

DEFINITION OF YOUTH



HIGHLIGHTS

-“the United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 as youth without prejudice to other definitions by Member States.”¹
- ...“the United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 as youth without prejudice to other definitions by Member States.”²
- ...“In 1995, the world youth population - defined by the United Nations as the age cohort 15-24 - is estimated to be 1.03 billion, or 18 per cent of the total world population.”³
- ...“approximately half of new human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infections are in youth aged 15 to 24 years and that no fewer than 6,500 young people are infected by the virus each day...”⁴
- ... “where a striking 76 per cent of young people (aged 15 to 24 years old) living with HIV are female.”^{5 6}

YOUTH is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence. That’s why, as a category, youth is more fluid than other fixed age-groups. Yet, age is the easiest way to define this group, particularly in relation to education and employment, because ‘youth’ is often referred to a person between the ages of leaving compulsory education, and finding their first job.

What does the United Nations mean by ‘youth’?

The United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines ‘youth’, as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. The Secretary-General first referred to the current definition of youth in 1981 in his report to the General Assembly on International Youth Year (A/36/215, para. 8 of the annex) and endorsed it in ensuing reports (A/40/256, para. 19 of the annex). However, in both the reports, the

Secretary-General also recognized that, apart from that statistical definition, the meaning of the term ‘youth’ varies in different societies around the world. When the General Assembly, by its resolution 50/81 in 1995, adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and beyond, it reiterated that the United Nations defined youth as the age cohort of 15-24. The General

¹ Secretary-General’s Report to the General Assembly, A/36/215, 1981

² Secretary-General’s Report to the General Assembly, A/40/256, 1985

³ General Assembly Resolution, A/RES/50/81, 1995

⁴ General Assembly Resolutions, A/RES/56/117, 2002

⁵ General Assembly Resolutions, A/RES/62/126, 2008

⁶ Commission for Social Development Resolutions, E/2007/26 & E/CN.5/2007/, 2007





Assembly resolution A/RES/56/117 in 2001, the Commission for Social Development resolution E/2007/26 & E/CN.5/2007/8 in 2007 and the General Assembly resolution A/RES/62/126 in 2008 also reinforce the same age-group for youth.

Youth and Young People

The UN Secretariat uses the terms youth and young people interchangeable to mean age 15-24 with the understanding that member states and other entities use different definitions.

Several UN entities, instruments and regional organizations have somewhat different definitions of youth, which the United Nations secretariat recognizes. The following table summarizes these differences:

Entity/Instrument/ Organization	Age	Reference
UN Secretariat/UNESCO/ILO	Youth: 15-24	UN Instruments, Statistics
UN Habitat (Youth Fund)	Youth 15-32	Agenda 21 ⁷
UNICEF/WHO/UNFPA	Adolescent: 10-19, Young People: 10-24, Youth: 15-24	UNFPA ⁸
UNICEF /The Convention on Rights of the Child	Child until 18	UNICEF ⁹
The African Youth Charter	Youth: 15-35	African Union, 2006 ¹⁰

Conclusion

Definition of youth perhaps changes with circumstances, especially with the changes in demographic, financial, economic and socio-cultural settings; however, the definition that uses 15-24 age cohort as youth fairly serves its statistical purposes for assessing the needs of the young people and providing guidelines for youth development.

For further reading

- Website of the Focal Point on Youth, UNDESA
<http://undesadspd.org/Youth.aspx>

⁷<http://www.unhabitat.org/pmss/listItemDetails.aspx?publicationID=3393>

⁸<http://www.unfpa.org/emergencies/manual/8.htm>

⁹http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/index_66834.html

¹⁰<http://www.africa-union.org/root/ua/conferences/mai/hrst/charter%20english.pdf>





- World Programme of Action for Youth
<http://undesadspd.org/Youth/WorldProgrammeofActionforYouth.aspx>
- UN General Assembly Resolutions
<http://www.un.org/documents/resga.htm>
- Youth Resolutions
<http://undesadspd.org/Youth/ResourcesandPublications/Youthresolutions.aspx>

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