

## INEE Thematic Issue Brief: Youth

### Definition

Governments and the international community use a variety of overlapping definitions to categorise children, young people, adolescents and youth. In some countries, the government definition of youth includes people as old as 35. While the existence of adolescence or youth as a clearly demarcated period of life depends on cultural and other factors, and while programming with these cohorts will often involve individuals that are older or younger than the target group, the INEE Minimum Standards uses the term 'youth' to refer to those aged 15 to 24 and adolescents are people between the ages of 10 and 19. Together, youth and adolescents form the largest category of youth people, aged between 10 and 24 years of age. Within a country or culture, there can be different ages at which individuals are considered mature enough to be entrusted with certain tasks. In emergency situations, adolescents have specific needs that are different than those of adults or younger children. Youth incorporates the connotation of a period of progression toward independent responsibility.

### Youth as a Thematic Issue

Youth have a right to education enshrined in various global human rights treaties. These treaties outline entitlements to free, compulsory primary education for all children, the responsibility of governments to provide basic education for individuals who have not completed primary education, and the states' obligation to develop secondary education for all children and guarantee equitable access to higher education. Governments and the international community also have a duty to help youth exercise their right to participation, including in emergency response and recovery.

Despite such rights and responsibilities, humanitarian actors and governments tend to prioritise the needs of younger children during emergencies, and, by their own admission, they often fail to serve the needs of youth. Funding for emergency programmes explicitly targeting youth, especially those who are not in school, remains scarce. In programming, youth are typically grouped either with younger children or with older adults. While many would benefit from access to non-formal educational options, governments often see these options as less legitimate than formal school and tend not to prioritise them, leaving cohorts of youth frustrated, unemployed or unemployable.

The crucial element of youth participation is often ignored in programming, even in programs targeting youth. In emergency situations around the world, youth are essential actors in response and recovery either through organic, self-led actions or with the assistance of external actors. In times of crisis, a community's youth may be its most abundant asset. In the field of education, youth are not simply beneficiaries or recipients - they must be engaged to assist with assessments, response strategy, programme design, monitoring and evaluation, and to take on responsibilities as community facilitators, teachers or education personnel. Tapping the potential of young people requires building quality educational systems that include both formal and non-formal approaches. In addition, quality educational systems need to be flexible, participatory, situation-based, equitably available for boys and girls, relevant, age and gender-specific, linked to realistic employment opportunities, related to peace-building initiatives and more.

### Addressing Youth in the INEE Minimum Standards

The INEE Minimum Standards Handbook makes numerous references to youth and their particular needs, especially in areas where youth has traditionally been underserved in programming. Examples of how youth issues are mainstreamed throughout the INEE Minimum Standards Handbook include the following:

- **Foundational Standards** encourage that youth are treated as a heterogeneous group with varying needs, and are engaged in discussions regarding education programmes at the community level on an ongoing basis. Youth should participate in the planning, monitoring and evaluating of education programmes.
- **Access and Learning Environment Domain** highlights the need to reach the poor, socially marginalised, and frustrated youth majority, especially the most vulnerable young people, through creative and entrepreneurial programmes. A range of education opportunities should be provided so that youth can re-enter the formal school system and/or can participate in non-formal learning activities. The domain also reminds programmers to consult with youth and engage girls and young

women on issues such as class scheduling, curriculum design, and minimising the risks in and around educational facilities.

- **Teaching and Learning Domain** calls for equal access to life-skills education for out-of-school youth, promoting relevant and demand-driven programmes in livelihood and vocational development, designed and implemented with the active engagement of youth, employers, training centers and other service providers such as micro-finance institutions.
- **Teachers and Other Educational Personnel Domain** recognises issues of education quality are a major factor in the effort to attract and retain young people. The domain also calls for the engagement of students in providing feedback on their teachers' performance and overall behavior, and where appropriate, expresses that youth should be given opportunity for employment within education activities and training courses.
- **Education Policy Domain** addresses the needs of out-of-school youth through encouraging disaggregated data collection and the development of youth policy. Furthermore, the domain emphasises the need to plan and implement livelihood and vocational programmes linked with micro-finance institutions, so that youth with skills will have the capital to apply their trade as self-employed individuals.

### Additional Guidance

The following are examples of good practices and lessons learnt in mainstreaming youth issues in education programming:

- **Emphasising Non-formal Education:** In crisis and post-crisis reconstruction, non-formal programming may be the only access that youth have to education and training opportunities. Addressing the right of education for out-of-school youth who cannot or will not attend school in a formal classroom setting requires flexibility of approach and meaningful user participation in programme design, implementation and monitoring. Case Example: The Norwegian Refugee Council develops a Youth Literacy Package, a non-formal education programme for refugee youth in Tanzania and Rwanda. [NRC Youth Education Pack Resource Kit](#)
- **Ensuring Meaningful Youth Participation:** A review of the contemporary literature around youth in emergencies finds a nearly universal recognition that the active participation of young rights-holders is the best way of reaching programme goals, that their participation has knock-on effects in areas outside of the immediate goals and that failing to engage them as the principal agents of change translates into disappointing programme outcomes. Case Example: Plan Australia works to develop opportunities for youth in two rural districts of Timor Leste through two practical interlinked projects: Youth Participation and Youth Livelihoods. [Programme Description](#)
- **Maintaining a Gender Perspective:** Considerations for varying age sub-sets is important in programming, so are considerations for gender, both for female youth and for male youth. Programmers should engage learners in an ongoing process to identify and address any particular constraints to accessing education for one gender or another. Specific programmes for girls should include, where applicable, reproductive health services, pre- and post-natal care, parenting support, life skills training and counselling services for gender-based violence. Case Example: Female Stipend Programme in Bangladesh offers an allowance to encourage families to send girls to secondary school, and to help to meet the costs of education, including examination costs and a portion of school fees, textbooks, school supplies, uniforms, shoes, transport and kerosene. [2006 Desk study on the FSP programme](#)
- **Linking Emergency to Transition:** The aftermath of an emergency is an opportune time to introduce supportive policies for youth at the national level. International actors should work with ministries to strengthen their cross-sectoral work, including youth-focused education. Case Example: The Joint Programme for Employment and Empowerment of Young Women and Men launched in 2008 the Government of Liberia and the UN Country Team, promotes the employability of youth both as a means to sustained economic growth and as a vehicle for peace and security. [Programme Fact Sheet](#)