

23 January 2026



Topic

Youth under 30 constitute **more than half of the global population**. They are a driving force for sustainable development, innovation and social transformation, yet they remain disproportionately affected by poverty, inequality and limited access to quality education and decent work opportunities.

When it comes to shaping the future of education, youth have a special role to play: they are the beneficiaries of education programmes and their future depends on it. For this reason, **meaningfully engaging students and youth in co-creating the education they want** is essential to meet their aspirations and ambitions. This is particularly true at a time of radical transformation induced by the technological revolution, which calls for rethinking the purpose and modalities of teaching and learning.

This commitment aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which **recognizes the role of youth as agents of change** in achieving inclusive and equitable quality education and building peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

Although progress has been made in **involving young people and students in global decision making in education** – including by securing them a permanent seat alongside global leaders in the [SDG 4 High-Level Steering Committee](#) – more needs to be done to ensure they are co-creators of education systems at all levels: at school, at country level, in international development cooperation programmes and so on.

The [Youth Declaration on Transforming Education](#) is a tangible result of youth's willingness and capacity to contribute to strategic dialogues in education. Their initiatives at grassroots level, where young people play an instrumental role in supporting their peers with the provision of education – especially in crisis situations – are instrumental to take informed decisions: they need to be better brought to light, mainstreamed and considered.

The International Day of Education 2026 will **celebrate the power of youth as co-creators of education**.

This will be done by:

- 1. Taking stock of national efforts to involve youth in educational decision-making**, through a new report by the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report team, in partnership with the UN Youth Office, which measures student and youth participation in education laws and policy-making. Requested by the [SDG4 High-Level Steering Committee](#) in 2022, this new measurement holds countries accountable for their commitments to meaningfully engage youth made at the United Nations' Transforming Education Summit and in the Pact for the Future.
- 2. Showcasing how UNESCO is leading the way by giving youth a voice in decision-making bodies** such as the SDG 4 High-Level Steering Committee, placing them at the centre of global consultations for the post-2030 education agenda and amplifying their voices through UNESCO networks such as ASPnet, SDG4 Youth & Student Network, the Global Youth Community, and the Youth Climate Action Network. On the ground, UNESCO empowers youth as leaders and changemakers, notably in crisis-affected contexts.
- 3. Introducing tools to ensure meaningful youth engagement in education at school and beyond**, which were developed by the [SDG4 Youth & Student Network](#) and the UNESCO Associated Schools Network.
- 4. Highlighting youth-led initiatives in crisis-affected contexts** that help safeguard the right to education for all, particularly for the most marginalized.

Format

The International Day of Education 2026 will be marked through youth-led and participatory celebrations:

- A global event convening youth and students alongside international decision-makers will be hosted **at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris on 23 January 2026 from 10 am to 12 noon (Paris time)**.
- An online youth-led event will feature young people's stories and their role in advancing quality education in conflict-affected contexts **on 23 January 2026 from 3 to 5 pm (Paris time)**. The event will be organized by the SDG 4 Youth & Student Network in cooperation with other UNESCO networks and partners, notably the UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPnet).
- An online action for youth and students to participate in the celebrations around International Day for Education will accompany other activities to drive visibility and engagement.
- The issuing of a call for good practices on meaningful youth engagement in education, which will be featured in the SDG 4 Knowledge Hub.