Key issues in East Asia and the Pacific

The rapid economic growth in East Asia and the Pacific, which has been driven by a labour-intensive market, quick technological progress and market-oriented reform, can only be sustained through the full participation and engagement of its young people. Systematic ways for adolescent voices to be safely expressed and heard are essential to build inclusive, stable and democratic societies. In a region driven by entrepreneurship and technology, the creativity and self-expression of adolescents and youth is a major precursor to innovation.

In East Asia and the Pacific, a ‘partnership approach’ incorporating adolescents and youth is often missing, and there are limited opportunities for them to be involved in decision-making processes such as policy design, programme development and feedback and monitoring. The 2017 Global Millennial Viewpoints Survey produced by the International Youth Foundation1 showed that two out of three young people (aged 15–24) believe that their government does not care about their needs. Increasingly, however, young people’s aspirations are expressed through volunteerism, community-led initiatives, social enterprises, start-ups, the use of social media and networking tools, art and activism. While technology has led to increased connectivity, better communications, and opportunities for jobs in non-traditional sectors, it has not been equally available to many adolescents in the region. In some cases, technological advancement has benefitted the more educated and experienced, and those with transferable skills and access to social networks and resources.

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1 International Youth Foundation. 2017. Global Youth Wellbeing Index.
Driving results for children

UNICEF prioritizes and promotes data generation and evidence about adolescents and youth to inform policies and programmes. It promotes the meaningful participation and involvement of adolescents in shaping the research and data agenda, particularly on the issues affecting them, including: their aspirations and priorities for the future; socialization, leisure and use of time; the influence of religion, media and social norms on their lives; and social networks and online behaviour.

UNICEF also promotes cross-sectoral programming through models and initiatives in which adolescents and young people are key collaborators at all stages of planning and implementation. This involves innovative interventions co-created by governments, think tanks and research organizations, the private sector and youth organizations.

Key programme strategies

Systems and capacity
- Strengthen mechanisms such as student councils, adolescent/youth clubs, local institutions, and community-based organizations, alongside digital and traditional media platforms that encourage and prioritize the participation of adolescents.

Data, evidence and knowledge
- Undertake research and generate evidence using participatory approaches that involve adolescents in all stages of knowledge production; include adolescents in the design and evaluation of the programmes affecting their lives.

Partnerships and alliances
- Identify key research organizations, academia and think tanks to address data and evidence needs using innovative, participatory approaches.
- Build partnerships involving the private sector as influencers, co-creators and problem solvers.
- Establish alliances with social enterprises built and/or led by young entrepreneurs and adolescent influencers, such as young designers, artists, musicians, sports figures and environmentalists, who could be engaged to promote adolescent voice and participation.
- Engage with faith-based organizations and community networks to promote social inclusion and peacebuilding.
- Engage with UN agencies, regional institutions, bilateral organizations, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and youth to promote adolescent participation in policy reform.

Governance, policy and budgets
- Promote the participation and engagement of girls and boys in developing policies that affect their lives, particularly around learning and adolescent health (e.g., sexual reproductive health, mental health, nutrition and violence prevention).
- Support national governments to develop operational frameworks in support of the Convention of the Rights of the Child General Comment No.20 on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence.
- Advocate for legislative and policy frameworks in schools, health structures and juvenile justice systems that ensure the systematic and institutionalized participation of adolescents.

Behavior change
- Invest in behavioural change interventions addressing social norms and cultural values that constrain the participation of girls and boys, partnering with organizations to influence the attitude of governments and communities on adolescent rights to civic engagement.