

Policy Brief | RIGHTS AND CHOICES FOR ALL ADOLESCENTS & YOUTH

Issue overview

Today’s generation of young people aged 10-24 is 1.8 billion strong, or approximately one quarter of the total world population. Such an unprecedented cohort is helping to shape social and economic development, they are challenging social norms and values, and building the foundation of the world’s present and future.

For millions of young people around the world, puberty – the biological onset of adolescence – brings not only changes to their bodies but also new vulnerabilities. Prioritizing and protecting their rights, needs and aspirations, will define the course of global and national development.

UNFPA puts young people—their talents, hopes, perspectives and unique needs—at the very center of sustainable development. In doing so, it backs the achievements and aspirations of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

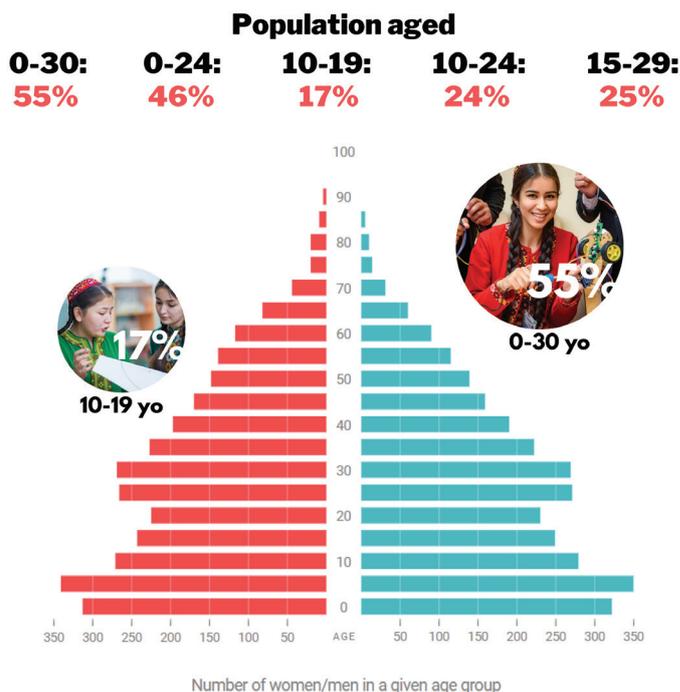
UNFPAs global strategy on adolescents and youth [“My Body, My Life, My World”](#) supports the implementation of Youth 2030 – the United Nations Youth Strategy and achievement of the Sustainable development Goals. Globally, UNFPA has been a strong proponent and advocate on investing in young people, both as a human rights imperative, as well as for the economic and social development of countries.

Definitions of adolescents and youth:

The UNFPA Youth Strategy embraces all adolescents (aged 10 to 19) and youth (aged 15 to 24), as per the United Nations definition for statistical purposes without prejudice to other definitions by the Member States.

The Law on Youth Policy of Turkmenistan identifies youth as young citizens aged 14 to 30 years old.

Youth in Turkmenistan (UN Population Division, 2019)



The global pandemic has had a dramatic impact on the lives of young people, on their education, job prospects, mental health, and social life. But young people are also at the forefront of responding to the pandemic. Across the globe, young people stepped up and devised responses in their communities and for their peers, young people volunteer in crisis, reaching out to older persons to help them overcome loneliness and exclusion, and assisting older people with new technologies so they can connect online with family and friends.

UNFPA works with governments, civil society and diverse partners, to help empower young people to make their own choices and determine their own futures. They, in turn, will be able to shape and improve the world around them by sustaining Peace, People, Planet and Prosperity.

Trends in Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan is a country with a predominantly young population. How well they navigate adolescence will determine not only the course of their own lives, but that of the country.

The **2013 State Law on Youth Policy** addresses 15 areas of relevance to young people aged 14-30 as per the national definition, namely: ‘participation; rights and freedoms; education; health; sport and healthy lifestyles; creative activity; vulnerable youth; young families; talented youth; physical and spiritual development; cultural entertainment; recreation; youth associations and international youth cooperation’.

“Creating favorable conditions for the establishment of youth mechanisms and platforms for youth participation in the socio-economic, political and cultural life of the state and society” is one of the priorities of the Law and State Programme on Youth Policy of Turkmenistan 2021-2025. Thirty percent of members of Parliament are younger than 30 years, while the Youth Organization of Turkmenistan counts over 900,000 members in the country aged 14–37 and works closely with the Cabinet of Ministers. This government-supported public organization has the potential to drive the interests of young people across the country.

Creating and strengthening youth-friendly healthcare services is a priority within the framework of the National Strategy on Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Children and Adolescent Health for 2021-2030. Adolescent birth rate for 15–19-year olds is at 22 births per 1,000 women in that age group, a slight decrease since 2016 (SDG indicator 3.7.2.). In 2018, adolescent girls aged 15-19 were included into the list of most at-risk women eligible for reproductive health commodities in the 95 reproductive health rooms countrywide.

Schoolchildren receive information about their reproductive health and rights, gender equality and life skills education within the framework of the Basics of Life Skills mandatory subject taught in 7-10 grades in secondary-level schools. However, the education is abstinence-focused and omits the issues of contraception, sexuality education and gender-based violence.

Young people are often the ones who drive social progress and transform social and gender norms promoting positive changes. For this, they need to be empowered with knowledge, skills and to exercise and express their rights. According to MICS 2019, 53.6 percent of girls aged 15-17 justify violence against women² due to established traditional gender roles in the family and society. The percentage is even higher among women aged 20-24, reaching up to 61.8 percent.



Creating favorable conditions for the establishment of youth participation mechanisms and platforms is one of the principles of the new State Programme on Youth Policy 2021-2025

Photo: UNFPA Turkmenistan/Sergey Mirzoev

UNFPA in Action

UNFPA promotes young people’s participation in decisions affecting them and in contributing to policies and services that are more likely to respond to their rights and needs.

UNFPA leads the work of the UN Task Force on Youth Policy to support the Working Group on Youth Policy in the implementation of the State Programme on Youth Policy for 2021-2025. UNFPA promotes the meaningful participation of young people in decision-making and dialogue during the process of policy development, implementation and monitoring. UNFPA supports programmes centered on adolescents with a particular focus on girls that can support their health, social, economic and cognitive assets and their overall development.

Within the framework of the new State Programme on the Youth Policy, UNFPA supports the government in establishing innovative platforms for youth participation and reinforcing youth-related statistical and SDG measurement systems. The partnership also focuses on promoting men and boys’ engagement in advancing gender equality and positive social norms in society.

UNFPA’s support to the education sector has focused on strengthening the quality of reproductive health, gender equality and life skills education within the Basics of Life skills subject through the adoption of teaching norms and standards and expanding the pedagogy resource base.

In out-of-school settings, UNFPA also works with partners to equip adolescents with life skills and expand their knowledge on reproductive health, gender equality and positive social norms.

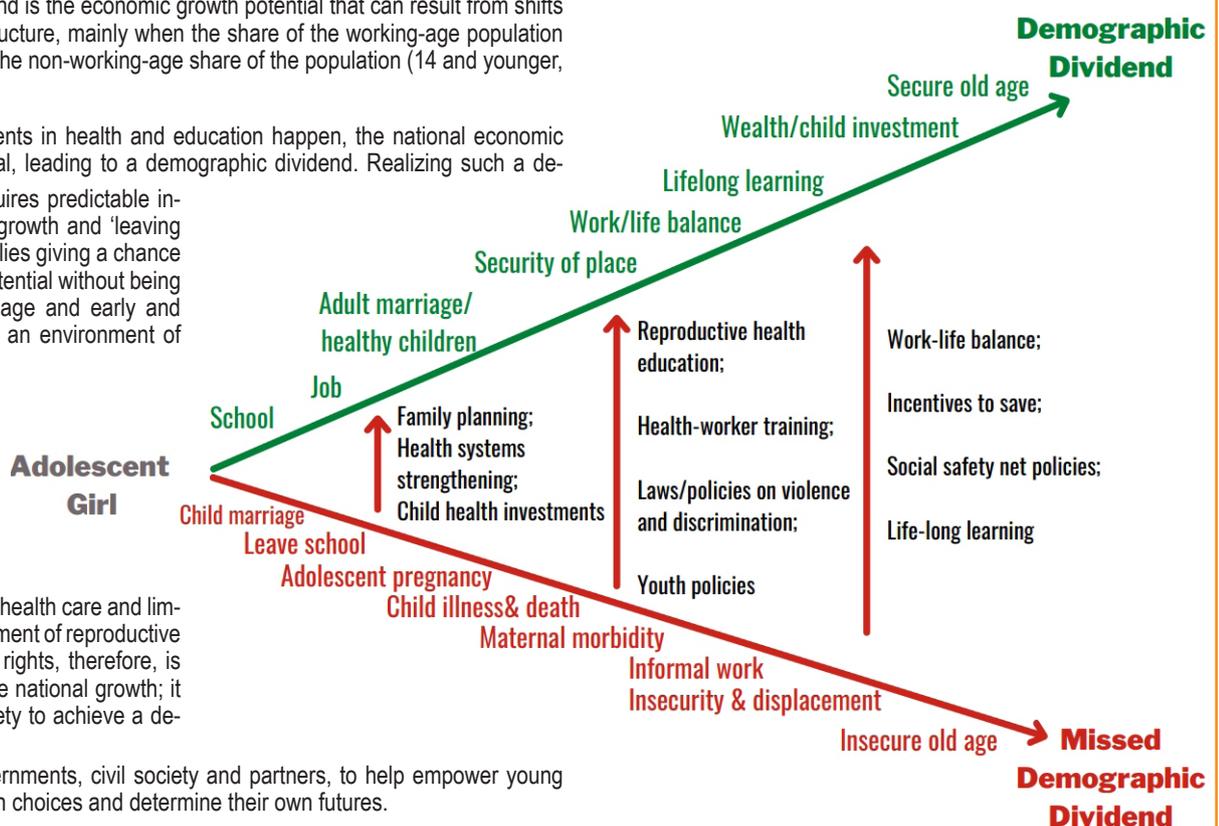
Harnessing the Demographic Dividend

The demographic dividend is the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population’s age structure, mainly when the share of the working-age population (15 to 64) is larger than the non-working-age share of the population (14 and younger, and 65 and older).

When the right investments in health and education happen, the national economic payoff can be substantial, leading to a demographic dividend. Realizing such a demographic dividend requires predictable investments for inclusive growth and ‘leaving no one behind’. This implies giving a chance to girls to realize their potential without being trapped into early marriage and early and unplanned pregnancies, an environment of

violence, poor access to health care and limited education. The fulfillment of reproductive health and reproductive rights, therefore, is not a sideline to inclusive national growth; it is essential for any society to achieve a demographic dividend.

UNFPA works with governments, civil society and partners, to help empower young people to make their own choices and determine their own futures.



UNFPA in Action *(cont.)*

Yashlyk.info website provides evidence-based information on youth health issues for young people, parents and teachers.

The Yashlyk site also provides new and updated evidence-based information for adolescents and their parents on adolescent reproductive health during the global pandemic, as well as virus prevention and health risks through a new rubric on COVID-19. UNFPA also supports the activities of the Youth Peer Education Network or Y-PEER, a group of volunteers who promote healthy living and gender equality among their peers.

UNFPA supports health policies and programmes that prioritize the needs of adolescents and youth.

Within the framework of the National Strategy on Reproductive, Maternal, Children and Adolescent Health, UNFPA continues supporting the government in making health services for adolescents accessible, affordable and trustworthy. UNFPA is also providing technical support in the establishment of an adolescent health center in the capital, including the development and integration of the different standards of clinical care for adolescent boys and girls. The center will serve as a knowledge hub and training center for the country and will offer a wide spectrum of health services to adolescents.

UNFPA is also the lead UN agency in the Joint Programme funded by the Human Security Trust Fund on “Empowering and engaging the young people in mitigating the multi-dimensional threats of the global health pandemic” with the Government as well as UNICEF, IOM and UNODC which will be launched in 2021.



UNFPA: Delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

New priorities of partnership in 2021-2025

The well-being and development of young people is a cross-cutting theme among the programme areas covered as part of UNFPA’s 5th Country Programme for 2021-2025 – Reproductive Health, Gender Equality and Population Dynamics.

Using its comparative advantages, UNFPA will continue providing technical support and policy advice to empower young people enabled by population dynamics, human

rights and gender equality, and creating conditions for the population to contribute to the development of the country.

The UNFPA Country Programme will have a specific focus on the populations furthest behind, including young girls in rural areas and from the lowest wealth quintile, adolescent girls and boys, and young people with disabilities. The partnership will contribute to the:

1

Enabling environment for reproductive health services and implementation of reproductive rights:

Supporting the implementation of the National Strategy on Reproductive, Maternal, Children and Adolescent Health for 2021-2030; and
Operationalizing comprehensive reproductive health education in school settings.

2

Gender equality and empowerment of women and adolescents to claim their rights and to make informed choices while creating demand for high-quality services:

Promoting men and boys engagement in advancing gender equality, promoting positive social norms and ending gender-based violence;
Promoting innovative mechanisms and platforms for youths and adolescents’ participation in decision-making and intergenerational dialogue, including in the context of a global pandemic; and
Supporting the realization of the State Programme on Youth Policy, specifically in the area of youth legislation, youth-related statistics, promotion of volunteerism, health, and life skills education, as well as creating support platforms for engaging men and boys to advance positive gender practices in the society.

Partners

The key partners are the Ministry of Sports and Youth Policy, the National Council (Parliament), the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population, State Statistics Committee, the Institute of State, Democracy and Law, the Youth Organization named after Magtymguly, Women’s Union, UN Agencies, public organizations, universities and academia, mass media and other relevant stakeholders.

Sources:

1. The State Committee of Statistics of Turkmenistan and UNICEF. 2016. 2015-2016 Turkmenistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, Key Findings. Ashgabat, Turkmenistan: The State Committee of Statistics of Turkmenistan and UNICEF.
2. Ibid.



United Nations Population Fund in Turkmenistan

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