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 Assembly Resolution, A/RES/56/117, 2002


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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

**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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entity/Instrument/ Organization</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UN Secretariat/UNESCO/ILO Youth</td>
<td>15-24</td>
<td>UN Instruments, Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Habitat (Youth Fund) Youth</td>
<td>15-32</td>
<td>Agenda 21&lt;sup&gt;7&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF/WHO/UNFPA Adolescent: 10-19, Young People: 10-24, Youth: 15-24</td>
<td></td>
<td>UNFPA&lt;sup&gt;8&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF /The Convention on Rights of the Child Child until 18</td>
<td></td>
<td>UNICEF&lt;sup&gt;9&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The African Youth Charter Youth: 15-35</td>
<td></td>
<td>African Union, 2006&lt;sup&gt;10&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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](http://undesadspd.org/Youth.aspx)

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/index_66834.html](http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/index_66834.html)

• World Programme of Action for Youth
  http://undesadspd.org/Youth/WorldProgrammeofActionforYouth.aspx

• UN General Assembly Resolutions

• Youth Resolutions
  http://undesadspd.org/Youth/ResourcesandPublications/Youthresolutions.aspx