



INTERNATIONAL  
**YEAR of  
YOUTH**  
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OUR YEAR OUR VOICE

## *Dialogue and Mutual Understanding*

### **Fact Sheet: Information and Communication Technology**

- Approximately one billion youth live in the world today. This means that approximately one person in five is between the age of 15 to 24 years;
- The number of youth living in developing countries will grow by 2025, to 89.5%;
- Therefore, it is a must to take youth issues into considerations in the ICT development agenda and ICT policies of each country.
- For people who live in the 32 countries where broadband is least affordable – most of them UN-designated Least Developed Countries – a fixed broadband subscription costs over half the average monthly income.
- For the majority of countries, over half the Internet users log on at least once a day.
- There are more ICT users than ever before, with over five billion mobile phone subscriptions worldwide, and more than two billion Internet users

Information and communication technologies have become a significant factor in development, having a profound impact on the political, economic and social sectors of many countries. ICTs can be differentiated from more traditional communication means such as telephone, TV, and radio and are used for the creation, storage, use and exchange of information. ICTs enable real time communication amongst people, allowing them immediate access to new information. ICTs play an important role in enhancing dialogue and understanding amongst youth and between the generations.

The proliferation of information and communication technologies presents both opportunities and challenges in terms of the social development and inclusion of youth. There is an increasing emphasis on using information and communication technologies in the context of global youth priorities, such as access to education, employment and poverty eradication. In addition, ICTs can create effective channels of cooperation, dialogue and information exchange among young people. As a result, the role of young people in the Information Society is an important one.

Young people are potential beneficiaries of increased access to ICT, in particular through improvements in education and social development. Young people may also play an important role in the development of the Information Society, through their ability to learn to use and develop ICT and its applications.

The benefits that ICTs can bring to young people have been widely acknowledged. In a broad sense, the benefits arise from improvements in education and access to information. At the





individual level, ICT may assist young people to gain more meaningful jobs, to communicate easily with other youth from all over the world, and thus share their experiences.

### **The United Nation, Youth and ICTs:**

While access to technology and associated electronic content has significantly changed the lives of many young people in developed countries, this is not always the case for those in less developed countries.

Access to ICTs such as computers, mobile phones and the Internet, especially broadband, remains a challenge for youth in the developing world. In addition, the cost of ICT access (mobile phones and Internet) is much higher as a proportion of per capita income in these particularly disadvantaged countries.

The challenge is bringing together all relevant stakeholders, including governments, civil society and the private sector, and encouraging them to work together to provide an environment that fosters the development of young people and enables them to realize their potential in the Information Society. ICTs transcend borders enabling the communication between young people from every corner of the world, helping in the promotion of dialogue and mutual understanding. It is important then that international cooperation in regards to the transfer of technology is fostered.

The United Nations recognizes young people as avid and creative users of ICTs, and as key contributors to building an inclusive Information Society and bridging the Digital Divide. In particular targeting girls and young women by promoting better and more inclusive access to ICT so as to promote their academic, social and economic development is crucial to not only bridging this digital divide, but also in helping close the gender gap.

In this sense, promoting universal, non-discriminatory, equitable and affordable access of youth to ICT is central to ensuring digital and social inclusion. Disadvantaged and marginalized youth, such as migrant and refugee youth, youth with HIV and AIDS, indigenous youth, youth with disabilities, rural youth, youth experiencing poverty, and those facing discrimination, are often excluded from access to ICTs. The effective allocation of resources so as to ensure equal opportunities and access to ICTs for youth living in vulnerable situations is critical to ensuring that ICTs are used and developed in an inclusive and equitable manner.

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005) produced goals with respect to the development and expansion of access to ICT globally. In particular, high priority was given to the role that ICT could play in relation to young peoples' education. The WSIS Geneva Plan of Action included goals to connect educational institutions with ICT by 2015 and to adapt school curricula to meet the challenges of the Information Society. The importance of capacity building and ICT literacy is also highlighted.

The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) also highlights the importance of improving access to the Internet and to increase information technology literacy at large. WPAY recognizes that effective use of ICT should strengthen youth engagement. WPAY suggests a 3 pronged approach to support youth in their use of information and communication technologies.





This aims at the adequate provision of media for young people, encourages participation by young people in the production of media and in the formation of media policy, and promotes education that emphasizes information and communication technology literacy as a significant dimension of contemporary citizenship.

Attention to young people and their ICT needs is also an essential component of the work of the United Nations Agency dealing with ICT matters, the International Telecommunication Unit (ITU). Amongst its work are digital inclusion activities, a main goal of which is to promote broadband school connectivity through its Connect a School, Connect a Community Initiative. By mainstreaming the youth agenda and offering projects and learning activities which provide young people with crucial ICT and life skills, ITU helps to boost their educational level, and therefore their economic potential.

There are more ICT users than ever before, with over five billion mobile phone subscriptions worldwide, and more than two billion Internet users. Likewise, in general, the cost of many ICT services is falling fast. Nevertheless, ICT affordability remains a concern, considering that the “ICT Price Basket” reveals the huge gaps that still exist between the haves and the have-nots. Indeed, ICT services remain much more affordable in the rich world than in the developing world. Broadband Internet access is perhaps the best and most important example of this.

In the 31 countries at the top of the list – those where broadband is most affordable – a fixed broadband subscription costs less than 1% of average monthly income. But for people who live in the 32 countries where broadband is least affordable – most of them UN-designated Least Developed Countries – a fixed broadband subscription costs over half the average monthly income.

### Progress:

The expansion of electronic and digital infrastructure has given many millions of young people the potential to learn, publish and communicate on an unprecedented scale. The rapidly declining real cost of information and communication technologies in some countries, combined with vast changes to available infrastructure, have allowed many young people to take advantage of technology to do and achieve things unknown to earlier generations.

Increased access to affordable ICTs in many countries is enabling improved education and literacy, including ICT literacy. Indeed, many countries include school connectivity among the priorities of their government’s agenda, which is a huge step toward implementation of World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)’ related goals. However, for most developing countries, connectivity of all schools remains a major challenge.

Given the findings on higher ICT use among youth, a larger proportion of young people in a population suggest a potential asset in the human capital required to develop an Information Society – and ultimately improve a country’s economic and social development.





### The way forward:

ICT has a major role to play in educational facilities at every level. Measurement of ICT use in schools and universities worldwide and analysis of the connection between the quality of education and optimal ICT use are important endeavors, with the ultimate goal being the improvement of educational standards, access and opportunities.

Developing economies that recognize that ICT is a tool for development, and adopt appropriate policies to encourage its wider use, will be poised to take advantage of their 'youth asset'. Many other advances, such as the transformation of business and government processes, are reliant on a higher level of ICT infrastructure, including broadband access.

The types of policies which could be pursued are well known and include:

- Strengthening public policies for the provision of information and communication technologies (ICTs), including access to internet, for education, and including the promotion of ICT training for education that is relevant and of high quality;
- Making changes to school and higher education curricula to encourage the ICT knowledge and skills that are needed in a global Information Society;
- Incorporating ICTs in teacher training and professional development, as well as in educational management;
- Establishing community access facilities (and/or encouraging the establishment of commercial Internet access facilities) through the use of ICT centers as community centers;
- Working with industries to ensure affordability of ICTs
- Working with ICT service providers to reduce the cost and improve the quality of ICT services.
- The use, where appropriate, of innovative new ICT platforms in education that draw on advances in mobile education, open education\ resources and social networks,
- Improved measures to ensure cyber-security and appropriate safeguards, especially for children and young people.
- Ensuring the equitable access to and education in ICT usage for girls and young women and youth facing disadvantage and/or marginalization, for example youth with disabilities, indigenous youth, youth with HIV and AIDS.
- Improved access to quality education for rural populations through increased investment in and the full use of modern technologies, including the establishment of remote education systems and training.

### For further information:

<http://social.un.org/youthyear/>

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/wpay2010.pdf>

<http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/sis/Youth/index.phtml>

<http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/sis>

[http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/material/Youth\\_2008.pdf](http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/material/Youth_2008.pdf)

[www.connectaschool.org](http://www.connectaschool.org)





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