

Introduction

1.1 Youth is the most energetic and productive section of a society. A country's ability and potential for growth is determined by the size and strength of its youth population. It is believed that developing countries with large youth population could see tremendous growth, provided they invest in young people's education, health and protect and guarantee their rights. It can undoubtedly be said that today's young generations are tomorrow's innovators, creators, builders and leaders. As youth are increasingly demanding more just, equitable and progressive opportunities and solutions in their societies, the need to address the multifaceted challenges faced by young people (such as access to good education & health, better employment and gender equality) have become more pressing than ever.

1.2 Youth can be a positive force for development when provided with the knowledge and opportunities they need to thrive. In particular, young people should acquire the education and skills needed to contribute in a productive economy; and they need access to a job market that can absorb them into the labour force. But they need the required support in terms of good health, education, training and opportunities to transform the future. The economic trigger happens when a county has more hands available to work than more mouths to feed. To put it succinctly, working age population has to be larger than the dependent population.

1.3 Engagement of youth plays an important role because young people are:

- i) Critical thinkers:** Youth have the capacity to identify and challenge existing power structures and barriers to change, and to expose contradictions and biases.
- ii) Change-makers:** Young also have the power to act and mobilise others. Youth activism is on the rise the world over, bolstered by broader connectivity and access to social media.
- iii) Innovators:** For bringing fresh perspectives, young people often have direct knowledge of and insights into issues that are not accessible to adults.
- iv) Communicators:** Young people can be partners in communicating the agenda to their peers and communities at the local level, as well as across countries and regions.
- v) Leaders:** When young people are empowered with the knowledge of their rights and supported to develop leadership skills, they can drive change in their communities and countries. Youth-led organizations and networks in particular should be supported and strengthened, because they contribute to the development of civic and leadership skills among young people, especially marginalized youth.

Who are Youths

1.4 There is no universally agreed international definition of the youth age group. For statistical purposes, however, the United Nations defines ‘youth’ as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years without prejudice to any other definitions made by Member States. This definition, which arose in the context of preparations for the International Youth Year (1985) (see A/36/215), was endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 36/28 of 1981. All UN statistics on youth are based on this definition, as is reflected in the annual yearbooks of statistics published by the UN system on demography, education, employment and health. This statistically oriented definition of youth, in turn, entails that children are considered those persons under the age of 14. Several UN entities, instruments, and regional organizations have differing definitions of youth, which the United Nations Secretariat recognizes. The following table summarizes these differences:

Entity/Instrument/ Organization	Age (years)
UN Secretariat/UNESCO/ILO	Youth: 15–24
UN Habitat (Youth Fund)	Youth: 15–32
UNICEF/WHO/UNFPA	Adolescent: 10–19 Young people: 10–24 Youth: 15–24
UNICEF/ The Convention on Rights of the Child	Child under 18
The African Youth Charter	Youth: 15–35

1.5 Many countries also draw the line on youth with regard to the age at which a person is given equal treatment under the law-often referred to as the ‘age of majority.’ This age is commonly 18 in many countries so that once a person attains this age, he or she is considered to be an adult. Nonetheless, the operational definition and nuances of the term ‘youth’ vary from country to country, depending on relative socio-cultural, institutional, economic and political factors.

1.6 In India, as per National Youth Policy-2003, ‘youth’ was defined as a person of age between 13-35 years but in the current Policy Document i.e. National Youth Policy 2014, the persons between the age group of 15 and 29 years are considered youth. Definition of youth as per 2014 policy has been adopted for this publication.

Youth Bulge

“India's demographic dividend in terms of youth population is a key factor that is expected to propel economic growth.”

1.7 Youth bulge refers to a demographic pattern where a large share of the population is comprised of children and young adults. It is a critical concept in thinking about the future, as understanding age-cohorts can help us understand emerging patterns. Age-cohorts experience a shared reality based on the economic and political conditions they have grown up in. With recent studies suggesting that a youth bulge can lead to civil conflict, creating social conditions to ensure that youth are employed or are linked to a purposeful national or global peace building or development agenda is crucial. This demographic bulge then passes through the body of the total population as a cohort in successive bulges until-as seen now in developed economies-the highest shares of the total population are made up of older workers and those of retirement age. The youth bulge, however, is not just a demographic trend, but part of an alternative way of seeing the future – that of the view of young people, their changing needs, their use of new digital technologies as digital natives and their views of the future.

1.8 Most developing countries, in particular the emerging economies, have seen their youth bulges peak. India's 1.3 billion people make it the second most populous country in the world, but with an average age of 29 years, it has one of the youngest populations globally. With this vast resource of young citizens entering the workforce, it could create a 'demographic dividend'. A demographic dividend is defined by the United Nations Population Fund as economic growth resulting from a shift in a population's age structure, mainly when the working-age population is larger than the number of dependents.

1.9 Also, as India is home to a fifth of the world's youth demographic and this population advantage could play a critical role in achieving the nation's ambitious target to become a US\$ 5 trillion economy. As India experiences demographic shift, along with changing social dynamics and technological advances, the youth population will contribute significantly in realizing the country's economic potential. India is experiencing a demographic window of opportunity, a **“youth bulge”**. However, youth come across various development challenges viz. access to education, gainful employment, gender inequality, child marriage, youth- friendly health services and adolescent pregnancy. Yet with the investments in their participation and leadership, young people can transform the social and economic fortunes of the country.

Youth and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

1.10 The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. In September 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, an ambitious plan of action which includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals with 169 targets, to be achieved by the year 2030. The pledges made in the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind and to reach the furthest behind first, as well as its affirmation to be people-centred, ensure that youth are included in all parts of the agenda (UN General Assembly, 2017e, para 6)

1.11 By definition, “sustainable development” - development that meets the needs of the present without compromising those of the future - begins with the respect for the future generation as an important stakeholder. The young people of today will mature in the coming years right alongside SDGs. They are the people who will experience the success or failure of the 2030 Agenda and also play a crucial role in achieving the goals. This is why it is particularly important to engage with youth and empower them in our endeavour for a more sustainable future. Young people played a key role in shaping this agenda and experience first-hand many of the issues it seeks to address.

1.12 The goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda are interconnected, aiming to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. Explicitly or implicitly, young people are deeply embedded within their fabric. Their knowledge, reach and innovative solutions are essential if sustainable development is to be realized. The Sustainable Development Goals are integrated, indivisible and universal, but their long-term success is largely contingent upon how well youth development efforts are integrated into the policies, plans and actions adopted to bring about their realization.

1.13 While all the Sustainable Development Goals are critical to youth development, almost one-half of SDG targets reference young people explicitly or implicitly with a focus on empowerment, participation and well-being. These are No Poverty (Goal 1), Health (Goal 3), Education (Goal 4), Gender Equality (Goal 5), Employment and Decent Work (Goal 8), Reducing Inequality (Goal 10), Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements (Goal 11), Sustainable Consumption and Production patterns (Goal 12) and Climate Change (Goal 13).

1.14 Young people are a major human resource for development, key agents of social change and the driving force of economic development and technological innovation. Connected to each other like never before, young people want to and already contribute to the resilience of

their communities, proposing innovative solutions, driving social progress and inspiring political change. They are also agents of change, mobilizing to advance the Sustainable Development Goals to improve the lives of people and the health of the planet. As young leaders of today and tomorrow, youth will not only directly experience the outcome of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and plans, but will also be the key driver for their successful implementation. Hence, it is pivotal that youth are informed and engaged with the global vision for the future. It is also vital to raise awareness about the 17 SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development among youth, build a platform for discussion, and create the conditions for active engagement.

1.15 Realizing the fact that youth form the backbone of any economy and India which is still considered to have a young population, it is necessary to strengthen the policies that address the youth and to design appropriate youth development programmes at various levels. This requires a strong database on the youth, cutting across various sectors, so as to systematically identify the gaps and clearly delineate the needs and suitable interventions. Reliable data will not only facilitate designing programmes and policies but also enable to evolve measurable indicators and serve as benchmarks for assessing the development. Hence the Ministry brought out Youth in India as an ad-hoc publication in 1998 first followed by its second edition in 2006 and third in 2017. This publication, 4th in series, attempts to cull out data on different aspects of youth population from different sources and put them together at one place along with the national policy on youth population and the national programmes for them. **Chapter-2** gives the details of the policies and programmes of Government of India for the welfare of youth population while **Chapter-3** provides the data on youth population and certain vital statistics, social status and economic status of youth population as available from different data sources.