

Young People

Young People and Their Role as Change Makers
World Vision Australia's
Public Policy Position

World Vision Australia's position on **young people** and their role as change makers

Young people and their role as change makers in ending poverty and building peace¹

World Vision Australia (WVA) works closely with young people in its programs both in Australia and around the world, and values all young people (into their mid-twenties) as critical change makers in development and humanitarian response. Young people see problems from a different perspective and can bring fresh and innovative thinking to challenges facing them, their communities and their countries.

All young people must have meaningful opportunities to shape decisions affecting their lives. World Vision Australia recognises the importance of supporting and working with young people to ensure their voice, ideas and actions have a platform and can contribute to positive change and to building peaceful societies.

Through its work, WVA supports young people to be resilient and empowered to lead their own and their community's development wherever possible. WVA recognises that investing in young people is an investment in a sustainable and peaceful world now and in the future.

World Vision's mandate to advocate for young people as change makers in development

World Vision Australia and the broader World Vision partnership works together with young people around the world and its work is strongly informed by the experience of young people in diverse communities. For example:

1. Our programs support youth in fragile contexts and conflict, such as our work in the Syria Response²
2. Our programs support youth to develop economic livelihoods and resilience, such as our work in East Sumba, Indonesia, to empower farmers – many of whom are young people – to manage their own natural resources effectively.³ In Cambodia we are assisting 13,500 young people to start small businesses and continue studying, thereby reducing their exposure to risks such as human trafficking⁴
3. Our programs in Australia help young Indigenous Australians to overcome the effects of intergenerational trauma focusing on strengths, skills and possibilities, productive activities and healthy relationships, recognising that young people have the ability to take action and positively change the contexts in which they live⁵
4. Our work through V-Gen and the 40 Hour Famine⁶ provides young people in Australia with the opportunity to engage with and contribute their ideas on development challenges around the world.⁷

In 2015, 95 percent of World Vision offices across the world were undertaking adolescent-focused programming and 68 percent of offices were supporting children's clubs as platforms for bringing young people together. Wherever they take place, World Vision's adolescent programmes are combining life skills with health, child protection, education, peacebuilding and economic readiness.⁸

World Vision Australia's policy recommendations for change

World Vision Australia calls on the Australian Government to:

1. Recognise in its Official Development Assistance (ODA) the particular and crucial role of youth as change makers in the development context, through:
 - a) partner with young people, young people's organisations and organisations that work to ensure young people have the platform to be agents of change, through its program investments;
 - b) create and support opportunities for young people to meaningfully participate and contribute as peacebuilders through its development and humanitarian programs;
 - c) consult young people on a regular basis in the development of new policy and ensure all youth-focused policies are informed and shaped by the views and experiences of young people; and
 - d) promote and respect the cultural rights of young indigenous people through supporting opportunities for them to develop and engage with their particular strengths, language and culture.
2. Promote and fully implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in Australia to ensure the protection and realisation of the rights of all children and young people.
3. Promote and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Australia in order to protect and uphold the rights of young indigenous people.
4. Ratify the Optional Protocol to the CRC on a communications procedure,⁹ in order to ensure that children and young people have the opportunity, after exhausting domestic remedies, to submit complaints to the Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding alleged violations of their rights under the CRC and its optional protocols.

Background

International context

In 2014 the world population of young people between the ages of 10-24 years stood at over 1.8 billion.¹⁰ Eighty nine percent of these young people live in less developed countries (approximately nine out of every ten young people).¹¹ Population projections for developed, less developed and least developed countries envisage a continuing growth in the numbers of young people up until 2030 and in some instances, beyond.¹² An estimated 600 million young people live in fragile and conflict-affected environments.¹³

There is no universal definition of who constitutes 'youth' or 'young people' as a group. 'Youth' or 'young people' is not defined under international law. UNESCO states that 'youth' is often used to refer to persons between the age where they may leave compulsory education and the age at which they find their first employment.¹⁴

At the international level, the United Nations often uses differing age brackets relating to young people: ages 10-24, ages 15-24 or ages 18-29. The 15-24 age bracket is used by the United Nations as the definition of youth for statistical purposes.¹⁵ While definitions of "adolescence" vary the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child asserts that "Adolescence is a period characterized by rapid physical, cognitive and social changes, including sexual and reproductive maturation; the gradual building up of the capacity to assume adult behaviours and roles involving new responsibilities requiring new knowledge and skills."¹⁶

To some extent, the groups 'children' and 'young people' overlap. Until the age of 18, all young people are children, entitled to the rights and protections established under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its associated optional protocols.¹⁷ This includes the right to participate in matters affecting them.¹⁸ Similarly, as children reach 'adulthood', they may still identify as 'young people'. As such, the terms 'youth' and 'young people' are flexible terms which can be subject to different definitions at the national level.¹⁹

Young people played a large role in shaping the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and many of the SDGs focus on young people.

The Declaration accompanying the SDGs recognises young people as "critical agents of change"²⁰ and states that the future of humanity and the planet "lies in the hands of today's younger generation who will pass the torch to future generations."²¹

In 2015, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution affirming the significant and positive contribution of young women and men aged 18-29 years in building a peaceful, secure and sustainable world, and the urgent need for young people to act as agents of peace and conflict resolution.²² In this resolution the Security Council calls on states to give young people a greater voice

in decision-making at local, national and international levels for the prevention and resolution of conflict.²³ The United Nations Secretary General has appointed an Envoy on Youth with a mandate to advocate for the development needs and rights of young people, bring the work of the UN closer to young people and to advise and represent the Secretary-General on youth related matters.²⁴

Australian context

In Australia the age bracket of 15-24 years defines "youth".²⁵

ODA:

The Australian Government's development and aid program does not place a specific focus on young people and it does not acknowledge anywhere in its strategic approach to aid and development the key role to be played by young people in development in the Asia-Pacific region.²⁶

Domestically:

Indigenous (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) young people are among the most disadvantaged in Australia.²⁷ The indigenous population is markedly younger than the non-Indigenous population of Australia. The estimated percentage of the indigenous population aged under 15 stands at 35.9 percent compared with 18.4 percent of the estimated non-Indigenous population.²⁸ The indigenous population also has a much lower median age, 21.8 years compared to 37.6 years for the non-Indigenous population.²⁹ Australia adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples³⁰ in 2009.³¹ Youth and children are particular groups identified by the Declaration as needing particular attention of States in the taking of effective and where appropriate special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions³² and in the general implementation of the Declaration.³³

Monitoring in Australia:

There is no nationally appointed watchdog on young people and their rights.

However, in 2013 the Australian Government appointed its first National Commissioner for Children,³⁴ who has a mandate concerning children in Australia (those under the age of 18).³⁵ Among other roles the Commissioner is responsible for:

- promoting discussion and awareness of matters relating to the human rights of children in Australia;³⁶
- undertaking research, educational or other programs to promote respect for the human rights of children in Australia;³⁷ and
- examining Commonwealth legislation to ascertain if laws are consistent with children's rights.³⁸

In discharging this role's mandate, the Commissioner may give particular attention to children who are at risk or vulnerable and may consult with children.³⁹ In 1992, the Australian federal parliament established the position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner.⁴⁰

Key resources & references

Key resources

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:

<http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth: <http://www.un.org/youthenvoy/>

UNFPA, The Power of 1.8 Billion: Adolescents, Youth and the Transformation of the Future, 2014, http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN-SWOPI4-Report_FINAL-web.pdf

World Vision International, Child and Youth Participation Strategic Direction FY2015-FY2020, 2015,

http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Direction%20Child%20and%20Youth%20Participation%202015-2020%20World%20Vision_1.pdf

References

¹ World Vision International, Child and Youth Participation Strategic Direction FY2015-FY2020, 2015, p.4.

² See: World Vision International, Bringing Hope to Forgotten Faces: 2015 Syria Crisis Response Report, 2016.

³ See: World Vision Australia, FMNR Hub, available at:

<http://fmnrhub.com.au/projects/indonesia-east-sumba-infocus/#.WBIMG9V96M8>

⁴ World Vision Australia, Annual Report 2015, p.21.

⁵ World Vision Australia, Young Mob Leaders Program Project Model 2016, available for internal use only

⁶ World Vision Australia, Annual Report 2015, p.42.

⁷ See World Vision Australia, VGen, available at: <https://www.worldvision.com.au/get-involved/advocacy/vgen-youth>

⁸ World Vision International, Building a Better World for Children: Child Well-Being Summary Report 2015, 2016, p.2.

⁹ Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the child on a communications procedure, A/HRC/RES/17/18, 2011.

¹⁰ UNFPA, The Power of 1.8 Billion: Adolescents, Youth and the Transformation of the Future, 2014, p.ii.

¹¹ UNFPA, The Power of 1.8 Billion: Adolescents, Youth and the Transformation of the Future, 2014, p.3.

¹² UNFPA, The Power of 1.8 Billion: Adolescents, Youth and the Transformation of the Future, 2014, p.5-6.

¹³ United Nations Secretary General's Envoy on Youth, 'Young people worldwide face daunting challenges', Speech on International Day of Peace, 1 June 2015.

¹⁴ See: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/youth/youth-definition/>

¹⁵ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Definition of Youth, p.1.

¹⁶ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 4, Adolescent Health and Development in the Context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2003, [2].

¹⁷ Article 1, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.

¹⁸ Article 12, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.

¹⁹ E.g. Under the African Youth Charter, 'youth' and 'young people' are defined as every person between the ages of 15-35 years. See African Youth Charter, 2006, p.11, available at: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/youth/youth-definition/>

²⁰ A/RES/70/1 2015, [51].

²¹ A/RES/70/1 2015, [53].

²² Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) (on youth, peace and security), available here: <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12149.doc.htm>

²³ Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) (on youth, peace and security), at [1].

²⁴ See Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, available at: <http://www.un.org/youthenvoy/about/>

²⁵ Australian Government, National Strategy for Young Australians, 2010, p.4.

²⁶ Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Australian Aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability*, 2014.

²⁷ Commonwealth of Australia, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016 Report*, 2016.

²⁸ Commonwealth of Australia, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016 Report*, 2016, p.3.10.

²⁹ Commonwealth of Australia, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016 Report*, 2016, p. 6.20.

³⁰ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, A/RES/61/295, 2007. See for further information in the Australian context: <http://declaration.humanrights.gov.au/>

³¹ See: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2009-04-03/aust-adopts-un-indigenous-declaration/1640444>

³² Article 21(2), United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, A/RES/61/295, 2007.

³³ Article 22(1), United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, A/RES/61/295, 2007.

³⁴ See: <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/commissioners/ms-megan-mitchell-national-childrens-commissioner>

³⁵ Section 3, Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986.

³⁶ Section 46MB(1)(b), Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986.

³⁷ Section 46MB(1)(c), Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986.

³⁸ Section 46MB(1)(d), Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986.

³⁹ Section 46MB(4), Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986.

⁴⁰ See: <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice>