

ACCELERATING  
RESULTS IN  
ADOLESCENT  
DEVELOPMENT AND  
PARTICIPATION

# Advancing Child-Centered Public Policy in Brazil through Adolescent Civic Engagement in Local Governance

## Context

Supporting the meaningful civic engagement of adolescents in local governance is foundational to a democratic society. Since ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, Brazil has updated its laws to promote and protect the rights of adolescents. This has included the adoption of the Brazilian Child and Adolescent Statute, and the Statute of Youth.<sup>1</sup> Though these legal mechanisms are promising, it has proven challenging to ensure equal participation among adolescents in practice, due to social, economic, cultural, environmental, and geographic factors that constrict the space for participation.

To address these challenges, UNICEF Brazil is supporting formal civic engagement programmes tailored to the most vulnerable adolescents and to the diverse contexts in which these adolescents live.

## Programme Approach

In the Amazon and Semi-Arid regions, UNICEF is supporting the **Municipal Seal of Approval** programme since 2013.<sup>2</sup> This four-year programme requires municipalities to commit to collaboratively creating and implementing plans to advance children's rights. This includes establishing and supporting an **Adolescent Citizen Group** with at least 8 girls and 8 boys. Each group is overseen by a Youth Mobilizer (aged 25-29) trained by UNICEF to help the group translate ideas into specific actions to support child-centered public policies. Municipalities also engage in a formalized process where the Adolescent Citizen Group, policymakers, and the Municipal Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents collaborate on Municipal Action Plans and other relevant policies and programmes. Adolescents also engage in 'thematic challenges', covering a range of issues, in which they learn about their rights, mobilize their peers and communities, and establish a dialogue with public policy managers.

In ten state capital cities, UNICEF works alongside government and other partners through the **Urban Centers Platform** programme.<sup>3</sup>



Like the Municipal Seal of Approval, the Urban Center Platform was designed as a four-year programme, but for bigger cities. The programme aims to reduce inequalities and improve indicators related to child rights. It involves a commitment from cities to hold thematic dialogues with participation from the public sector, civil society, and adolescents. This approach is being redesigned for 2021-2024 to focus on violence prevention.

The actions will emphasize areas of mental health, education, child protection, and adolescent opportunities and engagement. UNICEF collaboration with civil society organizations, well-established in the most vulnerable territories, supports adolescents' social mobilization activities and trainings which have led to citywide protocols, policies, and adolescent-centered municipal plans relating to issues of concern for them.

UNICEF also provides both adolescents and adults capacity-building on skills for integrating child-centred actions into systems, policies, and practices. For instance, in 2019, UNICEF worked with partners to provide 39,000 adolescents with child

rights knowledge and life skills training, including on interpersonal communication and leadership.

Building on these programmes, UNICEF Brazil has also supported regional networks of adolescents to participate in national public forums. In 2019, 50 adolescent participants from Adolescent Citizen Groups, urban centers adolescent networks, and migrant shelters gathered in Brasilia to attend a workshop to understand Brazil's history of children's rights and to organize their demands to national authorities. The adolescents developed and presented the **National Agenda for Adolescents** (NAA) to national leaders on the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Finally, to "walk the talk" and engage adolescents and youth in its own programming, in 2020 UNICEF created an **Adolescent and Youth Advisory Council**. The Council is composed of 24 young people from across the country, who meet monthly with a UNICEF team to promote reflections. Their views contribute to the design of adolescent and youth mobilization and engagement strategies. The Advisory Councils also offer strategies for campaigns and communication tools to reach a broad number of their peers, including those most vulnerable.

## Results

The Municipal Seal of Approval and the Urban Centers Platform programmes have helped to showcase the value of adolescent input in local governance, promoting the legitimization of adolescent voices in decision-making processes, and increasing the influence of their ideas on local planning, programmes, and policies. For example, in Recife, girls' perspectives were included in the municipal plan to combat gender-based violence, which previously focused only on adults. In Vitória, the city mayor adopted a municipal policy to foster students' participation in public policies and a protocol to better assist pregnant adolescents.

In the Amazon and Semi-Arid regions, more than 900 municipalities supported 16- and 17-year-old adolescents to

have their voting cards, and more than 700 municipalities improved services relating to sexual and reproductive rights for adolescents.

## Lessons Learned

Adolescent civic engagement benefits from *a commitment across sectors*, with stakeholders working to support civic engagement skills at all ages and in the multiple areas relevant to the lives of adolescents, including healthcare, safety and protection, and education.

Creating entry points for civic engagement does not alone guarantee its successful inclusion in child-centered policy making and policies. Rather, effective implementation often requires *high-level support*, including local government allies such as Mayors and public policy managers. In Brazil, such support has helped UNICEF and partners increase opportunities for adolescents to engage at the policy level and has led to greater support and allocation of resources for meaningful, systematic, and inclusive adolescent participation.

Ultimately, child-centered policies are stronger when those who can benefit most from decisions not only have a seat at the table, but an *equal and influential voice* in the final legislation.

## Acknowledgements and Contacts

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## Endnotes

1. [https://www.youthpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/library/2013\\_Brazil\\_Youth\\_Statute\\_Eng.pdf](https://www.youthpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/library/2013_Brazil_Youth_Statute_Eng.pdf)
2. <https://childfriendlycities.org/brazil-municipal-seal/>
3. <https://childfriendlycities.org/brazil-pcu/>