadership, Participation and Accountability 2.0 Part 1: The Recommendations*](#) (UNFPA ESARO, 2019).
- [*Accountability in Action: A Practical Guide for Young People Tracking the Sustainable Development Goals*](#) (Restless Development, African Monitor, Plan UK, YES Ghana, 2016)
- [*Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation*](#) (UNICEF, 2018)

ACTIVITIES FOR YOUTH-LED ACCOUNTABILITY

These activities can be supported by UNFPA, according to the context and needs.

Participatory policymaking

Include young people in policy design via consultations or other participatory means.

Participatory budgeting

Include young people in decisions on allocating municipal or public budgets.

Public expenditure tracking

Trace the flow of public resources for the provision of public goods or services from origin to destination.

Preparing report cards

Enable citizen monitoring and evaluation of public service delivery.

Civic education and awareness campaigns

Educate citizens/young people on their rights and available services.

Increasing the effectiveness of internal accountability mechanisms

Promote public commissions and hearings, citizen advisory boards, oversight committees.

Participation in national, regional or international human rights mechanisms

Contribute to or prepare shadow reports or other mechanism-specific means.

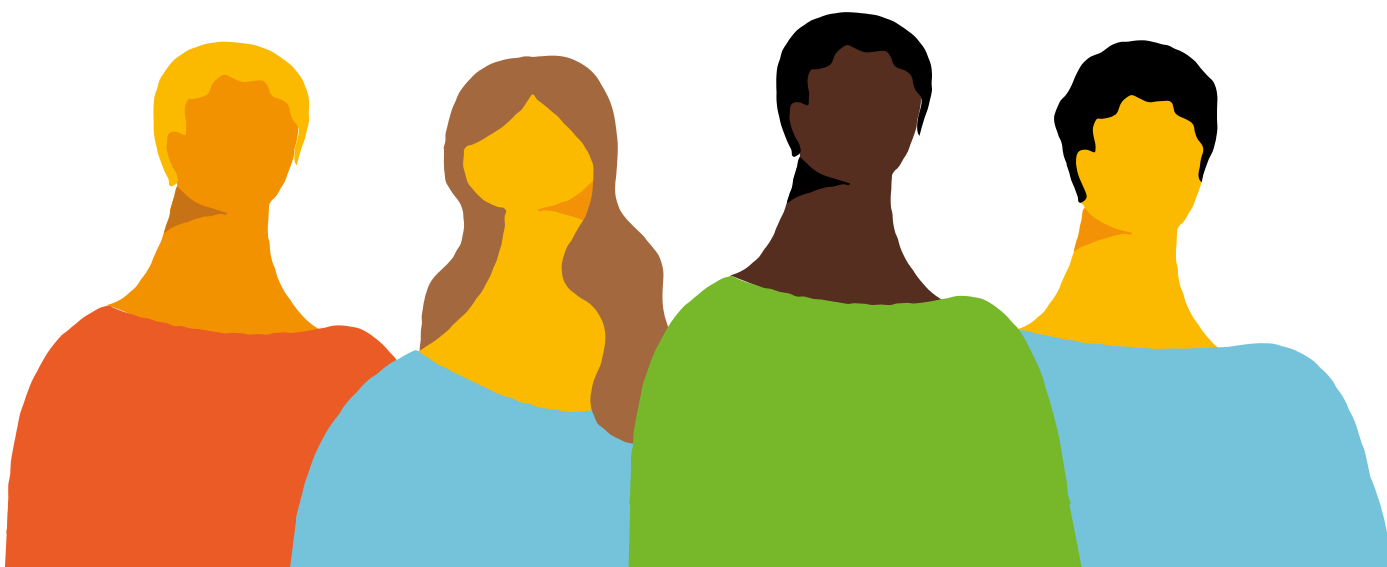
Media campaigns

Promote investigative journalism, blogs and social media.

Legal advocacy, public interest lawsuits

Initiate or support legal action for the protection of the public interest.

To learn more about safeguarding young people as human rights defenders, refer to Module 9 (Advocacy and Policy Dialogue).



→ LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

Leaving no one behind is one of the key principles of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and a central principle of UNFPA's Strategic Plan 2022-2025. Taking a human rights-based approach helps UNFPA to focus on the social inequalities and underlying power relations that lead to exclusion, and to identify intersecting forms of discrimination, both of which are crucial to efforts to reach the furthest behind.

This section focuses on working with young persons with disabilities and LGBTQ+ young people and proposes approaches to ensure youth rights for the two groups.

UNFPA'S APPROACH TO WORKING WITH AND FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Globally, over 180 million persons 10 to 24 years of age live with a disability – mental, intellectual, physical or sensorial. Around 80 per cent of them live in low-income countries. Young persons with disabilities are disproportionately isolated within their own communities, are far less likely than their peers to achieve the same educational and employment outcomes and are often unable to begin families or establish healthy sexual partnerships. They are as likely to be sexually active as their peers without disabilities and should have equal rights to SRH services. They have unique – and at times greater – needs for these services. For many young persons with disabilities, access to SRH services is hindered by physical inaccessibility, communication barriers, negative attitudes of service providers, lack of confidentiality, costs, mistreatment and an overall inadequacy of service delivery.

Globally, over 180 million persons 10 to 24 years of age live with a disability – mental, intellectual, physical or sensorial. Around 80 per cent of them live in low-income countries.

We Matter. We Belong. We Decide, UNFPA Disability Inclusion Strategy 2022-2025 provides the overall framework to support the leadership of young persons with disabilities and ensure equal opportunities for young persons with disabilities in accessing SRHR and prevention and response to GBV. In its work with young persons with disabilities, UNFPA:

- **acknowledges** that young persons with disabilities, including young women and adolescent girls, can best speak to their needs and the challenges they face, from accessing services to information and education about relationships, parenthood, contraceptives and other topics
- **promotes** an enabling social, policy and legal environment for realizing the rights of young persons with disabilities, focused on promoting gender equality and human rights
- **supports** networks of young persons with disabilities, including the Global Youth with Disabilities Network in collaboration with United Nations Interagency Partnership, and mobilizes existing national groups and networks of youth with disabilities.



WE DECIDE INITIATIVE

UNFPA has begun a global initiative to promote the human rights and social inclusion of persons with disabilities, “We Decide: Women and Young Persons with Disabilities. A Programme for Equal Opportunities and a Life Free of Violence”. With a focus on access to SRH services and information and addressing GBV, We Decide aims to mainstream disability into all UNFPA’s programmes and interventions and make disability inclusion more human rights-based and systematic within UNFPA. In 2019, 45 UNFPA country offices reported promoting the rights of persons with disabilities through their programmes, while all regional offices had programmed for disability inclusion. Inspired by the SDGs’ “Leave No One Behind” principle, We Decide provides model interventions for UNFPA, states and civil society organizations to scale up, based on the twin-track approach,⁵ intersectionality and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities.

⁵ Approach of mainstreaming disability inclusion throughout the work of UNFPA, and having a dedicated set of work for disability inclusion and reproductive rights.



LEADERSHIP OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN ECUADOR

For UNFPA in Ecuador, an important part of We Decide is strengthening the leadership of young persons with disabilities. A blind Ecuadorian young adult who is co-founder of Comparlante, an organization dedicated to accessibility in the Americas, was hired as a consultant to develop an accessible website for young persons with disabilities in Ecuador with a focus on SRH. This idea was developed by Comparlante and two local NGOs: Huertomanías, an organization working on labour-market inclusion of people with psychosocial disabilities, and Colectiva Sordas Feministas, a collective of deaf women in Ecuador who fight for the rights of deaf women.

In collaboration with organizations of persons with disabilities, the Ecuador Country Office developed a website, Igual que Tu (Just Like You), which provides information in accessible format on SRHR and GBV for young persons with disabilities, and brought together young persons with disabilities through online workshops. UNFPA Ecuador also guaranteed the inclusion of deaf young girls in a leadership school with Plan International focusing on SRHR.

The goal is to strengthen associative movements of young persons and women with disabilities, reduce gaps in the response to COVID-19 and develop inclusive action plans for disability in the pandemic and post-pandemic stages, through training in young people's personal development, empowerment and activation of their rights.

RESOURCES

- *We Matter. We Belong. We Decide. UNFPA Disability Inclusion Strategy 2022-2025* (UNFPA, 2021)
- *Young Persons with Disabilities: Global Study on Ending Gender-based Violence, and Realizing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights* (UNFPA, 2018)
- *Women and Young Persons with Disabilities: Guidelines for Providing Rights-based and Gender-responsive Services to Address Gender-based Violence and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for Women and Young Persons with Disabilities* (UNFPA, 2018)
- *Your Rights: Information for Women and Young People with Disabilities* (UNFPA, 2018)
- *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD)
- *Handbook for Parliamentarians on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (OHCHR, 2017)
- *Checklist for Ensuring Human Rights-Based Sexual and Reproductive Health for Women and Girls with Disabilities during the COVID-19 Pandemic* (UNFPA and Women Enabled International, 2021)

UNFPA'S APPROACH TO WORKING WITH AND FOR LGBTQ+ YOUNG PEOPLE

UNFPA works to ensure SRH rights and choices for all, irrespective of sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics. The widespread violence, discrimination and exclusion faced by LGBTQ+ people and their families around the world constitute serious human rights violations and impede efforts to achieve the SDGs and their promise of leaving no one behind.

In many parts of the world, consensual same-sex relationships remain criminalized, exposing many young people to the risk of arrest, imprisonment or even death. Homophobic and transphobic violence takes place in all contexts and settings. Trans people struggle to obtain legal recognition of their gender identity and face daily discrimination and stigma, whether at work, school or in trying to secure basic health services, housing and other needs.

UNFPA is committed to addressing the specific needs and rights of LGBTQ+ people by supporting health, CSE and advocacy initiatives that help marginalized communities and lift up young people, including the LGBTQ+ young people often left behind.



TIPS FOR WORKING WITH AND FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND LGBTQ+ YOUNG PEOPLE

- **Create an enabling legislative and policy environment** for young persons with disabilities and LGBTQ+ young people by conducting assessments and monitoring the legal environment specific to these two communities, through legislative advocacy and lobbying, and by participatory development in national policies and plans that addresses both groups' human rights.
- **Engage young people with disabilities, especially young women and girls with a range of disabilities, and LGBTQ+ young people** at the core of developing, implementing and monitoring programmes. UNFPA can provide capacity-building, delivery of programmes and accessible services, data collection and monitoring, and referral pathways. Targeted programmes might be needed in some country contexts, such as CSE for persons with disabilities, and safe spaces for LGBTQ+ young people, including GBV services.
- **Lead and support the involvement of young people with disabilities and LGBTQ+ young people in youth-led accountability processes**, including UPRs and VNRs, especially by establishing an enabling environment for their participation, including safety, accessibility and acceptability.
- **Apply the “Do No Harm” approach** in your supported interventions. In some countries, working with young LGBTQ+ people requires ensuring their confidentiality and privacy to protect their safety.
- **Adopt the AAAQ framework (Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability and Quality)** in the provision of all services for young people with disabilities. For details, see *Young Persons with Disabilities: Global Study on Ending Gender-based Violence, and Realizing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights* (UNFPA, 2018).
- **Protect, prevent, repeal, prohibit and safeguard:** Structure and adapt your work around these five core legal obligations of states with respect to protecting the human rights of LGBTQ+ persons. For details, see *Born Free and Equal: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in International Human Rights Law* (OHCHR, 2012).







RESOURCES

- ✦ ActionAid and the Office of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth (2020). *Believe in better. A Working Paper on Young People's Inclusion in the National Follow up, Review and Accountability Process of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development.* <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Believe-in-Better.pdf>
- ✦ Barragués, Alfonso (2021). *Righting the Demographic Dividend: Putting Youth Rights Upfront.* In Fernández Puyana, David (ed.): *Multilateralism, Human Rights and Diplomacy: A Global Perspective* (Muslim World League, University for Peace, 2021).
- ✦ European Youth Forum (2012). *Policy Paper on Youth Rights.* <https://tools.youthforum.org/policy-library/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Policy-Paper-on-Youth-Rights.pdf>
- ✦ European Youth Forum (2018). Human Rights Council resolution 35/14: OHCHR study on youth and human rights. European Youth Forum submission. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Youth/EuropeanYouthForum.pdf>
- ✦ IIMA Human Rights Office. Submission to OHCHR report on Youth and Human Rights in accordance with Human Rights Council Resolution 35/14. https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Youth/IIMA_VIDES.pdf
- ✦ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2019). *Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General.* <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3862829?ln=en>
- ✦ United Nations. *United Nations Youth Strategy: Youth 2030 Working with and for Young People.* https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/18-00080_UN-Youth-Strategy_Web.pdf
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