

International Youth Day 2024
From Clicks to Progress: Youth Digital Pathways for Sustainable Development

Concept Note

In 1999, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed the recommendation by the World Conference of Ministers of Youth (Lisbon, 8-12 August 1998) that 12 August be declared International Youth Day (A/RES/54/120). Over the last two decades, the annual International Youth Day celebrations have covered a wide array of themes relevant to young people, from food security and mental health to intergenerational solidarity and green skills, highlighting critical connections between youth and sustainable development.

International Youth Day 2024 is themed “From Clicks to Progress: Youth Digital Pathways for Sustainable Development”.

1. Digital Transition and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The global landscape today is characterized by digital transition, with rapid changes reshaping our societies and daily lives. Acknowledging its crucial importance to sustainable development efforts, the UN Secretary-General in the Our Common Agenda report¹ emphasized the need to support individuals to navigate technological transitions, alongside demographic and climate changes.

Digital transformation stands as one of the six key transitions that have “catalytic and multiplier effects across the SDGs and an outsized determinant impact for achieving the Goals”, demonstrating its far-reaching and multidimensional impact on addressing pressing global challenges². Technologies such as mobile devices, digital platforms and services, and emerging innovations including artificial intelligence are instrumental in advancing the SDGs. Data, generated from every digital interaction, serves as an essential pillar for digital transformation, facilitating evidence-based decision-making. It is estimated that digital technologies and data contribute to at least 70% of the 169 SDG targets, bringing about a profound impact across their economic, social, and environmental dimensions³. Furthermore, research also shows that technology can significantly lower the cost of achieving the SDGs by up to USD 55 trillion⁴.

2. Youth as Digital Generations and Visionaries

Since the adoption of SDGs in 2015, global internet connectivity has seen remarkable growth, with over two-thirds of the global population using the internet in 2023, and mobile phone subscriptions reaching 8.63 billion in 2022⁵. Notably, internet access in the least developed countries increased from 7% of the population in 2015 to 36% in 2023, while connectivity in high-income and upper-middle-income countries reached 92% and 79%, respectively⁶.

¹ United Nations (2021) [“Our Common Agenda”](#).

² United Nations Sustainable Development Groups (2023) [“Six Transitions: Investment Pathways to Deliver the SDGs”](#).

³ International Telecommunication Union (ITU) & United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2023) [“SDG Digital Acceleration Agenda”](#).

⁴ International Institute for Sustainable Development (2023) [“Force for Good Report Explores Role of Technology in Helping Reach SDGs”](#).

⁵ United Nations Development Coordination Office (2023) [“Game-Changers: Wired for Good, Digital Connectivity for a Sustainable Future”](#).

⁶ Ibid (2023).

Amid this digitalization, young people have higher access to digital technologies compared to other demographic groups. Comparative analysis shows that worldwide, 75 percent, or three-quarters, of young people aged 15 to 24 used the internet in 2022, a rate 10 percent higher than the rest of the age groups⁷. On the other hand, the digital divide and inequalities persist especially in low-income countries, and in terms of gender; women have less access to the internet than men, globally (63 percent of women compared to 69 percent of men)⁸. Similarly, there is also a gap in digital skills acquisition; adolescent girls and young women tend to have limited digital skills compared to their male counterparts⁹.

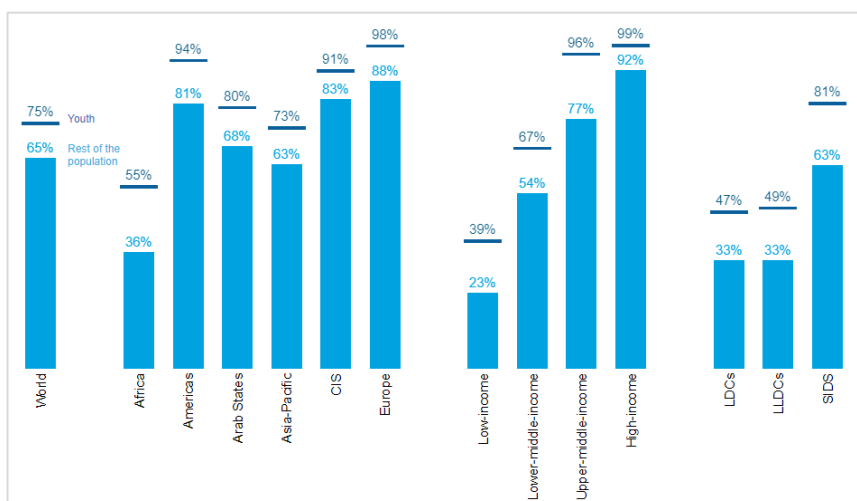


Figure 1 Percentage of individuals using the Internet by age group in 2022, data and graph from ITU (2024) “Facts and Figures 2022”.

While these challenges draw attention to the urgent need to accelerate digital inclusion, young people are largely considered “digital natives” because of their age and early technology exposure¹⁰. Young people are at the forefront of adopting new technologies, forming the largest demographic of users and developers that shape digital trends globally¹¹. This positions them as the driving force behind digitalization and innovation, leading digital processes and data-driven future¹². As the 2030 deadline for the SDG approaches, youth remain an essential demographic group in leveraging the transformative power of technologies to address global challenges.

3. Objectives of International Youth Day 2024

The theme of International Youth Day 2024, “From Clicks to Progress: Youth Digital Pathways for Sustainable Development”, highlights the key connection between digitalization and accelerating SDG progress, emphasizing the pivotal role of young people in this transformative process. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Explore the instrumental role of technologies and data in accelerating efforts towards achieving SDGs, including the role of young people in advancing digital transition.
2. Showcase diverse youth-led and focused digital solutions and innovations at the global and national levels that contribute to sustainable development.
3. Provide a knowledge base for stakeholders, such as youth, civil society, and national governments as well as relevant UN agencies, to access data and insights on the topic.

⁷ ITU (2024) “[Facts and Figures 2022](#)”.

⁸ United Nations Development Coordination Office (2023) *ibid*.

⁹ UNICEF (2023) “[Bridging the Gender Digital Divide](#)”.

¹⁰ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) (2020) “[World Youth Report 2020](#)”.

¹¹ ITU (2021) “[Digital Youth: Empower, Engage and Participate](#)”, ITU News Magazine, No. 6.

¹² UN DESA (2020) “E-Government Survey 2020: “[Digital Government in the Decade of Action for Sustainable Development](#)”.

4. Synergies with Relevant Efforts

Beyond the mid-point of SDGs, global efforts are geared towards leveraging solutions. For example, the ECOSOC Youth Forum 2024 is themed “Youth Shaping Sustainable and Innovative Solutions: Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and Eradicating Poverty in Times of Crises”. Similarly, the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2024 focuses on “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and Eradicating Poverty in Times of Multiple Crises: The Effective Delivery of Sustainable, Resilient, and Innovative Solutions”. Echoing these efforts, International Youth Day 2024 amplifies the digital dimension of solutions to accelerate SDG progress while highlighting the role of youth in these processes.

5. Key Components of International Youth Day 2024

- **Case Study Infographics:** A collection of digital solutions and innovative initiatives aimed at accelerating SDG implementation will be showcased through engaging infographics, launching on International Youth Day, 12 August 2024.
- **Interactive Online Quizzes:** Learning tools designed to enhance understanding of how digital technologies contribute to advancing the SDGs.
- **Short Videos:** These will highlight examples of digital solutions, particularly those led by or focusing on youth.
- **Social Media Toolkit:** Created to amplify the message of International Youth Day and its 2024 theme, this toolkit will include key messages, data, and insights. It will provide visual assets for download, encouraging individuals to celebrate the day within their communities and roles.
- **Outcome Document:** To capture and synthesize the key insights explored during International Youth Day. To be developed after International Youth Day.

What is positioned at the core of International Youth Day 2024 is to encourage digital engagement among individuals and stakeholders, reinforcing this year’s theme. The abovementioned components are outlined to achieve the overall objectives of International Youth Day while highlighting the relevance of digital tools and processes in itself.

DESA will work on the planning and production of these components in collaboration with partners. The infographics, serving as key knowledge products, will be designed based on data collected with the partners and launched on International Youth Day to officially mark and commemorate the Day. All components will be developed and disseminated through DESA/UN communication channels and those of partners, as appropriate, in a phased approach to build digital momentum and awareness towards the Day, except for the Outcome Document which will be designed following International Youth Day. A communication plan will be developed to coordinate effective outreach strategies.

6. Partnership

For International Youth Day 2024, DESA partners with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), UN-Habitat, and UN Internet Governance Forum (IGF). ITU led the SDG Digital Acceleration Agenda¹³, an initiative launched in 2023 aimed at exploring how digital technologies can accelerate progress towards the SDGs. DESA also collaborates with the UN-Habitat, the rotating Co-Chair of the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD), and the IGF to leverage the expertise and knowledge of IANYD members, relevant networks, and key stakeholders.

¹³ ITU & UNDP (2023) “[SDG Digital Acceleration Agenda](#)”.