This Call-to-action was presented at the Rome Conference in preparation for the United Nations High-Level Political Forum 2019: “Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies: SDG 16 implementation and the path towards leaving no one behind”, urges all relevant stakeholders and partners to take bold and strong action on Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG16) and empower young people.

The development of this Call-to-action was led by young people participating in the UNDP 16x16 Initiative (as part of United Nations Development Programme Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace, and funded by the Government of Italy). It was drafted with inputs from the United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth (UNMGCY) and a broad range of youth organizations, movements and networks, through an online consultation, in May 2019. This Call-to-action is in line with the vision outlined in the United Nations Youth Strategy (‘Youth 2030’, launched in 2018): “A world in which the human rights of every young person are realized; that ensures every young person is empowered to achieve their full potential; and that recognizes young people’s agency, resilience and their positive contributions as agents of change”.

WHY THIS CALL-TO-ACTION?

The 2030 Agenda recognizes that “children and young women and men are critical agents of change and will find in the new Goals a platform to channel their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world”. Youth organizations, movements and networks have greatly contributed to shaping the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and their key priorities and needs are included across the economic, environmental and social dimensions of development. Young people’s meaningful participation in SDG implementation, monitoring and accountability, from the global to the local level, should be understood as both a means and an end in itself. Youth voices, actions and solutions, as well as their reach and willingness to influence decision-making, are all essential if sustainable development is to be achieved.

This Call-to-action is particularly timely and needed, as SDG16 implementation is lagging behind: as the advance unedited version of the Special Edition Report of the United Nations Secretary-General on ‘Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals’ already indicates: advances in ending violence, promoting the rule of law, strengthening institutions, and increasing access to justice is uneven and continues to deprive millions of security, rights and opportunities and undermine the delivery of public services and broader economic development. Attacks on civil society are also holding back development progress. Renewed efforts are essential to move towards achievement of SDG16.

To meet the ambition of the 2030 Agenda and do justice to young people’s role as agents of change, all actors should systematically promote and invest in meaningful youth participation in SDG implementation, monitoring and accountability at all levels.

SDG16, in particular, represents a critical opportunity to advance youth empowerment by guaranteeing fundamental freedoms, ensuring accountability and opening up decision-making processes to their participation, because:

- It is a triple imperative (human rights, demographic, democratic);
- Young people need to be recognized and supported as SDG accelerators;
- The cost of inaction would be too high.
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking bold action in partnership with young people is urgent. Recommendations below are articulated around five priorities and address both youth-specific needs in the context of SDG16 and the need to enhance youth leadership and youth meaningful participation to advance SDG16 implementation, monitoring and accountability.

- **Peaceful Societies**

We call upon all governments and other relevant stakeholders and partners to:

- Listen and respond to youth’s needs in a given context on the basis of their work, vision, local knowledge and comparative advantage;

- Conduct youth-inclusive conflict, risk and context assessments;

- Raise awareness among governments and other institutional actors on the negative impacts of youth marginalization and exclusion from policy- and decision-making;

- Invest in advocacy to promote the role of young people as positive agents of change and key partners for peace and prevention of all forms of violence;

- Foster enabling legislative and policy environments for youth participation in the implementation of policies and programmes promoting peace in their contexts;
• Adopt a context-sensitive and ‘do no harm’ approach, prioritizing civic space, protection of the human rights of young people, investments in platforms and processes for youth meaningful participation and promote young people’s role in early warning initiatives, disarmament and reintegration, mediation, dialogue, reconciliation, peace processes, developing infrastructures for peace;

• Leverage synergies with Sustaining Peace, the Youth, Peace and Security (UNSCR 2250 and 2419), the Women, Peace and Security and the Prevention of Violent Extremism agendas, in order to promote and invest in young people’s role as peacebuilders and agents of peace;

• Promote a culture of non-violence through formal and informal peace and human rights education; and make peace and human rights education accessible to all, e.g. through creative approaches and story-telling; Build on the innovative and creative work of young peacebuilders and activists on the ground;

• Identify, fund and partner with youth organizations, movements and networks, including grassroots ones;

• Ensure the participation of youth in formal and informal peace processes; Empower young women and mainstream gender-sensitivity in peacebuilding policies and programmes;

• Provide opportunities for young refugees, internally displaced persons, migrants and young people from conflict-affected communities as well as listen to and act toward their aspirations and needs;
● Offer pathways for young people, including young women, to identify relevant strategic priorities, policies and programmatic approaches to disarmament and reintegration.

Just societies

We call upon all governments and other relevant stakeholders and partners to:

● Guarantee the enjoyment of human rights of all young people regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, race, community or socioeconomic status;

● Raise awareness about the specific situation of the rights of young people: promote a deeper understanding of the youth-specific barriers and challenges young people face in accessing their human rights; use this information to identify and advocate for actions that could facilitate young people’s access to their rights;

● Value and recognize young human rights defenders, and preserve the integrity of rule-of-law institutions by protecting young people’s human rights, including safeguarding them from arbitrary arrest and incarceration, ending impunity, ensuring youth-sensitive judicial proceedings and investigations, and ensuring equal access to justice and accountability;
Prioritize advocacy, policy development and programming to safeguard the human rights of young people and prevent and address widespread and grave human rights violations experienced by young people and ensure a strengthened focus on young people experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination and abuse, as well as young people’s access to justice;

Promote the mainstreaming of all rights of young people (including their right to participate in public affairs) into the work of treaty bodies, special procedures and other human rights mechanisms, and highlight the importance of protecting young human rights defenders and their organizations;

Broaden the engagement of human rights institutions and processes with young people;

Promote human rights education and training for youth, as well as global citizenship and sustainable development education, without discrimination, to foster civic awareness, participation and volunteerism;

Develop and implement effective mechanisms to document and follow up cases on human rights violations against young people including creating safe spaces where young people can report cases of human rights violations;

Partner with formal and informal youth organisations, movements and networks advancing human rights and the rule of law;
Promote the fight against corruption, including by ensuring youth participation in independent anti-corruption mechanisms and processes;

Prioritize young women and men as key partners, including in the design and implementation of security sector, penal and criminal justice reform processes;

Give specific attention to prevention-based approaches to at-risk youth, and diversion from incarceration of young non-violent offenders.

**Inclusive Societies**

We call upon all governments and other relevant stakeholders and partners to:

Engage young people on the basis of the principles of openness and inclusivity, and their experience and expertise, rather than as a tokenistic gesture;

Recognise the Principles and Barriers of Meaningful Youth Engagement and the Inter-Agency Guiding Principles on Youth for Supporting Young People as Critical Agents of Change in the 2030 Agenda;
Ensure that youth are not treated as a homogeneous group, by ensuring the prioritization of the needs and participation of the full diversity of young people across gender, socio-economic, ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds;

Promote the active participation of the most marginalised youth groups, including young women, refugee and displaced youth, Persons Living with Disabilities (PWDs), LGBTQI+ communities, rural youth and those living in poverty and intersectionalities present within these groups;

Conduct stakeholder analyses and invest in meaningful participation strategies to reach and foster trust among all youth groups, including the most marginalized and vulnerable;

Promote young people’s right to participate in public affairs, and enhance participation of young people in local, national, regional and global governance and political processes in governments, political parties and communities; institutionalize measures to close the gap between the youth population and the representation of youth in local and national governance institutions and processes (including by considering the use of temporary special measures such as youth quotas);

Invest in youth professional development, training, and volunteerism;

Ensure the adoption of youth-inclusive and youth-focused policy frameworks, addressing young people’s specific needs and establishing coordination mechanisms for and with youth at all levels;
Open institutional channels, avenues and platforms for sustainable and systematic youth representation and participation in the drafting, implementation and review of policy frameworks;

Expand youth participation across all spheres of society by engaging additional groups of young people, including young politicians, parliamentarians, journalists, teachers, students, young professionals, philanthropists;

Provide safe, inclusive and conducive environments, and support coordination between the work of youth grassroots movements and governments, ministries and other public institutions;

Support the capacity development of institutional actors and governments to respond to young people’s needs and to better partner with them on SDG16 and the 2030 Agenda.
Youth meaningful participation in SDG 16 monitoring, review, follow-up and accountability

We call upon all governments and other relevant stakeholders and partners to:

- Regularly co-create/consult with young people, including youth organisations, movements and networks, at all levels and in all their diversity, on priority-setting, policy development and implementation;

- Recognize the need for SDG16-related processes of implementation, monitoring and follow-up that are youth-sensitive and youth-inclusive, culturally appropriate and built specifically to match the needs of youth and marginalized groups;

- Promote and sustain youth meaningful participation in SDG16 and Agenda 2030 as a whole (including Voluntary National Reviews and national and local SDG reporting), including in the review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda;

- Establish and strengthen national and sub-national level platforms to engage and encourage youth meaningful engagement in the SDG implementation process;

- Ensure that the meaningful participation of marginalized youth is guaranteed and sustained in relevant SDG16-related processes and that this participation is supported adequately;
- Connect youth with other CSOs and movements to enhance capacity development, information sharing and maximize impacts;

- Support development of leadership skills and capacities of young people;

- Conduct relevant research that is locally driven and youth-sensitive;

- Support the documentation of promising practices of youth meaningful participation in decision-making, peacebuilding and SDG accountability of 2030 Agenda implementation;

- Support open data sources for citizens, and its proper utilisation at all levels;

- Systematically gather disaggregated data by age and gender;

- Support youth-driven data collection and perception-based studies and officially recognise this data in the Voluntary National Reviews;

- Make sure that findings are presented to the broader society in an accessible way and communication tailored to the audience, in particular using multi-media outreach and campaigns relevant to and led by young people;

- Foster implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national development frameworks for youth.
Equal partnerships & financing
(linkages with SDG17)

We call upon all governments and other relevant stakeholders and partners to:

- Establish, foster and strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships for SDG16, with youth at the forefront, ensuring coordination and coherence among relevant actors, and placing youth organizations and actors at the centre as key collaborators;

- Forge and enhance meaningful partnerships with young female activists, organizations and networks in all areas contributing to SDG16; Support the development of indicators, tracking mechanisms (for example youth trackers) to monitor budget and expenditures on, for and with youth;

- Create and support youth participatory budgets;

- Provide adequate, predictable and sustainable financial resources to support youth organizations, movements, networks and initiatives focused on SDG16 and related frameworks and provide flexible and predictable funding designed with the specific needs of youth organizations, movements, networks and initiatives in mind;
● Review, improve and widen existing modalities for cooperation, dialogue and partnerships with youth-led organizations, movement and networks, as well as young people beyond organised spaces, with a view to ensure concerted efforts to engage those representing most marginalized young people, at international, regional, national and local levels;

● Advocate for greater investment in long-term approaches to support youth empowerment for sustainable development and peace.

Please share the call-to-action and continue the conversation!

#16x16 #SDG16 #Youth2030