



165 million reasons

A call for investment
in adolescents and youth





165 Million Reasons: A call for investment in adolescents and youth in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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165 million reasons

A call for investment in adolescents and youth in Latin America and the Caribbean

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**165 million
reasons
to invest
in our future**

Today's adolescents and youth are members of the largest cohort of young people in history. In Latin America and the Caribbean, they will no doubt have tremendous influence on the way our shared future takes shape. Will it be one of thriving societies? Or of shrinking opportunities and despair?

Our choices today can make a difference. What we do for and with adolescents and young people will impact our families, communities, societies, and economic and political systems.

Globally, the world is home to 1.8 billion young people. Latin America and the Caribbean now has an estimated 165 million people between the ages of 10 and 24¹, one in every four people is young.

On balance, today's adolescents and young people are more educated, more mobile, more tech savvy, more aware of their rights. These attributes offer great hope for the coming years. Yet much more remains to be done to support them in realizing their rights fully. Many of their unique realities and needs are still overlooked. Millions are left behind, shut out of chances to succeed in their lives.

Too many young people encounter obstacles as they move from childhood to adulthood. High adolescent pregnancy rates and poor employment prospects are among the many issues requiring urgent action. If such bottlenecks are not addressed, including through the right investments, the region will face unconscionable losses in human capital, imposing steep social and economic costs, and undercutting human rights.

Today's young people will witness an important demographic transition as they grow older. By 2061, more people will be over the age of 65 than are under the age of 20. The capabilities young people develop today will, to a certain degree, determine society's chances to adapt to a workforce that will significantly decrease and to establish social protection systems sufficient for a larger cohort of older adults.



Young people are our present and future. Investments made with and for them are a driver of sustainable development.

¹ "YOUNG PEOPLE" IN THIS DOCUMENT REFERS TO ALL ADOLESCENTS (10-19 YEARS) AND YOUTH (15-24 YEARS) IN ALL SETTINGS, INCLUDING IN DEVELOPMENT, PEACEBUILDING AND HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS.

UNFPA's call for investment in adolescents and youth stems in part from these demographic shifts and the urgent need to factor changing age structures into public and private sector planning.

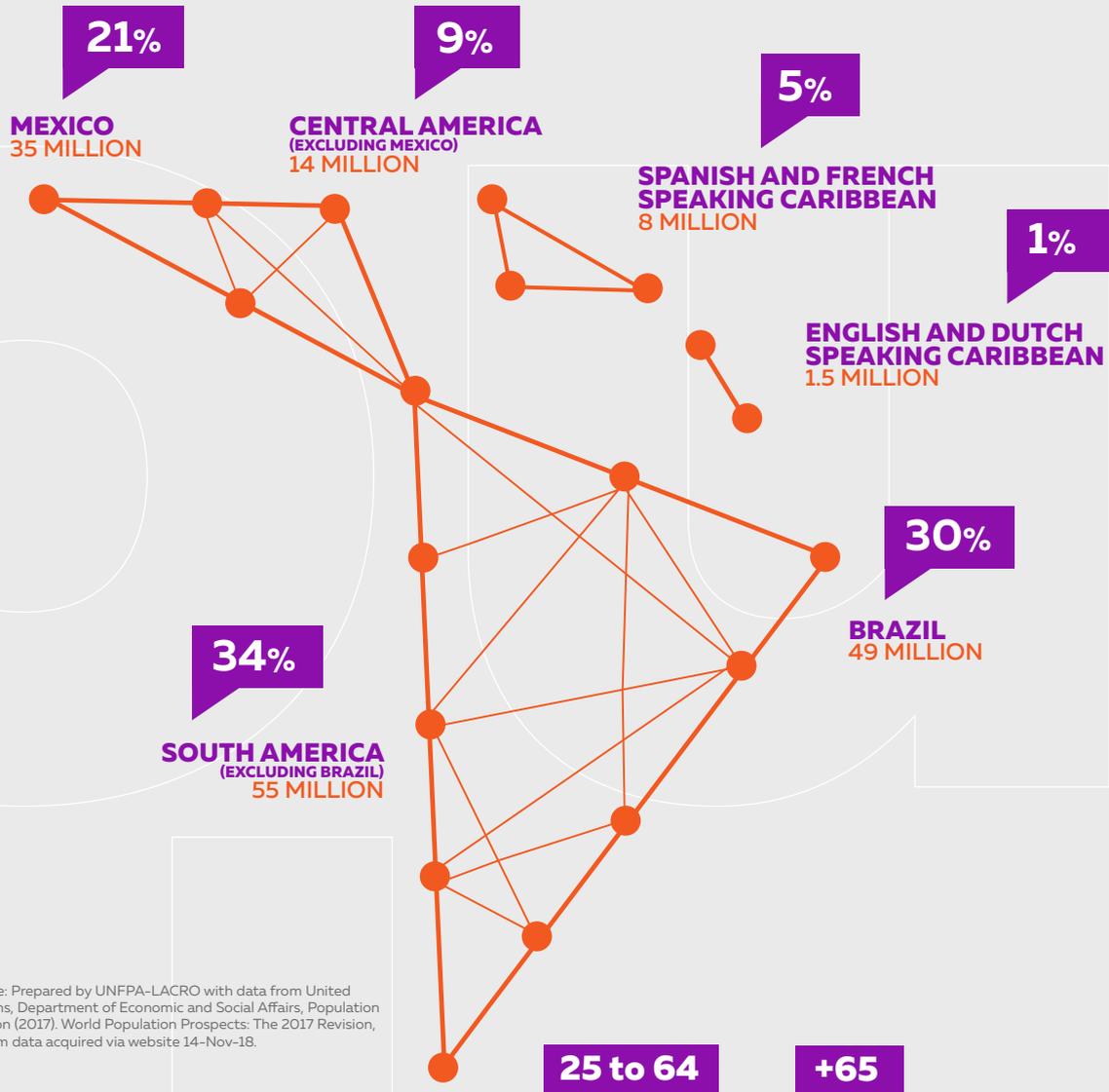
Equally important, adolescents and youth face many of the most important sexual and reproductive health and rights issues, from sexual initiation to family formation. Further, at this critical stage, gender identities are construed, determining in many cases prospects for equality and empowerment for girls and women. All adolescents and youth should be able to look at a future free from discrimination of any kind, be it related to race, ethnicity, social class, gender identity, sexual orientation or migratory status.

Prioritizing investments in adolescents and youth does not mean discarding attention to other age groups. UNFPA is proposing a better balance, where such investments are approached from a life-course perspective. Interventions for adolescents and young people build on previous investments in early childhood and lay a foundation for subsequent investments in working-age adults.

Adolescents and
young people are
our present and
our future, which
means we have
165 million reasons
to invest in them,
starting now.

Youth at a glance

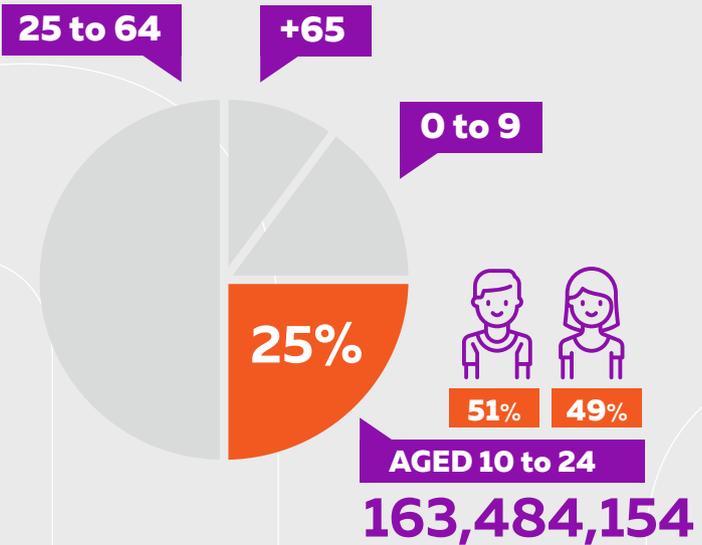
1. YOUTH POPULATION



Source: Prepared by UNFPA-LACRO with data from United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision, custom data acquired via website 14-Nov-18.

658,305,557

TOTAL POPULATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN (2018).



2. REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH INDICATORS

Adolescent fertility rate

61 out of 1,000

adolescents
(15-19)



Modern contraceptive prevalence rate



15%

AGED 15 to 19



38%

AGED 20 to 24

Based on data from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision; custom data acquired via a website on 14 November 2018; Demographic and Health Surveys from seven countries.

3. EDUCATION

59,4% of youth aged 20 to 24
have completed secondary education

62,8%

WOMEN



MEN

56%

EXAMPLES OF DISPARITIES BETWEEN COUNTRIES

COLOMBIA	TOTAL	URBAN	RURAL
	70,1%	77,5%	41,7%
BOLIVIA	TOTAL	INDIGENOUS	NON-INDIGENOUS
	53,6 %	49,6%	66,5%

Source for Colombia: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, based on data from the Household Surveys Database (BADEHOG). Source for Bolivia: CEPAL/CELADE Redatam+SP 11/16/2018. Data Base for Bolivia: Housing and Population Census 2012.

Youth at a glance

4. EMPLOYMENT

19,5%

Youth
unemployment
rate



Almost **one of every five** youth looking for a job **did not find it.**

Source: International Labour Organization (ILO), 2017, 2017 Labour Overview, Latin America and the Caribbean.

5. VIOLENCE

25%

of youth deaths
are homicides

Homicides are the leading cause of death for young males in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Pan American Health Organization

Intentional homicide rate in Latin America and the Caribbean by age range (2008)



Source: Chioda, L. 2016. Stop the Violence in Latin America: A Look at Prevention from Cradle to Adulthood. Overview. World Bank, Washington, DC.

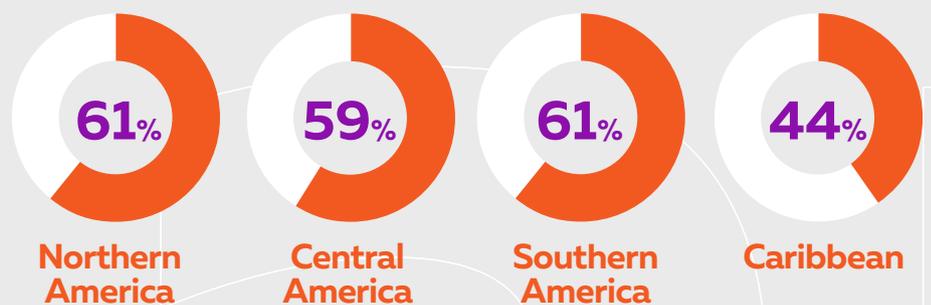
6. INTERNET

56%

have been
connected to
the Internet

(BY COMPUTER OR MOBILE
DEVICE IN THE PAST 3 MONTHS)

Social media access via mobile phone



Statistic.com, Number of Internet Users in Latin America. Custom data acquired via website, 14 November 2018.



Working with and for adolescents and youth

UNFPA is strongly committed to backing adolescents and youth in their determined quest to be heard and shape decisions vital for their future. Such a commitment is part of a larger pledge by the United Nations to do “nothing for young people, without young people’s participation”. It puts young people, their development phase and their perspective of the world at the center.

The UNFPA Strategy on Youth is fully in line with the globally agreed 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the United Nations Youth Strategy, Youth2030, aimed at scaling up global, regional and national actions to meet young people’s needs, realize their rights and tap their possibilities as agents of change.

At UNFPA, working with adolescents and youth is mandated by the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action beyond 2014² and the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development.³ Their commitments inform all elements of our 2018–2021 Strategic Plan⁴ which is aimed at getting to three “zeros”:

- ending preventable maternal deaths.
- ending the unmet need for family planning
- ending gender-based violence and harmful practices, including child marriage.

UNFPA is striving to get to three “zeros”: ending preventable maternal deaths, ending the unmet need for family planning, and ending gender-based violence and harmful practices, including child marriage. Our success in realizing these goals largely depends on closely engaging with youth and adolescents, especially the poorest and most marginalized, based on the contexts in which they live and the priorities they express.

For two decades, UNFPA has closely collaborated with young people and adolescents, helping them realize their full potential, listening to their voices and acting on their concerns. Moving forward, we will build on our extensive experience by making essential contributions to Youth2030, the United Nations Youth Strategy, with our own strategy to further deepen our engagement with adolescents and youth.



Without scaled-up action and investment, the full potential of a large and vibrant generation will be lost.

2. CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME OF ACTION BEYOND 2014 [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/Y5YWUTFP](https://tinyurl.com/y5ywutfp)

3. ECLAC. (2013). MONTEVIDEO CONSENSUS ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/Y64Q7KAW](https://tinyurl.com/y64q7kaw)

4. UNFPA STRATEGIC PLAN 2018–2021. [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/Y5LFVNOZ](https://tinyurl.com/y5lfnvno)

UNFPA is already working across the UN system to convene the multiple forms of expertise that will be required, on education, health care, decent work, peace and security, and many other core dimensions. We are collaborating with public and private partners and academia, and drawing on a bank of promising practices.

It is a source of pride at UNFPA to work on adolescent and youth issues in so many areas, from youth-friendly services for sexual and reproductive health to the empowerment of adolescent girls to youth leadership and the development of youth-oriented policies.



Youth2030 was launched at the 73rd session of the United Nations General Assembly by the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, with the aim of strengthening and scaling up global, regional and national actions to meet young people's needs.



The UN Youth Strategy: A blueprint for collaboration

The UN Youth Strategy⁵, launched in 2018 and known as Youth2030, is guiding the UN system in stepping up support for the empowerment of young people, based on lessons from youth programmes around the world. Youth2030 centres on engaging closely with young people so they can more meaningfully contribute to the work of the United Nations, and it can fully benefit from their insights and ideas.

Investment in the following areas will consolidate the position of the United Nations as a global leader in engaging with youth. It will become a pioneer of knowledge, a dynamic source of innovation, a catalyst for solutions and a champion of accountability.

The strategy's thematic priority areas cut across UN activities, comprising:

1. Engagement, participation, advocacy
2. Informed and healthy foundations
3. Economic empowerment through decent work
4. Youth and human rights
5. Peace and resilience building

The ownership of the UN Youth Strategy is equally shared by all members of the UN system at the global, regional and national levels. It seeks to ensure alignment within the UN system and guide effective linkages and synergies at all levels to mobilize resources and leverage partnerships in support of the strategy.

⁵. UN YOUTH STRATEGY, [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/Y56876BU](https://tinyurl.com/y56876BU)



A crucial moment in life

Adolescence and youth are crucial stages in life. An accumulation of factors interact at a time of rapid biologic, emotional and social changes largely ignored by public health policies until now.

In adolescence, neurocerebral plasticity and the facility to learn new things match the pace of neurological development in early childhood. With the right support, adolescents and young people are poised to develop the full complement of capacities and skills needed for a prosperous, healthy life.

Patterns set in motion between ages 10 and 24 have lasting consequences, for better or worse. The 2016 Lancet Commission⁶ pointed out, if these patterns are positive, they deliver a triple benefit: to adolescents and young people now, to them as future adults and to the next generation of children.

Scaling up action and investment in adolescents and youth is a matter of principle and practicality. It should sow the seeds of transformative long-term changes, defined and driven by young people, in full accordance with their rights, the demographic transition and sustainable development.

The rights imperative

Adolescents and youth have inherent human rights that they should be able to exercise in full. These rights are expressed in different frameworks, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They are fundamental to all aspects of the ICPD Programme of Action⁷, the 2030 Agenda⁸ and the region's own Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development.

The ICPD Programme of Action recognizes that realizing sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights requires the empowerment of all sectors of society, including adolescents and youth. Every individual has the right to make informed choices about their own bodies and lives, free of violence and discrimination.

⁶. OUR FUTURE: A LANCET COMMISSION ON ADOLESCENT HEALTH AND WELLBEING, [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/YYE6TQOS](https://tinyurl.com/yye6tqos)

⁷. ICPD PROGRAMME OF ACTION, [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/Y4DYN7OY](https://tinyurl.com/y4dyn7oy)

⁸. THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA, [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/Y83OFLEC](https://tinyurl.com/y83oflec)

The Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development is the most advanced expression of the ICPD Programme of Action, setting the direction for action across Latin America and the Caribbean. It calls on countries to guarantee that all persons, without any form of discrimination, have the chance to live a life free from poverty and violence. They must have access to quality social services, such as health, education and social protection.

From a rights-based approach to development, duty bearers, such as governments, businesses and parents, have obligations to realize the human rights of adolescents and youth, without exception. This may require making specific efforts to guarantee pensions and health care in order to redress inequities and reach those who have been left behind.

The demographic imperative

Each stage of life comes with age-specific concerns that must be addressed to improve the quality of life for all. Taking this approach responds to the demographic transitions at work in many countries today, where even traditionally young populations are ageing, a shift driven by factors such as falling fertility and mortality rates.

A few countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are still relatively young, with a youth bulge. Others are ageing. In the majority, the largest share of people are of working age. Simply having a large portion of people in the workforce can boost the economy, a pay-off known as the demographic dividend.

Making the most of the dividend, however, requires that working-age people do not just show up at their jobs, but are most productive once they are there. They need to be well-educated and healthy, capable of making choices about their families and sexual and reproductive lives, and able to find decent work.

Building this store of human capital depends largely on adequately investing in important milestones that must be reached at each stage of life – in childhood, during early and late adolescence, as young adults, and so on. In younger countries, this helps the demographic dividend initially take off. In older societies, it helps older adults remain productive and make up for the shrinking share of working-age people. A society for all ages becomes an imperative.

By 2030, a third of countries in the Latin America and the Caribbean region will reach the end of the demographic dividend window of opportunity, generated simply by a shift of having a large share of people at working-age. These countries, most of them in the Caribbean, will have an increasingly high share of older dependents. Unlike younger dependents, where families absorb many of the

costs, older people tend to draw heavily on social support systems, which are not as well-functioning in the region as they are in some other regions.

Sustaining these systems and a healthy economy will depend less on the sheer numbers of workers and more on their productivity. Yet Latin America's economies have grown more slowly than those in any other developing region over the last 15 years. Productivity is among the weakest of any region, according to McKinsey Global Institute estimates. Without a change in productivity growth, the growth of gross domestic product in Latin America will be 40 percent weaker over the next 15 years than it was in the previous 15.⁹

Avoiding this shortfall largely depends on choices made now to invest in healthy, well-educated adolescents and young people, paying particular attention to those in most risk of being subject to inequality, left out and left behind. Every community and country should be able to develop the human capital necessary for achieving its development aspirations.

The sustainable development imperative

As the ICPD Programme of Action approaches its 25th anniversary, efforts to accelerate progress on it continue to be critical in their own right as well as effective in attaining the more recently agreed 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other internationally agreed frameworks.

Sustainable development largely depends on a new and empowered generation, equipped to take up the challenge of transforming development so that it reaches everyone and evolves within planetary boundaries. The 2030 Agenda recognizes young women and men as critical agents of change, who will find in the 17 SDGs "a platform to channel their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world." The Agenda commits to fully realizing the rights and capabilities of youth and to empowering those most vulnerable to being left behind.

With their future at stake, youth are already a major force in propelling implementation of the 2030 Agenda, on issues ranging from education to climate change. They are also leading a process of defining monitoring and accountability mechanisms as well as measures to gauge the extent of youth participation across the SDGs.

⁹. MCKINSEY GLOBAL INSTITUTE, 2017, *WHERE WILL LATIN AMERICA'S GROWTH COME FROM*. [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/Y4GVQ4DB](https://tinyurl.com/y4gvq4db)

“My body, my life, my world!”

UNFPA's new global strategy on adolescents and youth

“My body, my life, my world!”, UNFPA's new global strategy on adolescents and youth, places young people at the center of sustainable development. By doing so, it contributes to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, in line with the United Nation's new Youth Strategy, as well as UNFPA's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan.

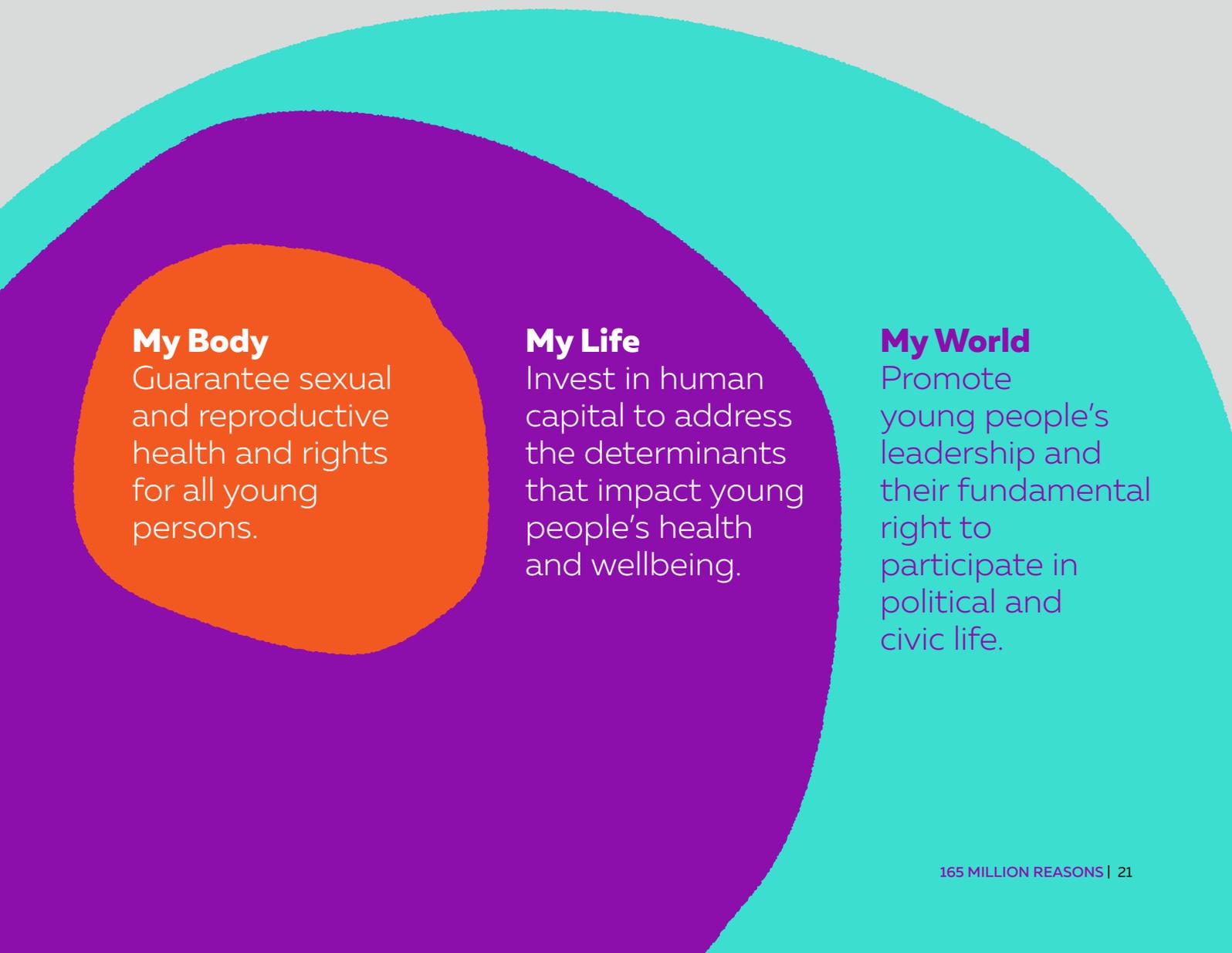
The strategy is aimed at all adolescents (10-19 years) and youth (15-24 years), celebrating their broad diversity. It also recognizes the diversity of their needs and desires, and is fully committed to ending the inequalities many of them still face, once and for all. It respects gender differences, sexual orientation and disabilities, and affirms sexuality as a positive dimension of every individual.

UNFPA's vision is that every young person is empowered to make informed choices and fully enjoy his or her rights.

The strategy is based on solid evidence in the design of comprehensive measures to ensure rights and choices. Its lifecycle approach relies on the links between adolescence and youth and the previous and later stages of life. The strategy can be applied across development, peacebuilding and humanitarian settings, and can be easily adapted to a variety of contexts and cultures.

Making a real difference in young people's lives requires leadership and shared responsibility. Youth-led and youth-oriented organizations, governments, community leaders, UN agencies, civil society, the academia, the private sector and the media have key roles to play.

Allowing young people to claim their rights and make informed choices about their bodies, their lives and the world they live in is a matter of justice and a driver of lifetime benefits.



My Body

Guarantee sexual and reproductive health and rights for all young persons.

My Life

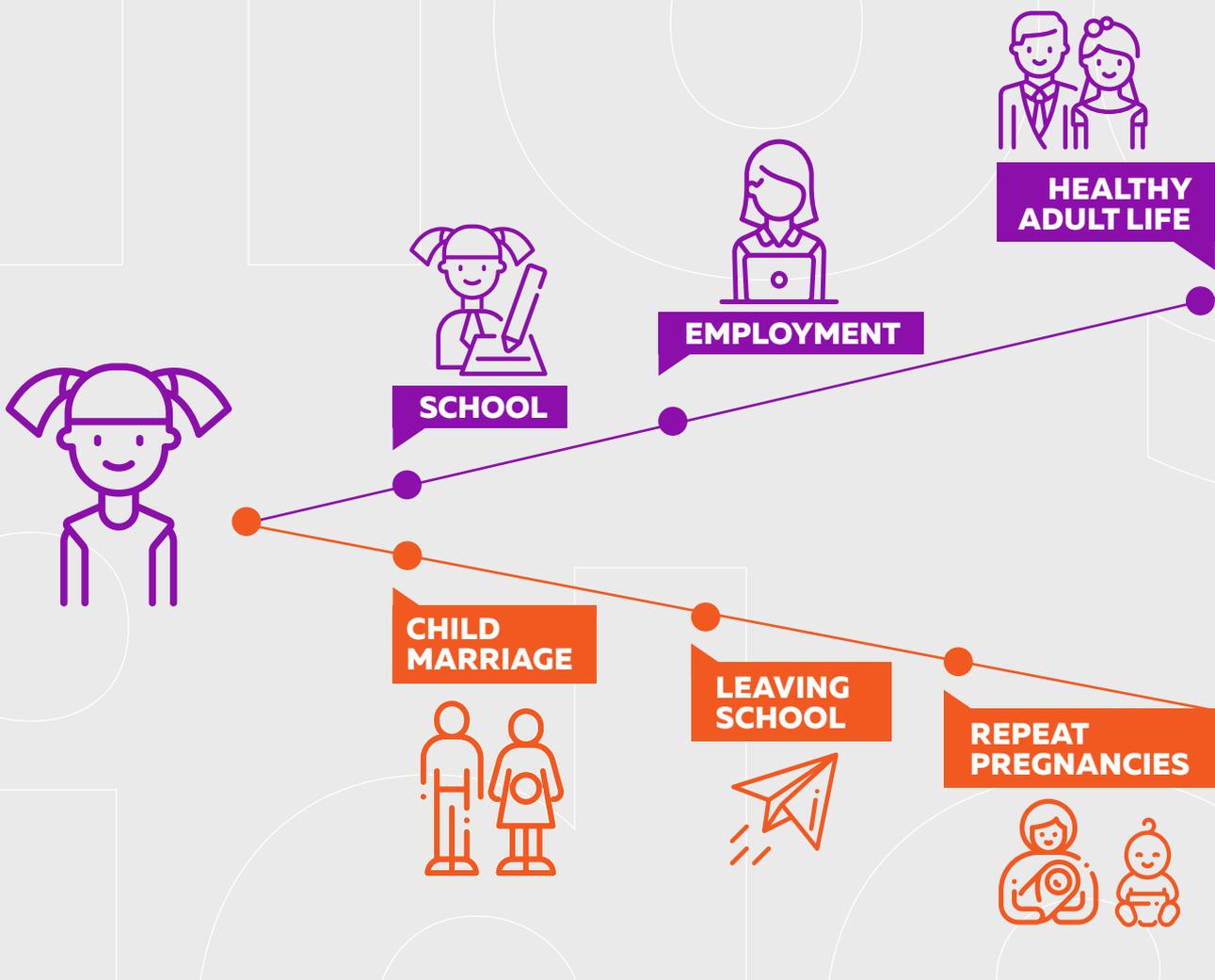
Invest in human capital to address the determinants that impact young people's health and wellbeing.

My World

Promote young people's leadership and their fundamental right to participate in political and civic life.

The opportunities of adolescent girls largely determine the course of the demographic dividend.

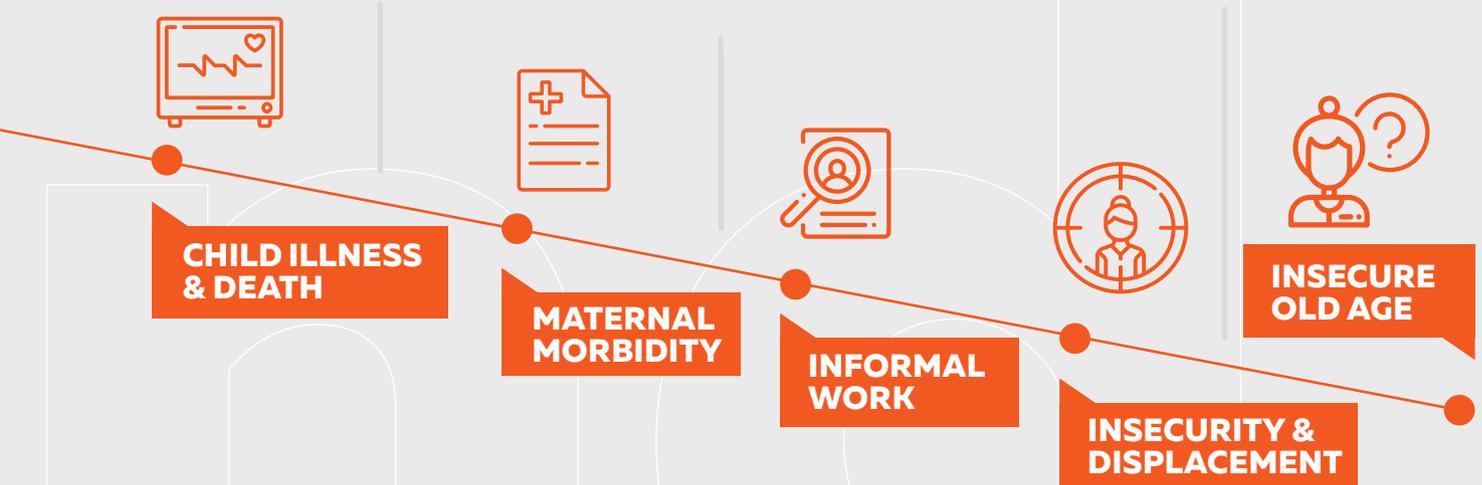
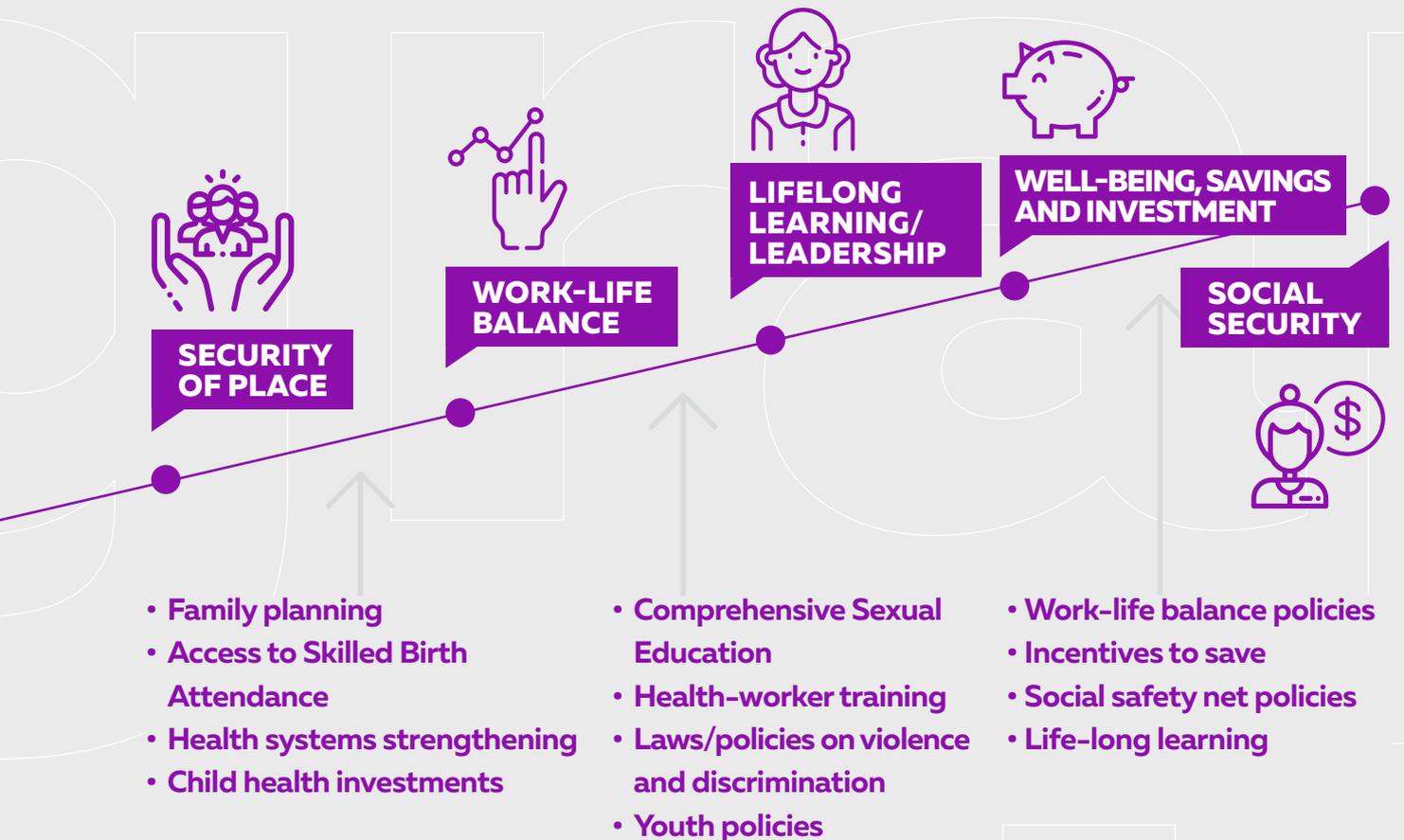
A country's potential to thrive will be constrained if the population is underprepared, and every person, particularly every girl, cannot pursue her education, or navigate her transition to adulthood assured of her human rights.



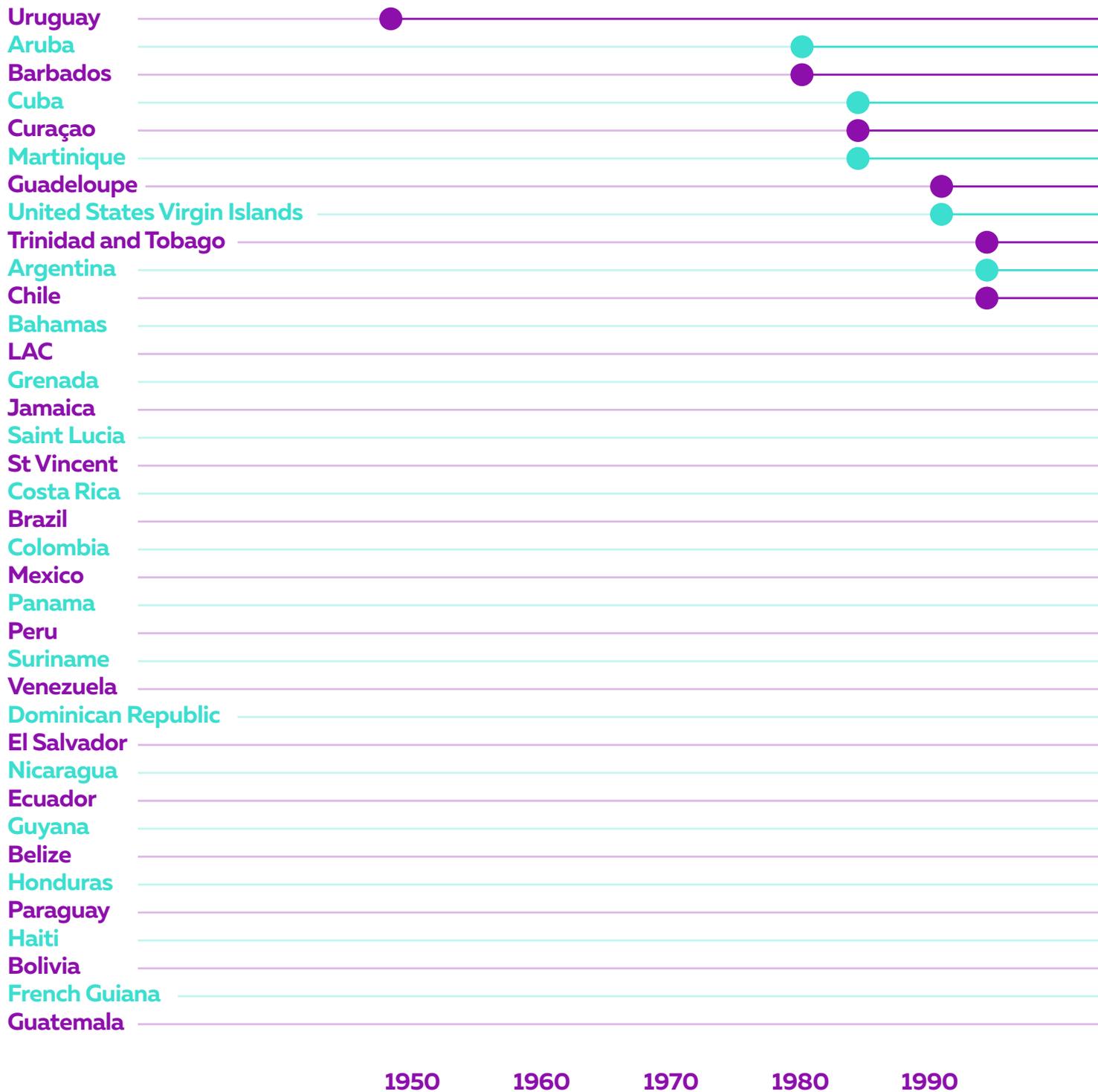
Every decision she is able to make can make a difference.

Harnessing the demographic dividend

Demographic dividend

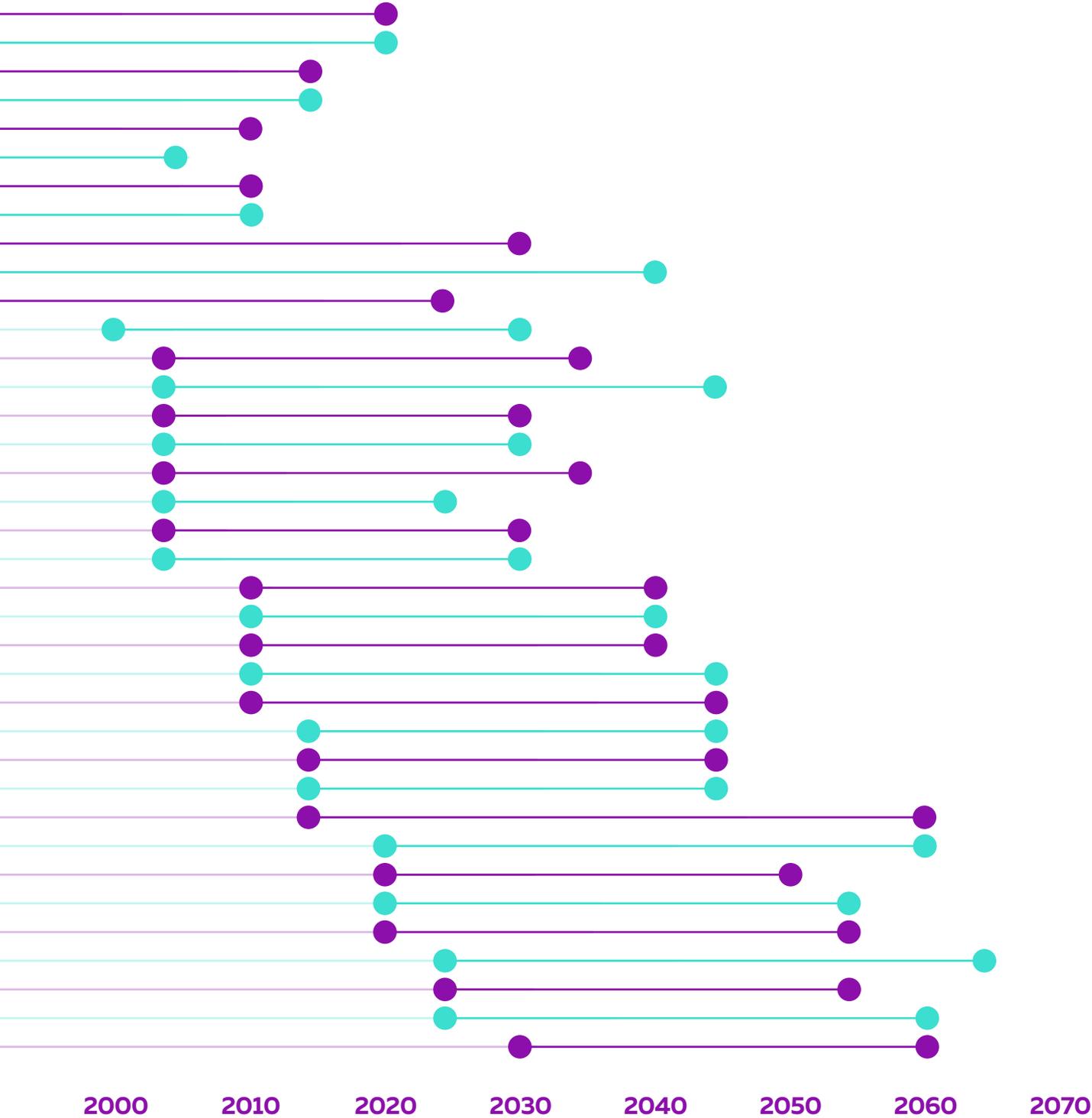


Missed demographic dividend



Prepared by UNFPA LACRO with data from United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision, custom data acquired via website November 16, 2018.

Demographic windows of opportunities in Latin America and the Caribbean





**Reaching
165 million:
10 actions now**

UNFPA's vision of reaching 165 million youth and adolescents rests on upholding their rights and realizing their potential –for every individual in every country and community. Based on its experience and that of many other organizations serving youth within the United Nations and beyond, UNFPA has identified 10 key actions to empower, inform and protect adolescents and youth. Each is oriented around adolescents and youth making successful, safe choices all along the road to adulthood. Together, they comprise a comprehensive package of support that should start at age 10.

The following actions lie at the heart of UNFPA's mandate, and it is through them that we will play a leadership role. These integrated actions, backed by wide-ranging partnerships and collective commitment, will have the power to meet all the challenges faced by youth and adolescents today.

¡10 Actions to start now!



ACTION 1

Leave no adolescent or youth behind

ACTION 2

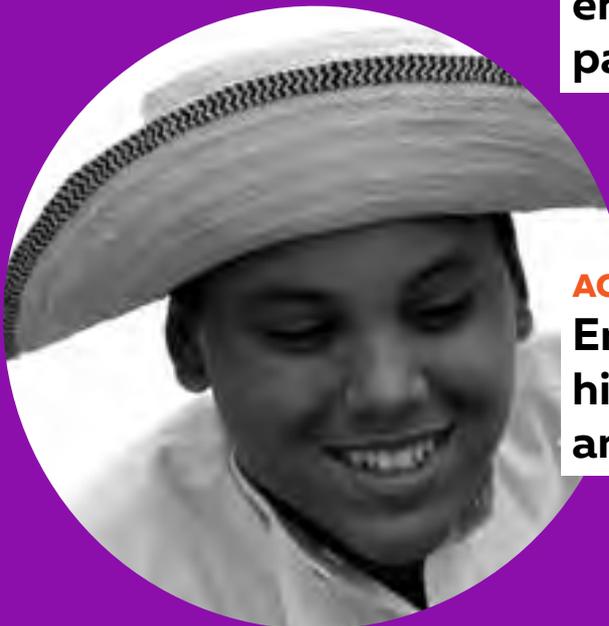
Ensure everyone finishes secondary school

ACTION 3

Support youth employment

ACTION 4

Make more room for engagement and participation



ACTION 5

Ensure universal access to high-quality integrated sexual and reproductive health services



ACTION 6

Reduce unintended adolescent pregnancy



ACTION 7

Provide age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education



ACTION 8

Prevent gender-based violence against women and girls

ACTION 9

End early and forced marriage and unions under age 18



ACTION 10

Ensure peace and security for adolescents and youth

ACTION

1

Leave no adolescent or youth behind

Latin America and the Caribbean is the world's most unequal region, leaving some adolescents and young people systematically behind, excluded from progress. Chances to realize rights and live in safety and dignity still depend heavily – and unfairly – on where they live, family income, race, ethnicity, disability and/or gender, among other factors.

Discrimination and exclusion run along many paths. In rural areas, for instance, the chance of obtaining a quality secondary education is often lower than in cities. Privatized health care may impose impossibly high costs on young women who are poor, with an added economic burden coming from unplanned pregnancy that undercuts the chances of finding decent work.

Unable to see a brighter future, many marginalized young people make the decision to migrate. Some 28 million people from Latin American and Caribbean live in countries other than those where they were born. Increasingly, migrants are female and young, driven by financial reasons, but also to escape violence. Some, especially women, face dire risks to their safety and lives, such as from human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Exclusion is often caused by the intersection of multiple factors, such as race coupled with age and gender, or deprivations in income and services mixed with insecurity and the lack of political voice. Efforts to leave no youth or adolescent behind need to make all forms of exclusion visible, for example, through better data analysis, that are geared towards tearing down multiple barriers. Education, advocacy and participation can support the transformation of discriminatory norms, while well-designed affirmative action programmes and other incentives can accelerate inclusion.

In many countries, the law and normative frameworks need to become more inclusive and oriented around human rights and commitment towards continued investment. One priority is to provide better opportunities for young people with disabilities. Civil society is already playing a vital role in establishing accessible platforms for them to express their needs and claim their rights. These efforts should be encouraged and extended.

Ensure everyone finishes secondary school

Quality education is a basic human right and must be available to all. It is a driver of social mobility and equality, and a determining factor in the quest for a skilled and productive workforce, a necessary component of economic growth. Education propels demographic dividends, and can protect and sustain development gains as societies age.

Latin America and the Caribbean today has the most educated young generation in its history. Enrolment in tertiary education shot up from 20 per cent in 1998 to 50 per cent in 2015. Among adolescents aged 15 to 19, 94 per cent have completed primary education. Yet only 64 per cent of people aged 20 to 24 finish secondary school, signaling that a significant share of youth are left behind even before they start adult life.

Completing a secondary education is essential to a successful, safe transition from adolescence to adulthood. It should help all adolescents understand and be able to exercise their rights, including those related to sexual and reproductive health. It should develop critical thinking skills, a responsible relationship to the use of environmental resources, and the kind of creativity and breadth of thought that underpin active citizenship and stable, well-functioning democracies.

Adolescents and young people need to come through their education with the skills to secure a job or start a business, while making meaningful contributions to society. A longer term public policy and investment vision should keep schooling responsive to rapid advances in technology as well as shifts in the economy.

A vital element is to recognize and respond to the diverse situations faced by adolescents, in line with the fourth Sustainable Development Goal, which calls for quality, inclusive education and permanent learning opportunities for everyone. Education policies need to make an explicit commitment to bridging inequalities. No one should be deprived of schooling due to pregnancy, or locked into a field of study because it conforms to biased notions of what a girl or boy, a person with a disability, or an adolescent from a given cultural background should think about or do. Incentives are needed to help adolescents and youth continue in school and surmount barriers related to poverty as well as discriminatory social norms.

Education systems as a whole need to change, with more relevant curricula, renewed teaching and learning methodologies, and strengthened school communities. Using school infrastructure for extracurricular activities and allowing students to stay for longer hours can go a long way towards keeping them safe and productively engaged. Increasing coverage of secondary education facilities could build in part on using new technologies to reach young people in remote locations.

ACTION

3

Support youth employment

The ability to find decent work is a hallmark of the move into adulthood. Yet across Latin America and the Caribbean, the unemployment rate among young people is three times higher than that of adults. Two-thirds of young people who have jobs end up in the informal economy, where working conditions are poor. Labour force participation rates are worse for young women for reasons including the lack of access to reproductive health care.

Leaving young people out of the labour market or languishing in low-productivity jobs denies them rights and well-being. It undercuts their potential to propel the higher productivity the region needs to make the most of the demographic dividend and to transition into older societies.

Extra losses accrue through gender disparities. There is at least a 9-percentage point difference in the labour force participation rate of women and men ages 15 to 24 in all countries, with a difference as high as 30 percentage points in some. Women's equal participation in labour markets could boost regional gross domestic product by 34 percent, or \$2.6 trillion.

According to a recent study by the Blackrock Retirement Institute and UNFPA, increasing the female labor force participation rate can be a catalyst for Latin American countries to accelerate economic growth and raise the human capital contribution from an extended portion of the population. Greater participation creates numerous benefits, from bolstering the number of women saving and investing for retirement to improving gender equality.¹⁰

To close gaps for young people, labour and employment policies need to specifically encourage their entry into the workforce, including through training, mentoring, apprenticeships and other avenues. Education and skills should be relevant to workplace demands, and coordinated with measures shifting economies towards higher levels of inclusion and productivity. Close collaboration between the public and private sectors can support this process.

Equally important is to tap the power of today's young people to transform workplaces and entrepreneurship through new technologies and work practices. Their creativity and innovation are potentially large assets that could be encouraged to advance new business models, and ignite dynamic and diversified sectors of the economy. According to a McKinsey Institute survey¹¹ survey, up to half of employers report they are struggling to fill entry level vacancies because of gaps in skills.

10. BLACKROCK RETIREMENT INSTITUTE, UNFPA. (2017). THE LATIN AMERICA DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND POTENTIAL [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/Y2W4892G](https://tinyurl.com/Y2W4892G)

11. MCKINSEY INSTITUTE. (2014). EDUCATION TO EMPLOYMENT: GETTING EUROPE'S YOUTH INTO WORK. [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/YVLB29L8](https://tinyurl.com/YVLB29L8)

Make more room for engagement and participation

Adolescents and young people are often among the first to embrace innovative and progressive ideas. They can be highly adept and resourceful in solving problems. Yet their voices are not always heard in decisions that affect them or their future, even though they face higher stakes than any previous generation, given pressures such as socio demographic transitions, economic patterns that remain inequitable and unsustainable as well as climate change and migration, among others.

The political participation of adolescents and youth has been on the rise in the region, including through the adoption of national and local youth policies, a proliferation of youth participation structures linked to these, and a burgeoning number of youth networks. But questions remain around how much impact these have, given a tendency for consultations to take place without much impact on the adult agenda. This kind of tokenistic participation renders decision-making unfair. It may not accurately reflect the realities of youth, or adequately draw on their innovations and unique perspectives. Many opportunities are lost for youth to cultivate citizenship and actively participate in formulating policies that can serve them.

All youth have the right to participate in the development of their societies. Barriers that prevent their engagement should be lifted, with particular attention going to marginalization imposed by gender norms, area of residence, race, disability or any other factor associated with discrimination. Partnerships with youth organizations and platforms should align with young people's interests and capacities in creating more opportunities for adolescents and youth to influence decisions that affect their lives and futures.

At both the national and local levels, young voices need to be heard in the design, management and assessment of policies, institutions, services and programmes. Information on youth contributions should be regularly and broadly shared, including through channels widely used by younger people.

Ensure universal access to high-quality integrated sexual and reproductive health services

For more than a decade, countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have adopted laws and programmes guaranteeing comprehensive health services. While significant progress has been made, there are still obstacles to access sexual and reproductive health care, particularly for adolescents. Barriers include insufficient coverage and poor quality. Some facilities lack privacy. The skills of health-care providers vary. Monitoring needs to improve, as does the participation of adolescents in determining the care they want and need.

Scaled-up commitment and action to surmount remaining barriers should aim at adolescents gaining universal access to quality, comprehensive health services with a focus on sexual and reproductive health care. Services should operate in line with adolescents' rights and in response to their needs. As a foundation, governments need to adopt and implement policies to enact these services, with specific strategies to reach adolescents facing social and/or economic exclusion.

As one priority, the availability of modern effective contraceptives should improve. Promoting access and use among adolescents requires supplying a range of low-cost or free options. These include female and male condoms, emergency contraception, and highly effective, long-acting reversible contraceptives such as subdermal implants and IUDs, based on individual preferences and needs.

Key strategies include promoting the use of the WHO's Medical Eligibility Criteria for contraceptive use, developing interventions based on the best available evidence, improving the technical competencies of providers in contraceptive technology and counselling, and recognizing the right of adolescent girls to select their contraceptive method of choice in a free and well-informed manner. Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay, among other countries in the region, have expanded contraceptive choices and increased adolescent access to effective contraception.

In general, providing sexual and reproductive health care services for adolescents and monitoring their quality and coverage should operate in line with the global standards of the World Health Organization, which have been endorsed by ministries of health. Chile and Colombia have carried out pilot applications of the standards. Brazil, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Peru and Mexico. have developed standards to improve the quality of health-care services for adolescents.



ACTION

6

Reduce unintended adolescent pregnancy

Adolescent fertility rates are unacceptably high in Latin America and the Caribbean, ranking second only to those in sub-Saharan Africa. The region has seen the slowest regional fertility declines among adolescents aged 15 to 19, and pregnancies among girls under age 15 are on the rise.

This is a dangerous trend. Adolescent pregnancy hampers psychosocial development, undermines the health of girls and their children, hinders education and employment, and spurs intergenerational cycles of poverty. A girl under the age of 15 is three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than a girl aged 15 to 19.

Pregnancies among adolescents may be prompted by traditional expectations that strongly value motherhood or expect young women to prove fertility. For some girls, pregnancy is unintended, resulting from a lack of alternative life projects, empowerment to negotiate with partners, knowledge and/or contraception, sexual violence, or restrictive laws and policies on contraception and abortion. In most countries in the region, abortions are either banned or only allowed for certain causes, leaving many poor young women and adolescents to rely on unsafe abortions to interrupt unwanted pregnancies.

Actions to prevent unintended adolescent pregnancies require comprehensive, quality approaches that reach all girls. One starting point is better data that capture the drivers and impacts of adolescent pregnancy, and can be used to identify and close gaps in girls' rights and choices.

Strategic interventions need to target the most vulnerable groups, and be sustainable and of sufficient scale. Each country should invest more resources in proven interventions, but could also tap empowered youth for their contributions in designing new approaches. All efforts towards providing universal, high-quality sexual and reproductive information and services, including effective contraception, should operate in line with adolescents' needs and rights. Close links should be built with comprehensive sexuality education and social protection interventions for adolescent mothers. The latter should at a minimum include measures to keep adolescent mothers in school so they can finish secondary education. If these include financial support, they should be well managed to avoid incentives for additional adolescent pregnancies.

Stakeholders who are responsible in addressing the multiple drivers of adolescent pregnancy need to ensure that cost-effective interventions are available and accessible to reduce prevalence. In general, progress will accelerate where the principles of gender equality and adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights are fully embraced, and where all girls are empowered to make their own informed choices.

In collaboration with a number of partners, UNFPA has promoted the use of the best scientific evidence available in regional, subregional and national initiatives, programmes and policies related to reducing adolescent pregnancy. Many countries are now working to promote the reproductive rights of adolescents, including through access to information and high-quality services, particularly for the most vulnerable populations.

For some girls,
pregnancy is
unintended,
resulting from
a lack of alternative
life projects.

ACTION

7

Provide age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education

Almost every country in Latin America and the Caribbean has laws, programmes or standards on comprehensive sexuality education. However, not enough children, adolescents and young people benefit from it, even though education on sexual and reproductive health is a priority emphasized by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Montevideo Consensus.

Comprehensive sexuality education should be grounded in technical evidence, framed by human rights principles, and responsive to gender issues, cultural differences and respect for diversity. It should promote a holistic, positive vision of sexuality that extends beyond the prevention of sexually transmitted infections, HIV and early pregnancy. Adolescents and young people should be able to apply it to make responsible, age-appropriate decisions and develop essential skills to improve their lives.

Public and private entities, civil society organizations and international agencies can scale up support for strategic collaboration between the health and education sectors. Technical, financial and operational assistance can help strengthen commitments to sustain programmes and extend their reach. Improvements in the quality of programmes could focus on curricula, teaching methodologies, teacher training and evaluation.

The specific needs of out-of-school groups must be understood and mechanisms put in place to ensure access to programmes. Other measures are needed to reach populations living in situations of great vulnerability, including migrants and young people caught in humanitarian crises.

Additional advocacy, strategic communication, and monitoring and evaluation can all contribute to more effective programmes and the fulfilment of internationally agreed standards and commitments.



ACTION

8

Prevent gender-based violence against women and girls

Violence against women and girls is one of the most prevalent human rights violations, knowing no social, economic or national boundaries. Worldwide, an estimated one in three women will experience physical or sexual abuse in her lifetime, most often by someone she knows. One in five women is sexually abused as a child.

Gender-based violence undermines health, dignity, security and autonomy. It can produce an array of life-altering consequences, including forced and unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, and even death.

Whatever form gender-based violence takes, from early marriage to sexual violence in homes or on the streets, it arises from gender inequalities that persist despite strong anti-violence laws and policies enacted in recent years. Too often, gender-based violence remains shrouded in a culture of silence. The impunity enjoyed by perpetrators, and the fear generated by their actions, has a ripple effect on all women and girls. Some are forced into choices such as avoidance of public places or certain jobs simply due to safety concerns.

Responding to violence against women and girls requires bringing together the combined efforts of the health sector (including mental health), law enforcement, the judiciary and social protection services, among others. All should be part of concerted actions to respond to the reality that women who experience violence do not always seek help, often because they do not know where to go or do not have confidence in assistance they would receive. Health services in particular need to be on the frontlines of improving measures to prevent violence, detect cases at an early stage, and provide compassionate and appropriate care. A better evidence base should map the true scope of gender-based violence, its consequences, risks and protective factors to respond effectively.

Policymakers and service providers could do more to contest attitudes and norms that underpin the inequalities fueling gender-based violence, including in viewing it as a “private” matter. Such norms are still widespread. They may discourage women from seeking help, and families and community members from assisting women who experience abuse.

Challenging such ideas can contribute to both, the prevention and response to violence, as well as gender equality more broadly. It is important to begin these interventions in early childhood and continue strengthening these skills into adolescence and youth so that they can develop non violent relationships from the initial stages in life.

Responding to violence against women in both development and humanitarian settings is a strategic priority for UNFPA. We help to develop, reform and implement national laws and policies on gender-based violence, and to establish data systems to accurately document the phenomenon.



ACTION

9

End early and forced marriage and unions under age 18

Child marriage is a grave threat to adolescent girls. It violates their rights, denies them a childhood, jeopardizes health and limits opportunities. A girl in an early or forced union is likely to become pregnant and leave school, reducing her chances to acquire skills and make informed choices about her life and suffer gender based violence.

Yet marriages and unions under age 18 are still socially acceptable in most of Latin America and the Caribbean, and even legally possible in some countries. One out of every 4 girls gets married or enters an early or forced union, with the poorest girls most affected. The region is the only one in the world where child marriages and early unions are not decreasing. If current trends continue, by 2030, the number of child brides per year will rise to 9.7 million.

While boys can also marry too young, in the region, girls are more likely to end up in early or forced unions. Discriminatory gender norms lead some families and girls to view an early union as acceptable and even desirable. Such norms also push girls who become pregnant, even as a result of sexual violence, to accept marriage as a solution.

To make progress on prevention, legal frameworks have to be aligned with international standards and eliminate all exceptions to the age of marriage and union. They must promote the registration of all marriages and unions under civil, customary or religious law. It is equally important to tackle social norms that undercut the law. Affected communities need information about the risks of early marriage. Girls should be empowered to make informed choices about their lives. A combined package of policies should allow married girls to remain in school, and have access to comprehensive sexuality education, and quality sexual and reproductive health services.

Across the region, UNFPA helps prevent child marriages and early unions through advocating legal reforms, generating evidence and encouraging policy dialogue. We provide empowerment programmes for girls, and safe and equal spaces for girls and boys, and conduct community campaigns and workshops inculcating positive norms around masculinity.



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Ensure peace and security for adolescents and youth

Latin America and the Caribbean is free of formal wars at present, but still faces significant challenges for the security of the population, especially for adolescents and youth. Every 15 minutes, there are 4 homicides, up to 400 every day. Eight out of the 10 most violent countries in the world are in Latin America, as well as 42 of the 50 most violent cities in the world.

At the same time the region is being challenged to move toward more resilient societies due to its high degree of vulnerability to natural disasters, particularly in Central America and the Caribbean, a vulnerability that is increasing as a result of climate change.

Every adolescent and young person, regardless of his or her gender, has a right to health, dignity and safety. Yet the people dying of homicides in Latin America and the Caribbean are mostly young men. And out of the 25 countries with the highest femicide rates, 14 are in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In tackling public insecurity, most countries could do more to enact measures aimed at preventing violence, including through development strategies that empower young people with skills, cultivate their abilities to protect themselves and open a world of alternatives to a life of crime. Essential elements include universal access to high-quality health and education, social protection and specific outreach to groups of youth struggling with multiple disadvantages.

Limiting lasting impacts of crisis from conflict or natural disaster depends on integrating measures to build resilience in humanitarian response strategies as well as cultivating national capacities to link crisis prevention, preparedness and response efforts.

Access to justice and support for victims of crimes needs to be timely, readily available and adapted to the needs of younger people. Penal reform rooted in human rights principles can be oriented towards measures not just to punish young offenders, but to successfully reintegrate them into society.

In 2017, Latin America and the Caribbean held its first regional consultation involving youth active in peacebuilding in over 30 countries.¹² Drawing on experiences in the prevention of violence and conflicts, and the promotion and strengthening of peace, they emphasized that prospects for peace

12. UNITED NATIONS. (2017). LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN REGIONAL CONSULTATION FOR THE PROGRESS STUDY ON YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY.

correspond with the extent of democratic organizations and a culture fostering participation.

Their perspectives reinforce the imperative for legal frameworks to guarantee the human rights of youth, including freedom of speech and a safe environment during protests. Public institutions could in many cases become more proactive in engaging youth and hearing their voices, including in political processes.

In 2015, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2250, its first emphasizing the importance of youth as agents of change in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. The resolution highlights participation, partnerships, prevention, protection and disengagement and reintegration as five pillars for action related to young people's contribution to peace processes and conflict resolution.

Every adolescent
and young person,
no matter where
he or she is, has
a right to health,
dignity and safety.



Charting a roadmap for a new generation

Charting a course for scaled-up action and smart investment in adolescents and young people offers opportunities to better respond to a crucial stage in life, realize human rights, reap the demographic dividend and pursue far-reaching gains over generations. To chart a roadmap for a new generation, we must put the young person, their development phase and their perspective of the world at the center.

We need to strategically apply what we know will work, based on evidence and experience. Some broad outlines follow, with scope for adaptation according to diverse contexts.



1. Understand their uniqueness

A starting point is to understand that adolescence in particular is a distinct stage of life, as much so as childhood in its physical, emotional and psychological dimensions. With rapid brain development, adolescents acquire the mental ability to assimilate information and make decisions, along with a desire to explore the world and build experience that at times leads to risky behaviour.

2. Think across the lifecycle

A life course approach links different responses to people at diverse stages of life in a continuum of appropriate policies, services and investments.

The infographic harnessing the demographic dividend (pp. 22-23) highlights how the correct decisions of girls, based on the appropriate access to services and the empowerment facilitated by human rights based social norms, would lead to preferable life and social outcomes.

It recognizes the important interconnections among population groups, including in terms of the demographic dividend and population ageing. It ensures that different actions and investments—in children, adolescents and young people, adults and the elderly— can most effectively build on each other.

3. Enjoin their participation and leadership

Adolescents and youth around the world contribute to their communities, push the boundaries of innovation and inspire political movements. They bring skills and perspectives on their own needs and priorities that should be valued and incorporated in working them.

By rights, the future is theirs. They—as individuals, and through their organizations, networks and movements—must have a leading role in defining how best to prepare for it. An important element is deliberately pursuing their broad-based inclusion in society and development, given that some adolescents and youth may already have relatively powerful voices and platforms, while others go unheard.

4. Make them visible

The needs of adolescents and young people are not usually met by strategies that work for children or are primarily oriented towards adults. They need specific public policies and services tailored to their unique phase of life, and backed by appropriate investments.

They should be visible as a distinct population group, defined by age, in data to guide policy decisions. Separate considerations may apply to early adolescence, between ages 10 and 14; mid- to late adolescence, between ages 15 to 19; and young adulthood, between ages 20 and 25.

5. Link their issues

No single investment or action will unlock the well-being of adolescents and young people and guarantee their future. Rather, a variety of well-sequenced measures must be taken to equip them with capabilities and ensure they have opportunities to use these. The basics include universal access to education, health, income and safety.

A misfire in any of these areas, and/or for any particular group of adolescents and young people, can have a ripple effect with long-lasting repercussions in society as a whole.

An adolescent girl who lacks the knowledge and services to avoid pregnancy, for example, is more likely to suffer lasting health complications from giving birth, drop out of school, remain in poverty, be at risk of violence, fail to acquire decent work and carry a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work at home. Other consequences accrue to the economy as a whole, which will be weaker because these girls will not be able to realize their potential contribution, including in terms of generating income and paying taxes.

6. Embrace an ecological mode

Just as an integrated approach is required for different stages of life, a similar understanding applies to creating an “ecology” where adolescents and young people can thrive. This integrated and interconnected scenario can be achieved through a combination of the right policies and laws, adequate investments, supportive institutions and advocacy to shift social norms. Many people support the ecology, from families and communities to businesses to all levels of government.

A call for better data

One immediate priority of the development process to reach 165 million is to improve the quality and quantity of socioeconomic and demographic data. These need to capture the diverse realities of life for youth and adolescents today. They are essential inputs for the design, implementation and evaluation of all public policies related to the 10 actions described above.

Data need to be regularly collected using reliable methods, and disaggregated by sex, age, migration status, race and ethnicity, cultural variables and geographical location, among other parameters. One particularly urgent need is to establish measures indicating the most disadvantaged and vulnerable populations, and showing where they are headed and why they are marginalized.

Regional and national public and social spending report results

UNFPA has developed a methodology to support countries in Latin America and the Caribbean in calculating public expenditure on adolescents and youth. Through this methodology, governments can obtain evidence to devise more strategic investments in adolescents and youth.

In 2017 and 2018, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay and Uruguay conducted national public and social spending studies using UNFPA's methodology, in collaboration with youth organizations. They produced seven national and one regional study. Other countries are considering similar exercises to monitor progress over time.







A platform for partnership

Together we can make change happen!

Every individual and organization has a role and responsibility in acting on issues that touch us all. Investing in the power and potential of adolescents and youth is about shared commitment, recognizing that we are all connected. We all benefit from a better present and future. Each of us can take actions to transform our world and our region, our countries and our communities.

A few ideas follow, for inspiration and action. Let's commit to this vision, together, starting now. Let's make it happen!

UNFPA's comparative advantage

UNFPA's mission is to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

UNFPA focuses its interventions and cooperation programmes aimed at assisting countries in achieving their expected outcomes. At present, in Latin America and the Caribbean, UNFPA has 22 country programmes, one sub-regional programme for the English and Dutch Speaking Caribbean and one regional programme.

All young people can exercise their rights to make informed choices

We support

- Strengthening health systems for universal health coverage and improved access to quality sexual and reproductive health services, particularly for adolescents and youth.
- Health policies and programmes that prioritize the needs of adolescents and youth.
- A healthy workforce able to deliver high-quality and confidential services to adolescents and youth.
- Timely, quality and disaggregated data to inform programming and policy.

We help prevent

- Early and unintended pregnancies
- Mortality and morbidity of young mothers, including obstetric fistula
- Unsafe abortion and its consequences.
- Unsafe sexual behaviors and new HIV and sexually transmitted infections.
- Female genital mutilation (FGM).

All young people can exercise their rights to make informed choices for a healthy and successful transition into adulthood

We support

- Access to comprehensive sexuality education for all young people, in and out of school.
- Adolescent-girl centred programming that aims to equip them with knowledge and skills.
- The development of adolescent and youth policies.
- Community engagement and mobilization.

We help prevent

- Child, early and forced marriage
- Discrimination based on gender, age, sexual orientation and ability status.
- Discriminatory power structures and gendered social norms.
- Gender-based violence.
- Sexual violence.

Young people's fundamental right to participate in political and civic life is fulfilled and their leadership is promoted and enhanced

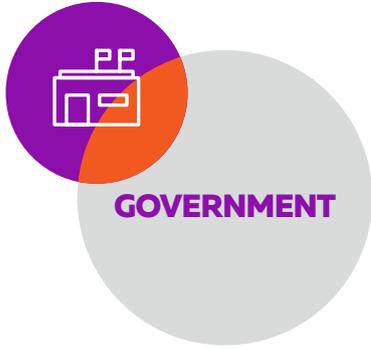
We support

- Developing and extending the use of social tools to measure the impacts of investments in adolescents and youth.
- Youth-led organizations and movements and their engagement in social and political processes, including in humanitarian and peacebuilding settings.
- The meaningful participation of young people in decision-making processes.
- Youth-led advocacy and mobilization and youth-led accountability mechanisms.
- Greater focus on young people and adolescents in policies and programmes in development, peacebuilding and humanitarian action.
- Demographic intelligence, including sex and age-disaggregated data on young people.

We help reduce

- Discrimination based on age, gender, sexual orientation and disabilities.
- Gender inequalities.
- The violence of exclusion experienced by young people.
- Exclusion and inequalities.





What can governments do?

Shared leadership

Governments can lead efforts to invest in a healthy, skilled generation of adolescents and youth, in line with their rights, and the demands of economies in the region. Governments can also support people and organizations working to improve society and shape collective understanding of public priorities. They can break down barriers to progress, including by encouraging innovation. Some ideas:

- Review legislation related to age, sexual and reproductive health, and marriage, and ensure alignment with regional and international commitments to human rights.
- Remove barriers to the practical realization of sexual and reproductive rights for adolescents, including shortfalls in access to services related to cost and/or responsiveness.
- Make adolescents and youth visible in decision-making, and valued for their essential contributions to dynamic economies and inclusive societies. This requires integrating specific provisions for younger age groups across a spectrum of public policies, and including age-disaggregated data in the collection and analysis of official statistics.
- Increase the coverage, quality and relevance of secondary education.
- Seek new ways to unleash the dynamism of young people through ready access to higher levels of education, credit, support for finding jobs and forming businesses, and housing, among other priorities.
- Develop targeted strategies for children and young people aimed at preventing conflict with the law.
- Reevaluate public budgets for the adequacy of investments in youth.

What can businesses do?

Shared value

Businesses have a vested interest in adolescents and youth as future innovators, leaders, workers and consumers. Firms with a longer term perspective are increasingly embracing the notion of “shared value” as a new way to measure business success. Creating shared value means generating economic returns and enhancing competitiveness while advancing economic and social well-being. Some ideas:

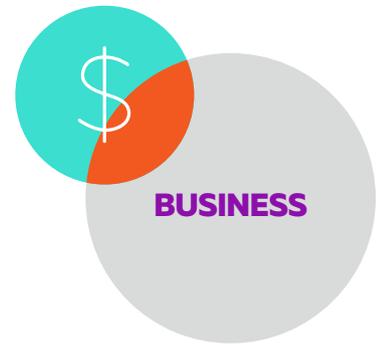
- Smooth the transition of youth into work through formal mentor and internship programmes.
- Prevent social and spatial exclusion.
- Engage with education officials on how to cultivate the workforce of the future.
- Help young entrepreneurs build skills, access finance and ignite innovation.
- Actively commit to hiring and promoting young women, including in non-traditional science and technology fields .

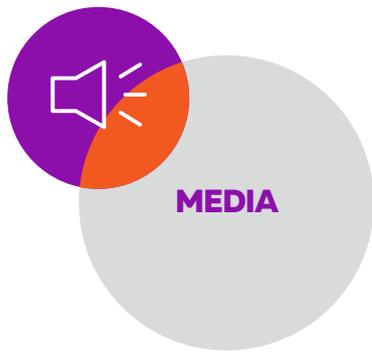
What can NGOs, youth networks and community associations do?

Shared responsibility

NGOs, youth networks and other groups can connect policy makers to the grass-roots, bring practical solutions to the table and act as a voice for those left out of decision-making. With diverse forms of expertise and experiences stemming from deep roots in communities, they can campaign for setting the bar high in the quest for progress. Some ideas:

- Support the formation and development of groups led by youth.
- Groom and open space for young civil society leaders.
- Help youth and adolescents effectively advocate for their greater social, economic and political inclusion, particularly those most at risk of being left behind.
- Back the realization of sexual and reproductive rights, starting in early adolescence, as integral to a safe and dignified life.
- Integrate youth concerns in advocacy on all issues related to human rights and sustainable development.



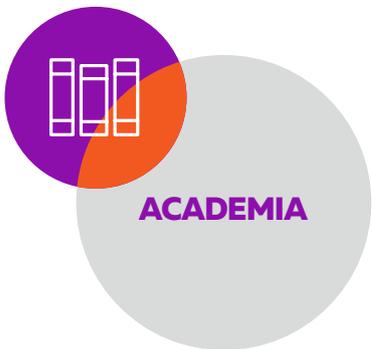


What can media do?

Shared perspectives

By providing accurate, timely and relevant information, the media can build common understanding and hold institutions accountable. The free sharing of diverse perspectives elevates public discourse. It underpins a healthy democracy and can clarify the interconnections that define today's world. Some ideas:

- Explore the complexities, contradictions and challenges of demographic trends towards encouraging broad social agreement on the right investments in adolescents and youth.
- Regularly include youth perspectives in media coverage and in depth reporting.
- Promote positive media images of adolescents and youth as capable contributors to society and the economy.
- End gender stereotypes in reporting and redress gender discrepancies in staffing to help influence positive gender norms for young women and men.
- Address issues that might challenge gender harmful social norms.



What can academia do?

Shared understanding

Academic institutions can spark and inform conversations and actions to improve society. They can develop aptitudes, encourage individuals to share insights and ideas, and raise awareness of the need for solidarity and social responsibility. Some ideas:

- Help adolescents and youth cultivate skills as leaders and engaged citizens.
- Encourage peer-to-peer initiatives for youth to learn from and empower each other.
- Advance research on how multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination faced by some adolescents and youth can best be measured and addressed.
- Analyse data and make demographic projections.
- Foster a culture of human rights, non-discrimination and peace.
- Study policy interventions to see what works and what doesn't work.
- Calculate costs and benefits of the policy interventions that work.

What can international organizations do?

Shared commitment to leaving no one behind

International organizations are mandated to train a spotlight on achieving internationally agreed principles and goals, including those embedded in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Agenda places particular emphasis on inclusive development that leaves no one behind. Since adolescents and youth are among those most commonly left out, all international organizations should commit to bringing them and their issues into the centre of development agendas. Some ideas:

- Support investment in the rights and capabilities of adolescent and youth as critical to the region's future development and stability.
- Prioritize measures to reach marginalized groups of adolescents and youth in programmes and policy advocacy.
- Take an integrated approach to the spectrum of issues facing adolescents and youth, including through partnerships bringing together diverse national and international expertise.



Be a part of it, the call for action

At UNFPA, our core mandate is working to ensure rights and choices for all, in line with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. We believe in the next generation.







Join us!

It's time to work together.

**We have 165 million
reasons to work with
youth and adolescents
at the center of the
sustainable development
agenda!"**

www.lac.unfpa.org/165m

A large, faint network diagram composed of grey lines and dots is spread across the entire page. It features several interconnected nodes and edges, forming a complex web-like structure. In the center-right area, there is a smaller, more detailed network diagram with teal-colored nodes and edges, which appears to be a stylized map of a region or a specific network structure.

165 million reasons

A call for investment in adolescents and youth