



ON EQUAL TERMS



A checklist for decision
makers & practitioners
on a youth-inclusive
NDC process

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UNDP is the leading United Nations organization fighting to end the injustice of poverty, inequality, and climate change. Working with our broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet. Learn more at undp.org and follow at @UNDP.

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1. Introduction

The rise of the global youth climate justice movement in recent years has played a pivotal role in accelerating climate action. However, it remains a concern among young advocates and their organizations that public institutions lack the will and/or resources to meaningfully engage with a diversity of young people and to integrate their inputs into climate policymaking. Simultaneously, government officials frequently encounter challenges in identifying and engaging youth in co-designed policy processes and including their contributions in legally-binding texts.

This disconnect represents a significant missed opportunity for countries to align their climate action plans with the needs of young people, the very people who will shoulder the consequences of our action or inaction. Central are countries' self-defined Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement.

An NDC is a country's pledge specifying how much it will contribute to the global goal of 1.5°C, adapting to climate impacts, and ensuring sufficient finance to support these efforts. It must be updated every five years with an increase in ambition based on the country's capacities.

As governments prepare to revise and strengthen their NDCs, due in 2025, it is imperative they are designed and implemented not just with young people in mind, but with them actively contributing, each step of the way, through a process in which they are valued equally alongside other stakeholders. This capacity for young people to contribute, and lead, is a human right, alongside the right to a healthy environment.

To meet the challenge, government officials, development partners, youth organizations, movements, and networks worldwide have requested support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). As the largest agency in the UN system supporting climate change adaptation and mitigation, including through its flagship initiative, the Climate Promise, UNDP is an active promoter of meaningful youth engagement in decision-making and policymaking processes at all levels.

To ensure a youth-responsive NDC process, UNDP has devised this checklist, providing officials and other stakeholders with a comprehensive guide for establishing a youth-inclusive NDC process. The checklist draws upon the extensive experience of UNDP in engaging with climate stakeholders and youth organizations, movements, and networks in a broad range of countries. It is informed by a survey of 335 youth from 78 countries in which young people aged 15 to 35 were invited to share their views on and experiences of participating in NDC formulation, implementation, and monitoring.

Adaptable to local contexts, it is intended to provide guidance across six key stages of the NDC process, beginning with the initial political decision to meaningfully engage youth, through to NDC implementation.

In addition to the checklist, this guide offers entry points and insights relevant to each step. It complements UNDP's NDC Quality Assurance Checklist and Gender Checklist, ensuring a proper consideration of gender and youth issues in NDC processes.

We hope that this checklist will be instrumental for your work on the NDCs and foster meaningful engagement with youth as pivotal supporters of climate ambition.



Photo: Joel Sheakoski

2. Key entry points

a. Taking the political decision to include young people

The first step to meaningfully engage young people in NDC processes, or any climate policy, is a choice upheld by political commitment.

Yet this – inviting young people to co-shape actions, strategies, decisions, and outcomes – often is the first point of failure with many policymakers continuing to underestimate the true value of youth input, leading to their systemic exclusion.

“A staggering 77.9 percent of the young people surveyed by UNDP report that they have never participated in, or been invited to participate in, the formulation of their country's NDC. 62.5 percent of respondents perceive the formulation of NDCs without the involvement of youth as a structural problem.”

A fundamental shift in mindset is needed among decision-makers, to see youth engagement as key to increasing and realizing climate ambition. Such a shift necessitates a clear political commitment to ensuring the equal and meaningful inclusion of youth.

Promisingly, the value of such commitments, including binding ones, have already proven effective.



Starting with the announcement of the Danish Youth Climate Council at COP24 in Katowice, we have witnessed the establishment of national youth climate councils in European countries (such as Netherlands, Poland, Estonia) and beyond (Canada, Chile, Brazil, Ghana, and Costa Rica). Each has been mandated by their respective Ministry of Environment to provide independent advice on national climate strategies and maintain a regular feedback channel.

Survey respondents from Zimbabwe, Kenya, Fiji, Viet Nam, Jamaica, Morocco, Colombia, and Nigeria also indicated that an inclusive, consultative approach, especially when supported by development partners, has helped to substantially advance youth climate objectives in their countries.

Notably, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and Russian invasion, Ukraine hosted its youth climate dialogues as part of a climate ambition forum with the government, supported by UNDP and the European Union.

Sweden, meanwhile, has established dedicated positions for its United Nations Youth Delegates, with a mandate to influence national climate processes, with feedback gathered via youth consultations, and to take part in international Conference of the Parties (COP) negotiations as Party delegates.

A young Peruvian respondent to our survey highlighted how the inclusion of youth representatives in the National Commission on Climate Change – on equal terms with other members – was a significant contributor to increasing NDC ambition in their country, due to increased accountability.

However, while there are positive examples of youth inclusion in climate policymaking, decision-makers have yet to fully leverage the potential of youth policy proposals formulated at annual Local and Regional Conferences of Youth (known as LCOYs and RCOYs) hosted by the official Children and Youth Constituency to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (YOUNGO). These serve as crucial preparatory events in the run-up to the Global Conference of Youth (COY) and the annual COPs.

b. Mapping youth organizations

One of the key concerns voiced by participants in the survey centres on the concept of visibility. Underpinning this is a **profound concern held by young people that conventional stakeholder engagement mechanisms “cherry-pick” organizations or individuals to be involved in NDC consultations, to the exclusion of other marginalized groups.**

Young people perceive that this “cherry-picking” often leads to rigid and hierarchical structures of civil society engagement, as well as greater division between privileged and underrepresented groups.

To address this concern, policymakers can learn from youth-led consultations which have embraced the “empty chair” principle. This entails acknowledging the absence of key affected voices at the decision-making table, while also striving to establish a more inclusive and representative structure.





Applying the principle of the “empty chair” when mapping youth climate organizations requires starting with the following questions: Which groups are typically overlooked in participation? And who is not present and represented in the room? Identifying underrepresented and particularly vulnerable groups, and then meaningfully engaging them is essential to enhancing the legitimacy of the NDC process.

As well as determining who to engage, governments need to consider how to do so effectively. Many marginalized and affected communities lack access to online communication channels, such as email or messaging apps, as well as direct contact with government officials. The development of alternative outreach approaches are therefore required. For instance, survey participants from Cameroon and Nigeria highlighted community radio as a valuable tool for reaching rural youth.

The tactic of “snowballing”, when one organization in the mapping process proposes additional actors to be involved, can also enhance inclusivity.

Finally, feedback from respondents indicates that involving neutral, trusted partners, such as international development agencies, enhances the quality of outreach. Policymakers should consider collaborating with such actors in their countries, then, especially if they have limited capacity to map youth climate organizations themselves.

c. Getting information out there

Inclusive mapping of youth organizations paves the way for the very first step of engagement in NDC processes: issuing the call for participation.

Unfortunately, as highlighted by the survey responses, this is when numerous challenges emerge, not least the ineffective dissemination of information. **In fact, the most cited grievance among youth is the absence of a coherent approach to provide them with information about the NDC consultation process.** The dissemination of information often occurs opaquely and without proactive outreach. For example, open calls often are only posted on the website of the respective government authority and not broadcast widely.



Further, today's youth, regardless of their country or territory of origin, are increasingly diverse – not just demographically and linguistically, but also in digital skills and access to information and online tools.

To ensure that those who engage in NDC processes represent the spectrum of youth interests in climate action, it is thus essential that governments and other actors employ outreach strategies that meet young people where they are. It is crucial too that young people co-create the call for participation in NDC processes and disseminate this information to their networks on social media and other online platforms. This must be done in all the languages of a country or territory, in formats accessible even on a basic smartphone.

Furthermore, as with the mapping process, it is important to have as back-up, non-digital channels of information that are commonly utilized in marginalized communities. Moreover, identified community gatekeepers can create a direct feedback channel. This ensures that the digital divide does not inhibit participation in the NDC process.

Finally, it should be noted that ensuring extensive and inclusive youth outreach, including in relation to gender representation, goes hand in hand with the equal consideration of their inputs. UNDP's [Gender Checklist](#) provides important insights into how NDCs should be formulated with gender equality considerations in mind.

It is not just gender which must be considered – NDC processes must also recognize – and seek to overcome – other intersectional factors which may limit young people's participation. These can include race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability and class.

d. Building the capacity of young people to engage

One of the primary requests expressed by young people, to enhance their engagement in NDC processes, is a need for a more comprehensive understanding of its importance and the technical aspects of engagement. Unfortunately, the survey showed that **65 percent of those who previously participated in NDC processes did not perceive it as successful in addressing youth concerns and climate ambition within their respective countries**. Capacity-building and training, then, is essential for improving the quality of young people's participation in both the formulation and implementation of NDCs.

To address this, YOUNGO, with the support of the UNFCCC Secretariat, organizes briefings that focus on specific topics in climate negotiations – however, these efforts cannot reach all youth actors at the national level. Government authorities, either independently or in collaboration with global or regional development partners, could greatly benefit from designing and implementing a capacity-building cycle tailored for young people engaging with the NDC process. Such an initiative would help increase participation and achieve a higher quality of substantive engagement.

An outstanding example of youth-centred capacity-building can be found in Panama through

“The Climate Change Academy for Young Leaders and its Alumni Programme. Through the academy, **48** youth, between **18** to **35** years of age, were selected from a pool of nearly **650** applicants, and trained on NDC commitments”



during five training cycles, from 2018 to 2022. An alumni initiative, launched in June 2022 is providing graduates with continuous support towards their future plans, including providing matchmaking opportunities, as well as allowing the Ministry of the Environment to measure the impact of the academy on participation and advocacy of young people.

Another success story is Care About Climate's 'NDC Equity Project', which, between 2021 and 2023, has trained more than 200 young people on how to understand and analyze their country's NDC for intergenerational and gender justice. To date, NDCs from 65 countries, representing 51 percent of global emissions including the EU, have been analyzed. Care About Climate provides project participants with continuous support as well as promotes their findings among policymakers at Regional Climate Weeks and COP.

The first stage of the capacity-building cycle involves awareness campaigns that emphasize the value of young people's inputs in NDC processes, in parallel with efforts to increase their participation in them.

The second stage involves designing training materials that target the areas, identified by young people, of greatest importance for understanding NDCs. Survey respondents identified climate science and data analysis, sectoral areas, and navigating technical terminology as being the most-needed areas of training.

Survey respondents from across the continents unanimously expressed their support for learning materials that reach young people in their own locations and languages. There is also a strong demand for decentralized training solutions, such as pre-recorded videos or sessions conducted by regional and national officials. These can then be used to train local trainers who can further localize the training and facilitate capacity-building in their local areas. These forms of training solutions, which fall under the Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) agenda of the Paris Agreement, represent an opportunity for further collaboration between government, development partners, academia, and private philanthropic institutions.

e. Making and sustaining an inclusive NDC design process



Photo: Mayra Monge

After completing the above steps, we reach the most pivotal phase of the process – the consultation itself. The stakes are high, as once a country’s NDC commitments are submitted to the UNFCCC, they will only be updated after five years.

The trust and active participation of young people in NDC consultations largely depends on their ability to influence the agenda and the selection of representatives on equal terms with the organizers.

Our survey revealed that youth from at least 15 countries are frustrated with decision-makers' preference for unrepresentative and “cherry-picked” delegates. By opening up consultation in a meaningful way, coupled with extensive capacity-building, governments can seize the opportunity to garner broader perspectives, capture insights that may not arise in regular procedures, and foster mutual trust. Here, governments have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

As highlighted by a respondent from South Asia, in their country there are often multiple consultations at multiple levels that invite youth participation. However, the format, scope, and content of these consultations is repetitive, resulting in a lack of meaningful engagement. Furthermore, the consultations frequently lack clear outcomes and defined roles for young participants, ultimately failing to align with the needs and expectations of young people.

It must also be said, the act of co-creating an inclusive space cannot be deemed successful if individuals willing to voice their perspectives are not protected from potential consequences.

“Slightly over half (51.3 percent) of the young people surveyed represent marginalized or disadvantaged groups, expressing particular concern for protection against retaliation, especially among Indigenous Peoples”

According to a 2021 report published by the Office of the Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth, ‘If I Disappear’, states should review, amend, and repeal any controversial laws that can be misinterpreted and misused to limit young people’s universal and fundamental rights of freedom of peaceful assembly and association, opinion and expression, and participation in public affairs, to ensure that youth do not face reprisals for their work.

Further, inclusive participation is hollow if the process fails to consider linguistic diversity. Survey respondents also unanimously expressed that logistics – that is, getting to and from consultations, and having the means to cover accommodation and meals – is an under-recognized barrier. Accordingly, government institutions and development partners must allocate budget to support the attendance of youth from outside capital cities and major population centres.

Transparency is also a crucial determinant in the success of an inclusive NDC process. **When young people have prior knowledge of how their inputs will be incorporated into an NDC's text, as well as the mechanisms and key performance indicators (KPIs) for implementation, it fosters a greater sense of ownership.**

NDC implementation does not mark the end of youth engagement; it signifies the completion of one cycle and sets the stage for future climate action commitments.

“*By following this checklist, decision-makers have a golden opportunity to establish a virtuous cycle of mutual trust and expanding expertise with young people, whose energy and insights have repeatedly proven essential for climate progress worldwide.***”**

3. Checklist

① Have you, or the institution you are a member of, made a political commitment, formalized in a law, directive, or other binding instrument, to engage young people in the NDC design process and established a platform (or multiple platforms) for such engagement?

a. Have you chosen a way of formalizing youth engagement in the NDC process (such as establishing a national youth climate council; giving recognition to the Local Conference of Youth, included youth representatives in current climate governance structures; or any other institutionalized consultation processes or mechanisms)?

b. Are the individuals/institutions facilitating youth engagement trained to ensure engagement is inclusive and representative of the diversity of young people in your country?

c. Have you allocated the financial, logistical, and technical resources to assure a diverse involvement of young people?

d. Have you actively sought young people's feedback on how they would like to see inclusive youth engagement in NDC processes formalized and sustained?



② Have you conducted a mapping of youth organizations, movements and networks representative of the diversity of actors/groups in your country?

a. Have you made a deliberate effort to reach out to young people from marginalized groups, such as, though not limited to, young women and girls, Indigenous and tribal youth, young people of African descent and mixed race, national and linguistic minorities, LGBTQIA+ young people, refugees, young people with disabilities, rural youth and/or those suffering from caste-based discrimination?

b. Have you made a deliberate effort to reach out to young people who cannot be reached via digital forms of communication, for example pursuing referrals from other young people, youth organizations, movements, and networks?

c. Have you consulted with development partners and/or civil society organizations working with, on, and for, young people in your country/region, on improving the efficiency of the efforts outlined in a) and b)?



3 How have you built the capacity of young people to understand the NDC design process and contribute to it?

- a.** Have you conducted a campaign/s raising the awareness of young people on the importance and value of engaging in NDC processes?
- b.** Have you designed and conducted training with interested young people on each aspect of your country's NDC, as well as the climate science and data analysis techniques relevant to them?
- c.** Have you provided capacity-building in relevant languages?
- d.** Have you made concrete efforts to build young people's capacity in the NDC process by helping them understand the technical language?
- e.** Have you encouraged the provision of capacity-building in a decentralized way (for example, arranging training with grassroots youth organizations and Indigenous youth representatives at the local level, providing training formats for the digitally excluded, involving regional and local institutions and leaders, and facilitating the training of trainers)?
- f.** Have you explored and tested new methods of delivering training, such as gaming, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), or any others?
- g.** Have you provided capacity-building and training opportunities for youth representatives to effectively monitor and assess the progress of NDCs?



4 Have you issued an open call to the mapped youth organizations, movements, and networks to be involved in designing your country's NDC?

- a.** Have you distributed this information through the digital channels most popular with young people in your country (for example, social media and messaging apps)?
- b.** Have you communicated to young people the methods and critical timelines to provide input to the drafts and final text of the NDC?
- c.** Have you prepared the form for distribution in all languages spoken across your country?
- d.** Have you determined how you will reach digitally excluded young people (for example, community radio; communication via local leaders, schools, and colleges; local youth groups and so on)?
- e.** Have you consistently provided contact information and/or a dedicated email address or phone number for any queries related to the NDC process?
- f.** Have you issued gender equality criteria to ensure inclusiveness and gender parity at every stage of the process?



5 Have you organized the consultation process in a way that can be considered as genuinely inclusive and meaningful by its participants?

- a.** How have you selected youth representatives to serve on a consultative process development team?
- b.** Have you defined inclusivity criteria considering factors such as location; gender; socio-economic background; Indigenous, local, and rural groups; and other diversity aspects?
- c.** Have you designed strategies for digital and in-person contributions which account for time constraints, digital barriers, and/or travel barriers?
- d.** Have you co-created the agenda and list of participants of these consultations with young people?
- e.** Have you implemented any strategies or methods to ensure that youth representatives and their contributions to NDC processes are recognized and visible?
- f.** Have you asked participants about the retaliation they might face for their contributions and put in place measures to ensure a safe space for engagement?
- g.** Have you announced the dates and format of the main consultations well in advance, and provided budget and logistical support to ensure a diverse and representative turnout?



h. Is the exact procedure for integrating consultation inputs into the text of the NDC clearly communicated to participants?

i. Have you made the consultation process accessible across communication channels and different languages?

j. Have you planned multiple consultations to ensure inclusion of young people across all time zones, as well as accounted for any national and/or religious holidays, days off, or conflicting dates (such as exam days)?

k. Have the consultations at the national level been preceded by local ones?

l. Have you made sure that the outcomes of the local youth consultations are shared and taken into account during national consultations?



6 Have you involved youth in oversight of the NDC's implementation in a way that is recognized to increase transparency and accountability?

- a.** Have you established, together with the young people involved, a mechanism for youth oversight of the NDC implementation and mechanisms to highlight how their contributions have informed the NDC?
- b.** Have you co-developed with youth representatives a set of key performance indicators (KPI) to monitor and assess NDC progress?
- c.** Have you made young people, especially from grassroots organizations, aware of what channels they can use to report irregularities, areas for improvement, and success stories in the NDC's implementation?
- d.** Are you regularly informing young people about the progress of the NDC cycle, and any lessons learned, to improve engagement in the next one?
- e.** Have you created accessible feedback channels for young people to share their concerns, suggestions, and views regarding the implementation process?

4. Conclusion

In recent years, the world has witnessed numerous examples of how meaningful youth participation, on equal terms with policymakers, has been driving climate action at the local, national, and global levels.

However, there is still great potential to do more to ensure the design and implementation of countries' NDCs reflect the needs, concerns, and aspirations of young people.

This year, 2023, is the year of the first Global Stocktake, assessing how far the world has come in meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement. It also represents a course-correcting opportunity, in which countries can increase the ambition of their NDCs, including via the meaningful engagement of young people.

This checklist outlines each step that governments and partners should consider to ensure that their climate action commitments are forged through meaningful intergenerational collaboration. It covers the entire process, from the initial political decision to include young people to the post-implementation and monitoring phases.

The checklist is not only informed by UNDP's extensive experience in collaborating with youth on climate action worldwide but also by a comprehensive survey that gathered substantive and representative feedback from young climate leaders in nearly 80 countries.

Equipped with this checklist, decision-makers responsible for their country's NDC ambition can set their sights high and deliver for the planet, young people, and future generations.

Sources

1. Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth (2021). [If I Disappear: Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space](#).
2. SparkBlue (2020). [Youth Meaningful Participation as a Turning Point for Climate Action and NDC Ambition](#).
3. [The 17th UN Climate Change Conference of Youth](#) (2022).
4. UNDP (2022). [Aiming Higher: Elevating Meaningful Youth Engagement for Climate Action](#).
5. UNDP Climate Promise (2021). [Gender Checklist: Key Elements to Include Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Climate Policies and Nationally Determined Contributions \(NDCs\)](#).
6. UNDP Climate Promise (2023). [What are NDCs and how do they drive climate action?](#)

Annex 1: Survey questions

For the scope of this survey, we consider young people individuals between 15 to 35 years old

1. Your age

2. Your gender

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

3. Your country/territory

4. Do you consider yourself from a marginalized, disadvantaged group or in a situation of vulnerability? (select all that apply)

- Tribal / Indigenous Peoples
- People of African descent and mixed race
- Youth with disabilities
- LGBTQIA+
- Refugee/immigrant
- Other
- Prefer not to say

5. If you responded "Other" to the previous question, please specify.

6. Have you ever previously been invited to participate, or participated, in the process of formulating Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) of your country?

- Yes
- No



7. If you haven't participated, are you aware of anyone else from your country who has?

- Yes
- No

8. If you aren't aware of anyone else, do you think that the problem of formulating NDCs without considering young people's interests is systemic in your country?

- Yes
- No

9. If you believe this is a systemic issue, what major obstacles do you think need to be removed for policymakers to establish a youth-friendly process for NDCs going forward?

10. If you have previously participated in the NDC formulation process as a youth, would you describe your experience as a successful one for the youth climate movement and climate ambition of your country?

- Yes
- No

11. If your answer is "yes", can you describe what made this process a successful one?

12. If your answer is "no", what improvements do you think policymakers could/should make for the next time?

13. What kind of support do youth in your country want to better engage themselves in the NDC formulation process?



14. Have you known or heard of cases of successful youth engagement in the NDC formulation in other parts of the world?

- Yes
- No

15. If your answer is "yes", please provide more details about such case(s) here.

16. Are you engaged in any kind of NDC implementation work in your country?

- Yes
- No

17. If your answer is "yes", please specify and describe whether you find the process successful and why.

18. If your answer is "no", please specify the obstacles to your engagement in the NDC implementation work.

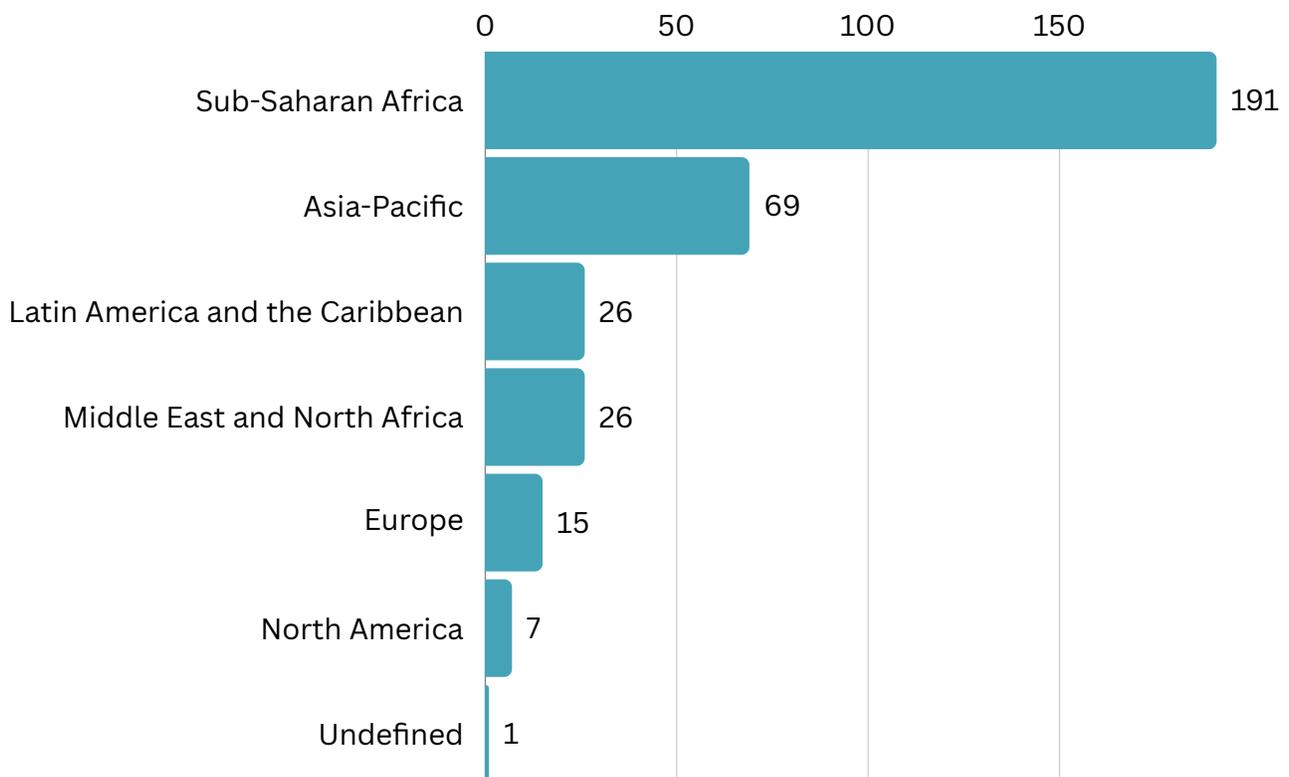
Is there anything else you would like to add?

Annex 2: Demographics of survey respondents

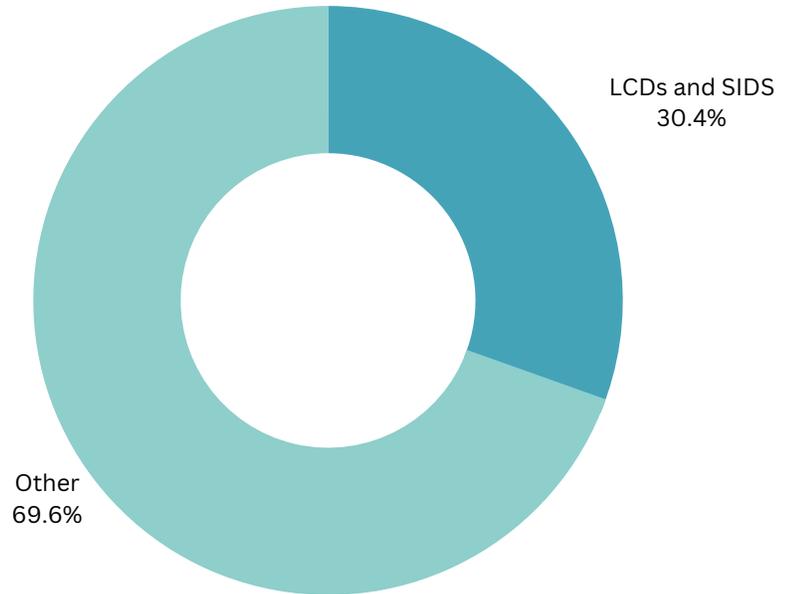
A total of **335** respondents from **78** different countries participated in the survey.

The median age of the respondents was **27** years old.

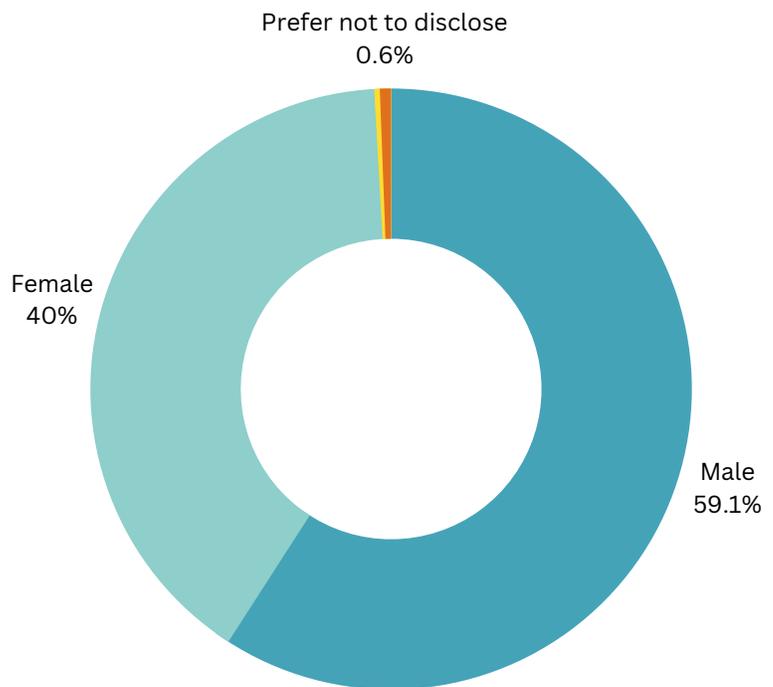
Breakdown by region



Out of **335** respondent, **102** represent **25** Least Developed Countries (LDCs) with **7** coming from **7** Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

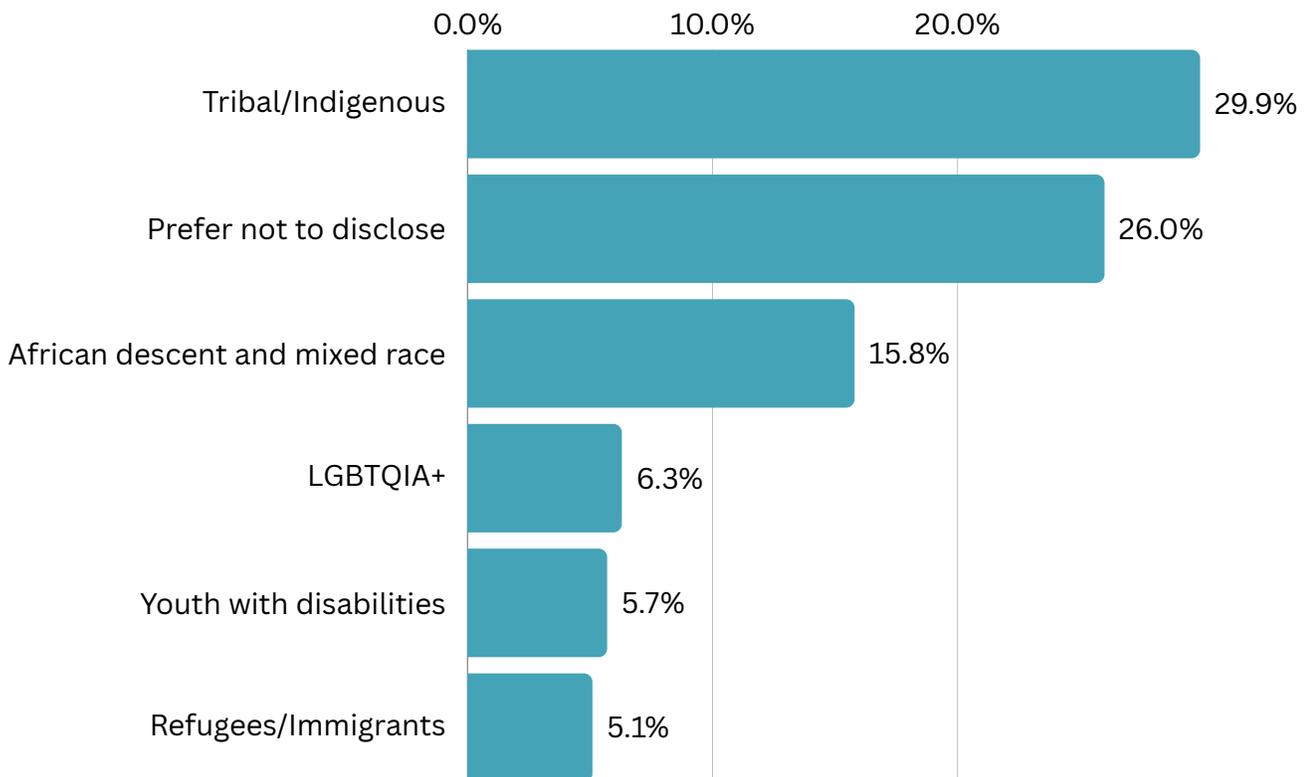


59.1 percent of respondents reported as male, **40 percent** female, **0.3 percent** non-binary, and **0.6 percent** preferred not to disclose their gender.



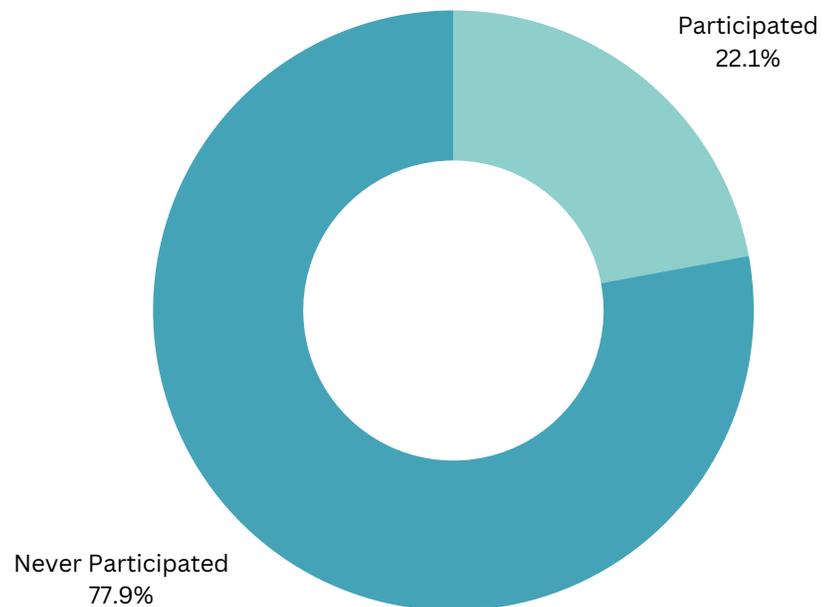
Background of respondents

51.3 percent reported coming from a clearly identifiable disadvantaged/marginalized background



Participation in NDC Process

77.9% of the surveyed youth claim to have never participated in, or been invited to participate in, the formulation of their country's NDC. Among them, only **23%** knew someone else from their country who has.



For those who did not participate

80.2 percent of non-participants (or 62.5% of all respondents) considered that the problem of formulating the NDCs without youth involvement in their countries is of a systemic character.

For those who participated

Among those who did participate in the NDC process, only **35 percent** of the respondents reported it was a successful one.

Only **29.6 percent** of the respondents heard of successful NDC youth engagement stories in other parts of the world.

More young people in the sample seem to be involved in the NDC implementation process (**33.7 percent**) than in its formulation (**22.1 percent**).



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