

UNICEF statement at the CCPCJ Thematic Discussions on the Implementation of the Kyoto Declaration - 12 November 2021

Topic: empowering youth

Adolescents today

Today's adolescent cohort is larger than ever before, with 1.2 billion adolescents (10-19 years of age) in the world, nearly 90 percent of whom live in low- and middle- income countries. The world is also home to more than 1.1 billion girls under age 18.⁵ Nearly one in four girls aged 15–19 years is neither employed nor in education or training (compared to 1 in 10 boys of the same age).⁶ Approximately 650 million girls and women were married before their 18th birthday.

A window of opportunity

Adolescence is a time of transformation. Adolescence provides a 'second window of opportunity' to positively influence developmental trajectories. It is a period characterized by rapid physical growth and cognitive development, with the adolescent brain developing at a rate unseen since early childhood.⁸ It is a critical period for individual identity development. During adolescence, children begin to interact with the world in new ways, often mediated by social and gender norms and stereotypes.

The empowerment journey for adolescents

Power is a fundamental concept in empowerment. For adolescents to make increasingly complex decisions about their lives and to influence matters that concern them, they must journey from a place of **less power and fewer assets to a place of greater power and more assets**. For this to be successful, others in more privileged positions must share their power.

To be empowered, adolescents must have their human rights realized, with equitable and inclusive access to human, social, productive, and developmental resources and opportunities (**assets**). Adolescents must have the **critical awareness (I CARE)** and **agency (I CAN)** to grow, and utilize these assets.

They must have the right and opportunities to articulate their concerns and hopes in matters that affect them (**I HAVE A VOICE**), and the means and supportive environment to safely and meaningfully engage (**I PARTICIPATE**).

At the same time, empowerment is a means towards the realization of adolescent rights, and States have obligations to take measure towards this end, including the promotion and protection of these rights.

How to strengthen empowerment

Their prospects depend on the **quality of their environments, relationships and experiences**; the support they receive, the services they can access, the social norms that guide their communities, and the **extent to which they can influence decisions that affect them**.⁹

Based on the described definition of empowerment, UNICEF has identified four key components to support adolescents along their empowerment journey. These components are 1) **promoting**

realization, access and use of assets; 2) increasing critical awareness, 3) fostering agency, and 4) enhancing opportunities for voice and participation.

Finally, we believe this can be achieved through systematic investments in 4 strategies:

- **Policies** which supports adolescent development and participation
- **Institutional mechanisms** (e.g. student councils, youth councils, local governance committees) for adolescent participation
- **Capacities** of adolescents and of service providers/partners to work together for youth friendly policies and services
- **Platforms** (digital/non digital) as a space where adolescents have the possibility to learn, discuss with peers, develop an opinion, plan courses of action to address issues affecting their lives.