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Chapter IV. Youth and future generations

- [Restless Development](#) is a women-led and feminist-centred global non-profit, with over 35 years of experience supporting the collective power of young leaders to create a better world, from the grassroots to the high-policy level.
- Restless Development brings expertise on youth-led research and advocacy and inclusive co-creation, as well as an extensive network of 4000+ youth civil society organisations as part of the Youth Collective. Our work is guided by our [Youth Power Principles](#) and [Power-Shifting Checklist](#).
- We are in the era of Peak Youth. Half of the world's population is under 30 and over a quarter are under 18 years of age,¹ while the world's poorest countries are seeing their populations become dramatically younger. They are more connected and networked than ever before and already leading the response to some of the biggest challenges we face; it is clear that responding to future opportunities, challenges and crises cannot be done effectively without the engagement - and involvement of - young people.
- While we very much welcome the focus on meaningfully and inclusively engaging young people in the Summit for the Future and Pact for the Future processes, Restless Development encourages Member States to increase their ambition when it comes to youth participation in both the work of the United Nations and in regional - and national-level policy-making. We recommend the following for inclusion in the Pact for the Future and for consideration during the intergovernmental negotiations:
 - **Recognising the expertise and collective power of young people.** Right now, young people everywhere are driving progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, from very rural communities through to densely populated cities. Their work is consistently underfunded while their expertise can go largely unheard. Restless Development calls on Member States to recognise the great wealth of expertise that young people in their diversity possess in tackling the biggest global challenges the world faces and strongly reflect this within the Pact for the Future.
 - **Establishing effective institutions and legislative frameworks that represent and respond to the rights of Future Generations.** Restless Development calls on Member States to consider how the involvement of young people is consistently reflected in policy- and decision-making processes, including by engaging youth civil society at the national and regional levels. By 2025, Restless Development is keen to see a Special Envoy for Future Generations appointed in order to drive innovation at the national level, while working with the newly appointed Assistant Secretary-

¹ [The Unlock Declaration](#), 22nd September 2021

General for Youth Affairs and Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY) to further advance this progress at the regional and global levels, [including scaling national listening exercises that have been piloted in the UK.](#)

- **Putting youth at the heart of intergovernmental negotiations of the Declaration on Future Generations.** Given that the Declaration will focus on thinking and acting in the interests of Future Generations, Restless Development urges Member States to ensure that young people are central to the intergovernmental negotiations, by:
 - a. Making it a mandatory requirement that Member States have a majority of young people² in their delegations for these negotiations to truly reflect the perspectives of young people;
 - b. Prioritising the participation of young people in their diversity who have little or no prior experience of the UN system and who can speak directly from their experiences of working on SDG goals and targets at the national or regional level;
 - c. Ensuring that appropriate funding and support is available to all young people selected to participate in the negotiations.
- **Committing funding to support youth-led movements around the world.** In addition, Restless Development urges Member States to consider mechanisms for directing funding to youth-led movements at all levels to better resource their work, unlock access to their expertise and vastly increase the reach and impact of their collective work, from the local level through to the global. This could include mandating youth-focused “funds for the future” within new and existing initiatives aimed at driving progress on specific SDGs, designed by diverse³ cohorts of young leaders and aimed at directing resources to young people working on these issues. By providing financial resources to these mechanisms, Member States would also be directly supporting youth-led progress on achieving Agenda 2030 while helping to ensure that future generations are better set up to lead. Connecting those young people and youth-led organisations who secure funding into the UN system, be it through direct connections with their UN Missions or via active participation in multilateral processes, could be transformational in ensuring that innovative ideas and youth perspectives are channelled into key UN thinking.
- **Standards of meaningful youth engagement.** While increasingly, there is a welcome focus on including young people in multilateral discussions and forums, the need for this engagement with young people in all their diversity to be meaningful has never been more crucial. Restless Development recommends that any standards on meaningful youth engagement must include:
 - a. **A consideration of which young people have access to UN forums and spaces.** Those young people engaged in UN processes are often regular participants in these spaces, with access to funding to attend events and the privilege of time to engage with detailed processes. Restless Development asks Member States to reflect on the participation of young people in UN forums, considering how to reach cohorts of diverse young people who may not have access to these spaces but could nevertheless bring much-needed expertise and alternative perspectives, recognising that expertise transcends educational levels and social stratification and could also include lived-experience expertise.
 - b. Alongside this, Restless Development urges Member States to consider **what standards must be met in order to engage cohorts of young people who better reflect the diversity of the international community.** This may include providing funding to attend events,

² Restless Development would define “young person” as those under the age of 30.

³ Reflecting the “segments of society” (paragraph 4 of the Declaration) set out in Agenda 2030, including “income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts” (paragraph 74g of Follow-Up and Review).

support to understand specific forums - including specific processes and UN language and terminology - and support to navigate the practicalities of involvement in UN forums. Member States may want to consider issuing formal guidance on these standards, to ensure that young people in all their diversity have a fair opportunity to participate in key processes rather than just those with the available resources or connections. Formal standards might also dissuade organisations from putting the burden of resourcing participation in UN processes on young people themselves.

- c. **Member States might also consider how to ensure the longer-term engagement of young people in UN processes.** Restless Development's experience of working with young people to engage in multilateral spaces often surfaces the frustrations of young people that once they have been involved in a forum, they receive no further feedback on progress or are offered very few - to no - further ways to engage. Building in feedback loops and ways to follow developments and input into later discussions are key to ensuring ongoing youth engagement. In addition, Member States could report annually on how they are engaging young people in policy-making via an existing mechanism, such as the ECOSOC Youth Forum.
- d. **Initiatives designed by young people, for young people.** While youth-focused initiatives are very welcome, Restless Development calls on Member States to prioritise the involvement of young people in their design, to ensure that they are youth-inclusive and more likely to result in a high level of engagement. Initiatives such as [Youth at Heart](#) by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs which not only incorporated [youth-led research](#) in order to ensure deep insight into the process but also resulted in a set of [Youth at Heart Principles](#) for use by the international community, are existing examples of how this approach can be effectively delivered in order to strengthen policy-making.
- e. **An expectation that Member States include young people in their delegations to key UN processes and intergovernmental negotiations.** Member States should consider allocating - and funding - spaces to young people on their official delegations, to ensure youth perspectives and expertise are inherent to key discussions. Young delegates should have access to key decision-making forums as well as opportunities to connect with other young delegates to build cooperation. Initiatives such as Denmark's [Danish UN Youth Delegates](#) are a welcome example of how this can be effectively operationalised.
- f. **Engage with existing youth movements.** Youth movements are already working collaboratively around the world on issues across Agenda 2030, for example, the [Youth Collective](#), a 4000+ network of youth-led and youth-focused organisations based in over 180 countries. Member States should consider how the UN proactively reaches out to youth movements for their advice and recommendations on key multilateral processes, while also responding to the requests for support from these youth movements.