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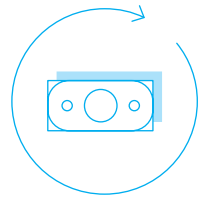
# Youth leadership on climate change

Supporting young leaders  
to strengthen their movement



## The Opportunity

The realm of youth engagement in climate change is bustling with initiatives. However, despite remarkable progress, young people still struggle to impact policies that are designed by adults but will affect their lives for years to come. UNICEF's natural role in this domain is to work with the early cohort of the youth generation, identifying the next climate leaders, building their capacities, and brokering with governments to help them influence climate change policies.



## Our initiative

In response to this challenge, in 2022, the ADAP team launched the "Youth Climate Change Leadership" initiative, aiming to empower young people to influence policies and strengthen their networks.

The initiative supports leaders through four strategic pillars:

1. strengthening youth networks to create a solid base,
2. raising awareness to garner societal support,
3. advocating for change -when not seated at the policy table-, and
4. negotiating policies to influence change -when at the table.

# How we do it

The “Youth Climate Change Leadership” initiative is implemented through four strategies:

↪ **Identification of emerging leaders**

UNICEF country offices identify leaders who can mobilize peers into action, rather than those primarily active on social media. Target age is 16-24 (with exceptions for precocious leaders), the goal is to support their leadership journey so they are ready to influence policy decisions within a few years.

↪ **Building young leaders’ capacities**

A global online training program (six modules, 18 hours) on strategic planning around the four strategic pillars is offered to young leaders (in English, Arabic, French, and Spanish). Graduated leaders then work with their peers to design and implement strategies at country level.

↪ **Creating a safe space for leaders**

A global community of practice (200+ members from 55 countries) allows leaders to continue learning, share experiences, and organize their work. Members meet bi-weekly to share progress and recommendations and attend monthly thought leadership sessions. The community is led by a management team (15 members elected to represent regions, age groups, gender, and minorities) and is supported by task teams to aid country-level work.

↪ **Supporting leaders at the country level**

UNICEF country offices guide leaders in strengthening their networks, conducting awareness and advocacy campaigns, and influencing policies. UNICEF brokers meetings between young people and governmental stakeholders, prepares the youth for these interactions, and follows up with stakeholders on asks by youth. In some cases, young leaders have been integrated into policy development working groups (e.g. NDC in Ecuador).



# Results

While it is hard to do justice to the realm of results already achieved, here below a selection which reflects key areas of successes.

## ↳ Ecuador - Empowering Young Leaders in National Climate Change Policies

In 2022, UNICEF-Ecuador initiated youth engagement in climate action with a workshop and capacity-building program. This empowered 40 young climate leaders to formulate policy recommendations for the Ministry of Environment's new Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), focusing on environmental education, risk management, health, energy transition, and sustainable agriculture. In June 2023, the Ministry integrated these young leaders into the working groups responsible for NDC formulation, highlighting a commitment to inclusivity and youth perspectives in shaping climate policies.

## ↳ Emirates - Engaging Young Leaders in the Local Conference of Youth (L-COY)

UNICEF-Emirates empowered young leaders organizing the 2022 L-COY by training them in awareness-raising and advocacy campaign design. These leaders identified key climate change challenges, gaps in advocacy and awareness, and social norms hindering climate action in the UAE. They presented a Youth Statement with 19 recommendations for youth-friendly green policies to the Ministries of Environment and Climate Change, Education, and Youth, leading to the integration of climate education into the national school curriculum.

## ↳ Paraguay - Strengthening a Youth Movement

In 2022, UNICEF-Paraguay supported the establishment of the Youth Network for Climate Action. Members received training through the "Young Leadership School: Advocacy in Climate Policies" program, covering topics such as climate change, adaptation, mitigation, financing, and COP participation. The network, now comprising 130 activists, developed a mission, vision, strategy, and regulations for electing coordinators and strategic planning. They co-led the organization of the Paraguay 2023 L-COY, resulting in the "National Declaration on Climate Change and Youth," which serves as the foundation for ongoing advocacy, environmental education, and tree planting.



# Lessons Learned

While the first two years of experience confirmed the fundamental hypothesis that young leaders are able to influence policies if provided with strategic support, field work showed how a meticulous follow up by UNICEF is needed to accompany young leaders' journeys to influencing policies.

More specifically:

- ↪ **Leaders are more effective working with groups rather than as individuals.** Unlike social media advocates, leaders represent youth networks and can mobilize others, contributing to the sustainability and scalability of the initiative. Their capacity to mobilize peers needs to be supported by appropriate tools and methodologies.
- ↪ **Identifying the right young leaders can be challenging** due to their short track record. Investing time in selection and choosing two or three leaders per country and carefully coaching them can mitigate this risk.
- ↪ **UNICEF support is critical.** Youth leadership is most effective through intergenerational partnership. Young leaders who have achieved the best results were those closely coached by UNICEF country offices

## Next Steps

- ↪ **Expanding to 100 Countries**  
The initiative expanded from 14 to 55 countries in the past year, largely due to the rollout of UNICEF's Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan (SCAP). As UNICEF's climate advocacy ambitions grow, this initiative will become critical in supporting young people to influence policies.
- ↪ **Strengthening the Governance of the Global Community of Practice**  
Initially managed by UNICEF, the community is now led by a youth management team. The next phase involves developing bylaws for the management team to govern the community while continuing to provide them with guidance.
- ↪ **Handing over to Regional Offices**  
After two years of HQ management, the initiative will now transition to regional offices, allowing for more contextualized and linguistically specific support.

# Learn more

Find a few case studies which describe our work at country level:



**Ecuadorian Youth in Climate Action:**  
[A Call for Change](#)



**Emirates Youth Leading Climate Action and Policy:**  
[Building A Youth Movement on The Momentum to COP28](#)



**Youth-Led Action towards Climate Advocacy and Policy:**  
[Lessons from Maharashtra, India](#)



**Youth Leadership on climate change initiative:**  
[Lessons from UNICEF Malawi](#)



**Youth leadership on Climate Change initiative:**  
[Lessons from UNICEF Maldives](#)



**Youth leadership on Climate Change initiative:**  
[Lessons from UNICEF Paraguay](#)



**Youth-Led Action on Climate Change:**  
[Lessons from UNICEF Serbia](#)

# Where we want to go

The initiative has supported youth movements in 55 countries.

Our vision is to expand and have young leaders strengthening movements to conduct campaigns and influencing policies in 100 countries by the end of 2025.

