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World **YOUTH** Report 2005

Young people today, and in 2015



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Foreword

Young people today, and in 2015

Young people hold the key to society's future. Their ambitions, goals and aspirations for peace, security, development and human rights are often in accord with those of society as a whole. The international development agenda is centred around the achievement of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) incorporated in the United Nations Millennium Declaration. Each of these Goals relates directly or indirectly to the well-being of children and young people.

We are living in a very youthful world, indeed, with almost half of the current global population under the age of 25. There are 1.2 billion young people in the world today, and the next generation of youth (children presently below the age of 15) will be half again as large, numbering 1.8 billion. Thanks to the global consensus that led to the adoption of the MDGs, young people are increasingly becoming the focus of international attention.

With over 200 million youth living in poverty, 130 million illiterate, 88 million unemployed, and 10 million living with HIV/AIDS, the case for investing in young people today is clear. However, world leaders must also commit themselves to ensuring the well-being of the next generation; today's children will be the youth of 2015—the year targeted for the achievement of many of the MDGs. In 2003, a quarter of all children in the developing world were malnourished. Eleven million children under the age of five die each year, mostly from preventable and treatable diseases; if this trend continues, 110 million of the world's youngest children will have perished before the current group of five-year olds reaches the threshold age of youth in 2015. Moreover, 115 million children are currently not in school. These statistics suggest that the young people of 2015 will face enormous challenges unless a much greater effort is made to achieve the MDG targets set for that year.

The MDGs relevant to the current generation highlight youth employment, maternal health, and reduced exposure to HIV/AIDS and other preventable diseases. For the future generation of youth, the MDGs address universal primary education, reductions in child mortality, and improved maternal health. This indicates that the MDGs are in many respects “youth development goals”.

The year 2005 marks not only the five-year review of the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration and of progress in achieving the MDGs, but also the tenth anniversary of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, adopted by the General Assembly in 1995. Predating the Millennium Declaration by several years, this Programme of Action constituted the first global blueprint for effective national youth policies. Highlighting ten priority areas of youth policy in a practical, comprehensive policy plan, it has served as an essential reference point for many Governments all over the world.

A number of important changes have taken place since the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth. Young people, more than any other age group, have been adversely affected by developments relating to globalization, the ageing of society, rapid advances in information and communication technology, the HIV/AIDS

epidemic, and armed conflict. The direct relevance of these areas of concern to the lives of young people was recognized in the adoption of General Assembly resolution 58/133 of 2003 and further validated by their inclusion in the World Youth Report, 2003, which provided an extensive evaluation of what had been achieved both in these five areas and in the original ten areas of policy priority identified in the World Programme of Action for Youth.

This second edition of the World Youth Report reflects a very different approach from that of the earlier edition. The main findings of the 2003 Report remain valid. In the present publication, the 15 areas of priority are grouped into three clusters that reflect a somewhat broader focus on youth in a global economy, youth in civil society, and youth at risk. To provide a better understanding of the realities faced by the current generation of young people, each of the three sections of the Report focuses on a particular cluster and includes a brief review of all the priorities it encompasses, as well as a more detailed examination and analysis of one topic of particular relevance. The topic highlighted in part I is poverty among young people in its various dimensions. Before the 2003 Report was published, little was known about the numbers of young people living in poverty, let alone the dynamics characterizing their unique circumstances and experiences in this context. Part II zooms into some of the dramatic changes occurring in relation to young people's social and cultural development. While there is still enormous diversity among young people worldwide, the processes of urbanization and globalization and rapid advances in information and communication technology have arguably contributed to the emergence of a new global media-driven youth culture. These trends have each had an impact on young people's socialization and on youth activism and other forms of civic engagement. Part III of the Report highlights the impact of conflict on young people. While most youth manage to make the transition from childhood to adulthood in a safe and peaceful environment, large numbers of young people are not so fortunate; the past 15 years have witnessed enormous growth in domestic and international armed conflict.

Too often, youth policies are shaped by negative stereotypes of young people, with excessive attention given to delinquency, drug abuse and violence. This type of policy focus ignores the majority of youth, who do not engage in such high-risk behaviours, and diverts attention away from the need for structural investments in education, health care and employment creation.

Investing in youth starts with investing in children. Strengthening policy and resource commitments now with the aim of achieving the relevant MDG targets in the coming decade will produce enormous benefits for the young people of 2015. Today's young people will also benefit from efforts in this regard, and as they have demonstrated repeatedly, they are partners in working towards these global development goals. Too many young people continue to live in dire circumstances; there is no time to lose in scaling up investments in our planet's youngest residents.

It is my sincere hope that with the five-year review of progress towards achieving the MDGs and the tenth anniversary of the World Programme of Action for Youth, and through publications such as this one, world leaders will recognize the youth of today as untapped resources for development and peace.



José Antonio Ocampo
Under-Secretary-General

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Technical Note

In this publication, unless otherwise indicated, the term "youth" refers to all those between the ages of 15 and 24, as reflected in the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. The term "young people" may be used interchangeably with the word "youth" in the text.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	acquired immune deficiency syndrome
CAFF	children associated (or formerly associated) with fighting forces
CAP	consolidated appeals process
CD	compact disc
CD-ROM	compact disc - read-only memory
DDR	(Programme on) Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
e-	electronic (examples include e-mail and e-commerce)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FGM	female genital mutilation
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICT	information and communication technology
IDP	internally displaced person(s)
ILO	International Labour Organization
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MONUC	United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MSEE	Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction
MTV	Music Television
NGO	non-governmental organization
OIOS	United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services
OSRSGCAC	Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
PC	personal computer
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RHRC	Reproductive Health Response in Conflict Consortium
RUF	Revolutionary United Front (Sierra Leone)
STI	sexually transmitted infection
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VCR	video cassette recorder
WAFF	women associated (or formerly associated) with fighting forces
YEN	Youth Employment Network
YMC	Youth Media Council

As many generations of young people have come and gone, and as each decade has witnessed the emergence of a new cohort of young people between the ages of 15 and 24, youth issues have remained a prime concern for many policymakers. Many of the basic aspects of the transitional phase of life known as youth have remained the same; education, health, entry into the world of work, family formation, and productive and responsible citizenship are still among the highest priorities for young people. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) represent a renewed commitment to ensuring that these basic requirements are met so that young people may realize their innate potential.

It is also true, however, that the world in which young people are now making their transition into adulthood is quite different from that of ten years ago. Few foresaw the enormous impact that rapid globalization, the spread of HIV/AIDS, the explosive growth of information and communication technology (ICT), and other recent developments would have on young people's daily lives. Some of the previous generations of youth lived in a period of global ideological polarization. Gradually, they began to demand greater participation in the institutions influencing their socialization (notably the systems of education in their societies) and in democratic decision-making processes. While the latter has become a crucial element of successful youth policies worldwide, the former ideological focus has largely vanished and appears to have been replaced by new ideological conflicts.

This type of historical perspective serves to remind youth policymakers of a simple but often ignored fact: young people today are different from any of the previous generations of youth. It is essential to ensure that youth interventions are relevant and valid for the current young generation in society and not mired in the realities of times past.

MAIN FINDINGS: A SNAPSHOT OF YOUTH WORLDWIDE

This publication builds upon the *World Youth Report, 2003*. The earlier *Report* provided a detailed analysis of the ten areas of policy priority addressed in the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, adopted by the General Assembly in 1995, as well as the five additional areas of concern formally acknowledged by the General Assembly in 2003 (see the list below).

The ten priority areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/81 of 1995, include the following:

- 1 Education**
- 2 Employment**
- 3 Hunger and poverty**
- 4 Health**
- 5 Environment**

- 6 Drug abuse**
- 7 Juvenile delinquency**
- 8 Leisure-time activities**
- 9 Girls and young women**
- 10 Youth participation in decision-making**

Five additional priority areas identified by the General Assembly in its resolution 58/133 of 2003 are as follows:

- 1 Globalization**
- 2 Information and communication technology**
- 3 HIV/AIDS**
- 4 Youth and armed conflict**
- 5 Intergenerational relations**

It was decided that providing a comprehensive update on the same priority areas only two years after the issuance of the 2003 *Report* was unlikely to offer much new insight, as the global situation of young people has not changed dramatically in most respects. Nonetheless, it is appropriate to mark the tenth anniversary of the World Programme of Action for Youth with a review of major developments and the progress achieved in each of the areas of concern. Some of the main findings of the analysis are summarized in the following:

- **Poverty.** Estimates based on available poverty data from 2002 indicate that some 209 million young people, or 18 per cent of all youth, live on less than US\$ 1 per day, and 515 million live on less than US\$ 2 per day. As poverty indicators are usually not disaggregated by age, it is unclear whether the poverty situation of young people has improved or deteriorated since 1995. The effects of intergenerational transfers on young people's income and well-being also need to be better understood.
- **Education.** Since 1995, the number of children completing primary school has continued to increase, and four out of five young people in the eligible age group are now in secondary school. Tertiary enrolment has risen as well; it is estimated that some 100 million youth are presently engaged in university-level studies worldwide. The current generation of youth is the best-educated so far. However, 113 million children are not in school, and 130 million young people are illiterate.
- **Employment.** In spite of the progress achieved in education, global youth unemployment has increased to a record high of 88 million. Rates of unemployment among young people are highest in Western Asia, North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. There is growing pressure on young people to compete in an increasingly globalized labour market.

- *Health.* Globally, young people are reaching adolescence earlier and marrying later. Premarital sexual relations appear to be increasing. Although early pregnancy has declined in many countries, it is still a major concern. HIV/AIDS is the primary cause of mortality among youth, followed by violence and injuries.
- *Environment.* Young people continue to be concerned about a sustainable future. There is a need to increase their involvement in decision-making processes that relate to the environment.
- *Leisure.* The past decade has seen growing recognition of the vital role leisure time can play in the lives of young people in terms of promoting social inclusion, access to opportunities, and overall development. Young people are increasingly seeking and finding new ways to spend their free time, both out of necessity and out of choice.
- *Drug abuse.* There has been an unprecedented increase in the use of synthetic drugs worldwide, mostly in recreational settings. The demand for illicit substances among youth in developing countries has risen to levels typically found in industrialized countries.
- *Juvenile delinquency.* Delinquency among young people perpetuates negative stereotypes and is often perceived as a threat to society. Some countries respond to this threat by imposing policies of incarceration and active deterrence, while various United Nations instruments promote social rather than judicial approaches to dealing with young offenders.
- *Girls and young women.* There has been greater awareness of gender issues among Governments. However, equal access to higher education and labour markets remains a concern in some countries. Negative stereotypes of women persist in both old and new media.
- *Participation in decision-making.* Over the past decade there has been growing recognition of the importance of youth participation in decision-making. New efforts to include young people in decision-making must take into account the significant changes occurring in the patterns and structures of youth movements.
- *Globalization.* Young people are adaptable and perhaps best able to make use of the new opportunities offered by globalization. However, large numbers of young people have not benefited from this process, especially in developing countries. Globalization has had an impact on youth employment opportunities and migration patterns, and has led to profound changes in youth culture and consumerism and in global youth citizenship and activism.
- *Information and communication technology.* The proliferation of ICT within the context of globalization over the past decade has presented both opportunities and challenges for young people. The global digital divide affects individuals of all ages, including youth.

- **HIV/AIDS.** Ten million young people, most of them in Africa and Asia, are currently living with HIV/AIDS. The epidemic has had a devastating impact on the sexual and reproductive health of young people, as they are particularly vulnerable to infection.
- **Youth and conflict.** A disproportionate number of young people have been involved in conflicts over the past decade. While an international legal framework is in place to protect minors and prevent their engagement in conflict situations, there has been no improvement on the ground.
- **Intergenerational relations.** The share of young people in the world's total population is gradually declining, and youth development will increasingly be geared towards the potential benefits it can bring to other generations. Despite its changing structure, the family remains the primary social institution for the congregation and interaction of generations.

HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

The 15 priority issues identified above may be grouped into three clusters representing the broad contexts in which today's youth deal with challenges and concerns that many of them share in spite of the vast differences in their cultures, societies and communities. The book is divided into three parts based on these clusters; each starts with an overview of global trends relating to the relevant priority issues, after which one topic is examined in much greater depth. The three clusters are described in some detail below.

Part I: Youth in a Global Economy. This first cluster comprises the issues of globalization, education, employment, and hunger and poverty. Chapter 1 presents an overview of global trends relating to all four issues, and chapters 2 and 3 provide a more in-depth look at young people in poverty.

While poverty reduction is clearly a vitally important development goal, little is known about the dynamics characterizing the poverty situation of young people. In the 2003 *Report*, a first attempt was made to estimate the number of young people living in poverty based on the established thresholds of US\$ 1 and US\$ 2 per day; in the present publication these figures are updated, and some additional observations are offered. Another (often overlooked) aspect of poverty addressed in this section is the transfer of poverty between generations. In our ageing world, a better understanding of intergenerational dynamics is essential for the development of effective policy interventions.

Part II: Youth in Civil Society. The second part of the publication focuses on concerns relating to the environment, leisure, participation in decision-making, intergenerational relations, and ICT. Chapter 4 provides an overview of global trends with regard to these five issues, and chapters 5 and 6 highlight the impact of ICT on young people's socialization and activism within a changing media landscape.

Growing reliance on new forms of information and communication technology is a defining feature of the lives of many of today's youth. ICT developments have provided young people with an ever-expanding array of media possibilities for obtaining information, pursuing pleasure, and strengthening autonomy. The Internet has been a particularly important component of the ICT revolution for young people. As these media and their "global" content have become more widely accessible, a somewhat homogeneous global youth culture has emerged that binds the world's young people together in important new ways. These technological advances have contributed to a redefinition of some of the most fundamental aspects of society. Most notably, the openness and availability of new technologies have expanded the possibilities for young people to share their views and experiences and contribute to their own cultural development, leading to an increasingly bidirectional flow of socialization between the younger and older generations.

Part III: Youth at Risk. This final cluster encompasses the issues of health, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, the situation of girls and young women, and youth in armed conflict. A brief summary of recent findings concerning these areas of priority is provided in chapter 7. It should be emphasized, with regard to the issues of health and gender, that young people's basic rights include access to medical care, to information on sexual and reproductive health, and to gender equality, and it is on this basis that policies and programmes should be developed. Chapter 8 focuses on the rise in violent conflict around the world and examines its dramatic impact on young people through a gender lens.

The end of the cold war has not brought about a reduction in armed conflict; on the contrary, many new conflicts have emerged in recent decades, most notably in sub-Saharan Africa but also in other parts of the world. Disproportionate numbers of young people are involved in these conflicts both as perpetrators and as victims. The situation of child soldiers has, deservedly, been widely documented, and a number of international legal instruments incorporating various preventive and protective measures have been adopted to address this issue; unfortunately, these instruments do not protect young people over the age of 18. The rise in armed conflict, terrorism and the threat of terrorism has focused world attention on young males and their potential for violence. As a consequence, the experiences and capacities of young males and females who do not participate in, but are affected by, armed conflicts are marginalized, as are the concerns of female youth who are actively involved in armed violence.

While it may not be immediately apparent, there are some important connections between the issues highlighted in this edition of the *World Youth Report*. First, it may be argued that all three issues—youth in poverty, the emergence of a global media-driven youth culture, and youth in armed conflict—received insufficient attention in the past but have become more central to the wider development interests of the international community. Second, poverty, global youth cultures, and armed conflict are all either directly or indirectly related to globalization. Third, both established and emerging media have made young people

increasingly aware of the problems of their peers who are trapped in poverty or in conflict-or both. Fourth, poverty, global youth cultures and armed conflict have a dramatic impact on traditional socialization patterns, affecting families, communities, schools, and other institutions that provide young people with the support they need during their transition to adulthood. Too many young people continue to see promising educational careers cut short by conflict and poverty.

Finally, all three issues reflect aspects of the global divide between young people: there are those who are trapped in poverty and those who are not; there are young people who benefit from new technologies in their lives and careers and young people who lack access to them; and there are youth who can pursue their dreams in a stable environment of peace and security, and those unfortunate enough to become trapped in armed conflict. These disparities and inequalities between the young people of the world need to be eliminated; it is hoped that this book will contribute to a better understanding of where to start. ●

