



Youth Groups: A Quick Look at International Organizations

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Abstract

Much of the hope for resolving our world's greatest problems is vested in the power of youth. Since the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security (2015), the recognition of young people as a positive force for preventing and resolving conflict and building sustainable peace has gained significant momentum. What is it that makes today's youth more capable of introducing radical and sustainable social transformation than the youth of the previous generations? It is not merely that the new generations are more capable of coping with the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) world, but the urgency of overcoming the risks that our planet and our society are facing, has become so obvious that the younger generations are pushed to act for their security, here and now. Also, the technological environment and the widely spread skills have given youth unprecedented opportunities for interaction and collaboration like never before. Contemporary youth are the first globally networked generation in history with communication capabilities that allow an almost unlimited flow of information and widespread promotion of global causes. Collective participation of young people in international projects through youth groups provides possibilities for intergenerational dialogue that is necessary to both adjust current institutional frameworks and make room for new ones. Apart from intergenerational projects that empower youth to play an essential role in creating rapid social change, such as the UN projects in the last few decades, youth have also established themselves as crucial actors in global social movements which in their own right intend to bring about effective change in our highly fragmented and disparate world. Youth organizations inspire interaction among people from around the world, with a purpose of bringing about common well-being. For the new generation, this process ought to start at an early age and become a life-long quest to be nurtured as a social obligation. The article lists a selection of 22 dedicated international organizations, many of them youth-led, which have been addressing the Sustainable development issue.

1. Introduction

Keeping in mind tectonic changes taking place on the global political scene, it is essential to give voice to those groups of young people, determined to stand in the front line, speak out

and ask for an inclusive, responsible and just future that leaves no one on the verge of human indignity and survival. These people are ready to understand, educate and find common avenues of shared thoughts, ideas, and solutions from which new global cooperative systems can be constructed with an aim to sustain the well-being of all humanity in the long run.

Recognizing the efforts of these young activists, we give them the strength to become leaders whose vision of leadership will be built on the foundations of inclusiveness, equality, solidarity, ecological consciousness, and acceptance of diversity as complementarity and other such great values. If empowered and recognized in time, their efforts will give shape to valuable political movements and even political theories in the future, and moreover, they will be able to mobilize, educate and empower masses of young people sharing the same vision all around the world.

Nevertheless, the power of these movements can be unpredictably powerful. All the way from the “Civil Rights Movement” in 1965 up to the Arab Spring in 2010, youth movements have played a significant role in social transformation. Like never before in history, these youth movements have the capability to connect, mobilize and promote global causes worldwide and bring about effective and positive change in our highly fragmented and disparate world.

UNICEF recently reported that nearly half of the world’s children face an extremely high human security risk due to the dangerous effects of multiple planetary crises, especially climate change and its consequences, including poverty and lack of access to food, clean water, and appropriate education. Most youth organizations’ activities are centered upon the realization that the security of their future is uncertain. Youth are endangered and thus have a right to ask for radical change.

Listed below is a selection of 22 international organizations whose activities have been meaningfully addressing some aspect of security and/or sustainability. Some are explicitly youth-led (1, 2), some are designated youth units within larger organizations (4, 5, 6, 11, 21), while others appear to have an intergenerational leadership (3, 8). A few are broadly advancing the full spectrum of Sustainable Development Goals (4, 6), while most others have a more specialized focus on climate (5, 15, 16), human rights (7), peacebuilding (12), ecovillages (13), reforestation (17), energy (18, 19), global development (20), gender equity (21), or green schools and communities (22). Some are arms of the UN (4, 5, 6) or affiliated with the UN in some other way (3, 7, 8, 13).

1. **Fridays For Future** (2018, everywhere; <https://fridaysforfuture.org>) International movement of school students who skip Friday classes to participate in demonstrations to demand action from political leaders to prevent climate change and to push the fossil fuel industry into transition to renewable energy. The movement is active in more than 150 countries and has involved hundreds of thousands of protestors in thousands of strikes. Their demands: keep global temperature rise below 1.5 °C, create a safe pathway towards it compared to pre-industrial levels, ensure climate justice and equity for everyone, follow the Paris Agreement, unite behind the science, and listen to the best currently available science. The movement is led by Greta Thunberg, the Swedish environmental activist widely known for challenging world leaders. The long list of

Country Contact Information includes Fridays For Future Antarctica, with 30 photos of concerned penguins!

2. **Extinction Rebellion** (2018, London; <https://rebellion.global/about-us>) International, decentralized, and “politically non-partisan” movement of “ordinary” people, “using non-violent direct action and civil disobedience to persuade governments to act justly on the Climate and Ecological Emergency” and minimize the risk of social collapse. They have three demands for governments: 1) Tell the Truth, to declare a climate and ecological emergency; 2) Act Now to halt biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse gas emission to net-zero by 2025; 3) Go Beyond Politics, with governments to be led by the decisions of a Citizens’ Assembly on climate and ecological justice. The directory of >1,200 national and local groups includes XR Antarctica.
3. **Global Youth Action Network** (1999, New York; <https://gyan.tigweb.org>) Alliance of youth-led and youth-serving organizations in more than 190 countries. It acts as an incubator of global partnerships and a global information provider. Various levels of membership are open to any organization that supports young people and rejects hatred or violence in any form. More than 1,200 organizations have applied for GYAN to date. In 2004 it was granted affiliate status with the UN Department of Public Information, and in 2005 Special Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).
4. **Youth2030** (2018, UN/New York; www.unyouth2030.com) A “system-wide strategy” that acts as an umbrella framework to guide the UN and its partners to work “with and for young people” across its three pillars, namely peace and security, human rights, and sustainable development.
5. **YOUNGO** (2009, UN/New York; <http://www.youngo.uno>) The “Youth Constituency” of the UN Framework Convention (UNFCCC), comprising 200 youth NGOs and 5,500 individuals and serving as an official conduit for youth participation in the UN climate talks as well as a global network of youth and youth-focused organizations working on climate change. YOUNGO runs various Working Groups (Access & Disabilities, Agriculture, Information, etc.) on specific aspects of climate change within the UNFCCC, with the aim to ensure that perspectives of future generations are considered in multilateral decision-making processes.
6. **SDSN Youth** (n.d., UN/New York; www.sdsnyouth.org) A program of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2012) aiming to educate young people about the SDGs and provide opportunities for them to pioneer innovative solutions to address world challenges. SDSN creates platforms for youth to connect, collaborate and integrate their ideas and perspectives into national and regional pathways for implementation of the 17 SDGs. More than 2,600 youth community leaders have been involved in 127 countries.
7. **World Youth Alliance** (1999, New York; www.wya.net) Aims to build a global coalition of young people able to defend the dignity of the person through education, culture, and advocacy. It trains youth to advocate for human dignity and develop creative solutions

to real-world problems in the areas of international policy, human rights, economic and social development, global health, and education. WYA works at international institutions such as the United Nations, the European Union, and the Organization of American States, bringing young people to international conferences and into dialogue with ambassadors, diplomats, and political leaders.

8. **Junior Chamber International** (1944, Chesterfield, Missouri; <https://jci.cc/>) A non-profit NGO of young people between 18 and 40 years old, with members in 124 countries, and regional or national partner organizations in most of these countries. Their mission is to motivate and empower youth to become active citizens, take responsibility for global challenges in their community, identify targeted and sustainable solutions, and build the courage to address the most critical challenges of our time. JCI has consultative status with the Council of Europe, UNESCO, and the UN Economic and Social Council.
9. **Generation Waking-up** (2010; Oakland CA; www.generationwakingup.org) Rallies high school and college-age young people for the “Great Turning”. Its projects (*Wake up, Thrive and Amplify*) include social entrepreneurship ventures, community projects, and advocacy campaigns intended to awaken, empower and mobilize youth to build a more sustainable and secure world. More than 150 young people have been trained as WakeUp facilitators, and thousands of young people in Australia, Brazil, China, Germany, Egypt, India, Kenya, Mexico, Romania, the UK, and the US have participated in GW programs.
10. **Youth Fusion—Abolition 2000 Youth Network** (1995; New York; <https://www.youth-fusion.org>) Worldwide networking platform for young people in the field of nuclear disarmament, risk-reduction, and non-proliferation. Their focus is on youth action and intergenerational dialogue, building on links between disarmament, peace, climate action, sustainable development, and ‘building back better’ from the COVID-19 pandemic. Led by the principles of the Abolition 2000 Founding Statement and as part of the Abolition 2000 Network, they seek the total abolition of nuclear weapons. Youth Fusion organizes forums and events for inter-generational dialogue to build cooperation for more effective policy action.
11. **International Student/Young Pugwash** (2001, no location info; <https://isyp.org/>) Global interdisciplinary network of students and young professionals concerned with the interface of science, technology, society, and ethics, committed to the ideals of the Pugwash Conferences on World Affairs and the 1955 Russell-Einstein Manifesto that led to the founding of PCWA in Pugwash, Nova Scotia, Canada. ISYP is led by a youthful Executive Board with the responsibility to coordinate and expand the global network, engage a new ‘peace generation’, and organize regional and international events such as the annual conference.
12. **United Network of Young Peacebuilders** (1989, The Hague; <https://unoy.org>) A network of 123 youth organizations in 69 countries active in the field of peacebuilding and conflict transformation, “united around the vision of a world free from violence.” Besides core programs on capacity building, advocacy, and campaigning, ‘UNOY

Peacebuilders' supports members with networking possibilities, sharing information, a pool of resource persons, carrying out research, fundraising, international working group meetings, training seminars, and global regional conferences. Along with Search for Common Ground and the UN Peacebuilding Support Office, it co-chairs The Global Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security (https://www.youth4peace.info/About_GCYP).

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13. **Global Ecovillage Network** (2006, Findhorn, Scotland; www.ecovillage.org) Provides education and collaboration opportunities for young people to co-create a peaceful and regenerative culture. It has consultative status with the UN-ECOSOC and functions as a network of autonomous regions (in Latin America, Oceania & Asia, North America, Africa, and Europe), coordinated through the NextGen International Youth Council that meets on a monthly basis. Recent projects include Youth Social Innovation for Resilient Communities, Youth-Led Societal Innovation for Resilience, and the Zambia Greening Schools.
14. **Earth Guardians** (1992; Boulder, Co, <https://www.earthguardians.org/>) Provides the platform, resources, and collaborative opportunities necessary to elevate youth voices and strengthen the positive impact they are having in their communities and in the world. Their mission is to inspire, inform, engage and invest in diverse youth “to be effective leaders in the environmental, climate, and social justice movements... fueling the cultural shift toward a regenerative future.” They claim to have trained 22,000 youth leaders, and educated 600,000 youth in more than 61 countries with over 450 action campaigns.
15. **Climate Cardinals** (2020; McLean, Virginia; www.climatecardinals.org) Seeks to make the climate movement more accessible to non-English speakers, especially young people. This youth-led movement was begun by high school senior Sophia Kianni, an Iranian-American climate activist, and named after the state bird emblem of Virginia to suggest migration of ideas. The organization has over 8,000 volunteers who are translating and sourcing climate change information into over 100 languages. The initiative spans 41 countries and has reached over 500,000 people with over 500,000 words of climate information translated to raise awareness and mobilize various groups.
16. **Protect Our Planet Movement** (2016, New York; <https://thepopmovement.org>) Aims to empower youth to participate actively in addressing climate change. It seeks to provide a common platform for youth associations, organizations, and young individuals

to share their action-oriented efforts, integrate activities, mobilize collective efforts, and utilize knowledge in addressing the threat of climate change. The POP Movement has developed projects across the US, Australia, Africa, Asia, and Europe.

17. **Plant for the Planet** (2007, Munich, Germany; <https://a.plant-for-the-planet.org>) Global children and youth initiative with over 88,000 ambassadors in 75 countries campaign for a massive reforestation drive to “plant a trillion trees.” The organization has trained over 91,000 children and youth activists in 1,608 academies in 75 countries. As Climate Justice Ambassadors, they give speeches to adults to inspire them to combat climate change, prevent a temperature rise above the critical 1.5 °C limit, reduce fossil fuel emissions, reduce meat consumption, and more. They emphasize the great impact that planting trees has on society, including new economies based on reforestation that can generate billions of dollars for national and local economies and small farmers.
18. **Young International Solar Energy Society** (1954, Freiburg, Germany; www.ises.org) Serves as a social and professional network for young members of ISES working on photovoltaic and other forms of renewable energy. Through knowledge sharing and community-building programs, it aims to help its global members provide the technical means for an accelerated transformation to 100% renewable energy. Meetings and social events are organized at the biennial Solar World Congress and at some regional solar energy conferences.
19. **European Youth Energy Network** (2021, Brussels; <https://youthenergy.eu>) Seeks to put youth at the heart of energy transitions. The organizations active in this network educate youth on energy and sustainability, and represent and engage them in energy and climate policymaking. EYEN works closely with the European Commission’s Director-General for Energy. It has been serving as Regional Focal Point for Europe on behalf of the SDG#7 Youth Constituency of the UN Major Group for Children and Youth since May 2020. Currently, EYEN’s main project is OpenPolicy Europe, a tool that allows youth to get a better understanding of how the policymaking process works, who is involved, what policies are in place where, and how one can get involved.
20. **Youth Challenge International** (1989, Toronto; www.yci.org) Designs global development solutions that create conditions for youth to realize meaningful employment and overcome the health, environmental, and inequality challenges they face. It aims to equip young people with the tools, experience, knowledge, and networks to build sustainable livelihoods, taking into account market realities.
21. **Young Leaders Program of Women Deliver** (2007, New York; www.womendeliver.org) With an emphasis on sexual and reproductive health and rights, this program strives to elevate the work of young people for gender equality (SDG#5). Through Digital University coursework training, a Speakers Bureau, grants for short-term advocacy projects, workshops, and conferences, it connects young advocates with the platforms, people, and resources needed to amplify their influence. WD’s Young Leaders Program has engaged more than 1,000 youth advocates under the age of 30 from more than 148 countries to date.

22. **Green Schools Alliance** (2006, New York; www.greenschoolsalliance.org) GSA mobilizes schools to help transform markets, policy, education, and behavior, increase community resilience, empower students, and prepare citizens to think and act in new and creative ways. It initiated the Sustainability Leadership Commitment, a call to action for schools and districts to help in reducing the climate and ecological impact, educating and engaging communities, and transforming the present institutional culture. By signing the Commitment, green schools and districts pledge to develop and implement a comprehensive climate action plan to achieve carbon neutrality. *GSA's work has reached 48 US states and 91 countries, with 579 signed commitments representing more than 8,000 schools.*

2. Conclusion

The growing mobilization of young people and their desire to have a say in local, national, and international policies and programs have caught the attention of the international community and policymakers. Successful intergenerational partnerships at the UN and in other regional and national settings necessitate the inclusion of young people, especially in projects dealing with sustainable development, human rights, peace, and security. Young people are now recognized as crucial agents of change in the UN 2030 Agenda.

Youth movements are one of the strongest catalysts of social evolution and future change. All of the movements listed above are built around a strong set of values advocating a responsible, greener, and just future for humankind. To accomplish a much-needed system transformation, however, it will be necessary to continually assess the most effective forms of action in dealing with security and sustainability issues.

3. Recommended Reading

The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis. Foreword by Fridays For Future. New York: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), August 2021, 28p. Introduces the first Children's Climate Risk Index, ranking countries on how vulnerable children are to environmental stress and extreme weather events. Some 1 billion children—nearly half of the world's children—live in countries that are at an “extremely high risk” from impacts of climate change (especially in Africa). In sum, “The climate crisis is a child rights crisis.”

Adults Are Failing Us on Climate, by Greta Thunberg, Adriana Calderon, Farzana Faruk Jhuma, and Eric Njuguna, *The New York Times* (Op-Ed), 22 Aug 2021, SR8. The four FFF authors of this UNICEF report foreword write that “For children and young people, climate change is the single greatest threat to our futures. We are the ones who will have to clean up the mess you adults have made, and we are the ones who are more likely to suffer now.”

Young People's Voices on Climate Anxiety, Government Betrayal and Moral Injury: A Global Phenomenon, by Caroline Hickman and Elizabeth Marks (both at University of Bath), *The Lancet* Preprint, 7 Sept 2021, 23p. A survey of 10,000 young people aged 16-25 in 10 countries, finding 59% very or extremely worried about climate change (84% at least

moderately worried), >45% said that feelings about climate change negatively affected their daily life and functioning, and >50% feeling anxious, angry, powerless, and guilty.

Youth Climate Action in the United States, by Melanie Meunier (Univ of Strasbourg), *E-rea* [Online], 18 Feb 2021. Based on ample bibliography on climate change and youth activism (O' Brien et al., Tilly & Tarrow, Jenkins et al., Gamber-Thompson, Kaplan, The Climate Group, Climate Academy etc.), this article explores the process of formation of youth groupings that starts with transforming “fear and frustration into positive action” and develops into three different levels of activism: disruptive, i.e. fighting against the system (since 1970s), dutiful, i.e. fighting inside the system (since 1990s) and dangerous, i.e. subverting the system by proposing new visions of society (contemporary).

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