



2020  
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT  
FOR GLOBAL ACTION

## 2020 THEME CONCEPT NOTE: YOUTH ENGAGEMENT FOR GLOBAL ACTION

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### **ABOUT INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY**

In 1999, in its resolution 54/120, the General Assembly endorsed the recommendation made by the World Conference of Ministers of Youth (Lisbon, 8-12 August 1998) that 12 August be declared International Youth Day.

International Youth Day gives an opportunity to celebrate and mainstream young peoples' voices, actions and initiatives, as well as their meaningful, universal and equitable engagement. The commemoration will take the form of a podcast-style discussion that is hosted by youth for youth, together with independently organized commemorations around the world that recognize the importance of youth participation in political, economic and social life and processes.

### **THEME**

As the United Nations turns 75, and with only 10 years remaining to make the 2030 Agenda a reality for all, trust in public institutions is eroding. At the international level, against the backdrop of an increasingly polarized world, the international system of governance is currently undergoing a crisis of legitimacy and relevance. In particular, this crisis is rooted in the need to strengthen the capacity of the international system to act in concert and implement solutions to pressing challenges and threats (examples include some of the worst contemporary conflicts and humanitarian emergencies, such as Syria and Myanmar, as well as global challenges, such as the COVID-19 outbreak and climate change).

In many domestic contexts, there is also a growing sense of discontent aimed at political establishments for—failing to include the perspectives of the wider public and effectively respond to their needs. In many countries, political forces have been able to tap into this discontent, contributing to a rise in nationalism, intolerance, and isolationism. In turn, this has increased fragmentation and polarization, hampering the prospects for concerted global action.

At all levels, deep inequalities and a lack of political and social inclusion appear to be at the core of the problem. Young people in particular regularly state that their voices are not sufficiently taken into account, their needs sufficiently understood and met, and that their engagement and empowerment in various processes is still lacking. In fact, as documented by low rates of electoral activity, political participation, and parliamentary involvement, young people are underrepresented in institutional political processes. For instance, despite constituting over half the global population, only around 2 percent of national parliamentarians are under 30 years old. Meanwhile, older age cohorts are highly overrepresented within political establishments.

The under-representation of youth is, at least in part, a result of structural and societal barriers and biases such as perceived inexperience, a lack of supportive social networks, or insufficient financial resources. In addition to and as a consequence of these barriers, young people often tend to turn away from traditional or formal channels of political participation as they see them as ineffective and outdated. This indicates that any political disengagement among youth (in terms of voter turnout, for example) is not a result of a general lack of interest in politics, but due to frustrations with the formal channels of participation. As a result, young people have instead turned towards alternative forms of participation to channel their political energy.

Enabling the engagement of youth in formal political mechanisms does increase the fairness of political processes by reducing democratic deficits, contributes to better and more sustainable policies, and also has symbolic importance that can further contribute to restore trust in public institutions, especially among youth. Moreover, the vast majority of challenges humanity currently faces, such as the COVID-19 outbreak and climate change require concerted global action and the meaningful engagement and participation of young people to be addressed effectively.

Against this background, the aim of IYD 2020 is to shed light on the need to enable the engagement of youth by making local, national and global institutions more inclusive for the purpose of strengthening their capacity (and relevance) to achieve global action. **In particular, IYD 2020 seeks to highlight the ways in which the engagement of young people at the local, national and global levels is enriching national and multilateral institutions and processes, as well as draw lessons on how their representation and engagement in formal institutional politics can be significantly enhanced.** This year's IYD seeks to put the spotlight on youth engagement through the following three interconnected streams: 1. Engagement at the local/community level; 2. Engagement at the national level (formulation of laws, policies, and their implementation); and, 3. Engagement at the global level.

**FORMAT**

The commemoration of IYD 2020 will take the form of a podcast-style discussion led by youth for youth. This will involve discussions on the selected theme between young participants that are engaged in political processes at the local, national, and global levels, including for instance representatives from youth constituencies linked to the UN-system, young parliamentarians and UN Youth Delegates. Creative elements, such as spoken word artists, will also be utilized to break up the substantive discussions. Finally, a range of online products will be created and widely disseminated as tools for independently organized commemorations around the globe.

IYD 2020 will be convened by UN DESA in partnership with the IANYD Youth Caucus and Create2030.