

UNDP TURKEY EXPERIENCE IN
YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

1. LA-21 - Strengthening local government / LA21 Youth Platforms.

In 1997 Turkey initiated the **Local Agenda 21 (LA-21) National Program**, as a key local democratization project, implemented and coordinated under the auspices of United Cities and Local Governments Section for the Middle East and West Asia – UCLG-MEWA (formerly IULA-EMME) and UNDP. The overall objective of the program was to strengthen local governance by ensuring that civil society participates in decision-making and influences local investments. This successful initiative has been reflecting a decentralized and enabling approach of networking and collaboration among equal partners, being local stakeholders the primary decision-making and implementation bodies organized in the form of city councils and supported - among other groups - by local youth councils and children platforms.

Within this framework, 75 local youth platforms have been established in cities throughout the country under the coordination of the **Youth Association for Habitat and Agenda 21 (YfH)**. These efforts encompassed the establishment of Youth Councils and Youth Centers in all of these cities. The **Youth Councils** bring together the youth organizations, as well as students and employed and unemployed youth in partner cities. These platforms raise awareness on youth related issues, encourage youth participation in decision-making and create an inclusive platform for people of different backgrounds to come together and share common values. Local youth councils and centers under the LA-21 Program;

- support transferability in capacity building of young people with peer education,
- create a sense of belonging to the city,
- develop solutions for the problems of youth at the local level,
- provide interaction with different social youth groups,
- enable young people from diverse backgrounds to produce together,
- provide urban facilities from which youth cannot profit.

The youth component of the LA21 program have manifested an outstanding performance in terms of mobilizing the youth and perforating to all partner cities and the full spectrum of activities in the LA21 processes. The youth platforms have established a nation wide network and started to come together in regional and national programs.

Moreover, these local youth platforms are in continuous interaction among themselves within a country wide network and with other youth groups in the region and the world. These interactions have led to the establishment of the **LA21 National Youth Parliament (LA NYP)** on 19 May 2004 with the participation of 297 delegates and observers from 75 diverse provinces. The LA21 NYP is based on democratic civil participation and constitutes a basis in determination, preparation and efficient implementation of national youth policies and programs. LA21 NYP perpetuate its activities towards institutionalization, participation to all levels of decision making processes regarding youth in order to include them to projects being developed. LA-21 National Youth Parliament provided recommendations for the **amendment of the Municipality Law** and organized meetings with state authorities; the goal has been to increase youth

participation in decision making at local level. Consequently, the Municipality Law changed on 8 October 2006 enabling local youth councils to have a stronger role at municipalities through city councils.

Successfully, LA-21 National Youth Parliament initiated a **campaign to decrease the eligibility age from 30 to 25 to become a deputy in Turkey** after organizing multiple meetings with representatives of political parties and state authorities. The campaign was highly supported by local governments, ministers and the public and for the first time in the Republic's history, young people gained their right to represent the nation at the Turkish Great National Assembly. More information is available at <http://www.youthforhab.org.tr/>.

2. Support to the Development of an IDP Programme in Turkey.

In 2003, the Government of Turkey opened officially a dialogue with the international community on the IDP issue. Since then, UNDP initiated the "Support to the Development of an IDP Programme in Turkey". Progress has been made on a number of points including the institution of a survey on internal displacement. As a consequence to the survey, UNDP Turkey implemented one pilot IDP Program in the Van province aimed at the capacity development and policy advice for NGOs and Damage Assessment Commissions. The strategy of intervention for this projects is to promote the engagement of as many local stakeholders as possible and therefore involvement of as many youth as possible through their empowerment and confidence building.

Youth's participation to decision making process, even their acceptance as individuals still needs strong advocacy and support on one side. However, strong steps have been achieved in this matter. Participation of the local NGOs where the youth is visible, as well as the participation of the internally displaced youth has strongly contributed to the formulation of youth-sensitive policy recommendations.

3. South Eastern Anatolia Social Development Project for Youth.

The UNDP's programming for youth in Turkey literally began in the urban centers of the Southeast Anatolia region with the Program entitled **South Eastern Anatolia Social Development Project for Youth** for the establishment of youth houses in 9 provincial centers.

The aim of this program was to provide opportunities for the young people in these regions to associate among themselves in a forum created by the UN with the guaranty of neutrality over the potentially divisive political allegiances in the region. These centers provided opportunities for young people to organize their collective **participation in local decision making processes** as well as to engage in all efforts to empower themselves, including skills training. The project did this through capacity development activities, social and cultural activities, exchange programs and so forth. The project began in 2001 and the exit strategy was implemented in 2006 where these youth centers are now being managed by the Government with funding from private sector. As of end of the project, the number of participants to the project reached 67,000. The project also contributed to employability of the young people, with more than 160 young people employed with the help of the project.

All this activities were coordinated by our main partner for youth programming the **Youth Association for Habitat and Agenda 21** (established during the

1995 Copenhagen Social Development Summit with the participation of 300 youth organizations with diverse religious, racial, cultural and national backgrounds). Its main mission is to increase youth awareness for sustainable development and livable environment, youth participation in decision making; to develop partnerships among youth; to enable youth to establish partnerships with the governments, local authorities and the private sector; to follow up and increase the participation of youth in the international youth related events of the United Nations and the European Union; to improve networking among youth groups and to develop training programs.

It is important to underline that, although, in its first 3 years this program was aimed to affiliate approximately 400 young people to youth houses and to reach out 9,000 young people via different activities, in **5 years more than 50,000 young people were empowered** through the South East Anatolia Region Social Development Program for Youth. Besides, in this period, more than 100 young people had a chance to share their experiences that performed in Turkey with the peers attending international meetings in Europe, Mediterranean and Middle East.

4. Empowerment of Youth for e-transformation of Turkey

The project that is developed and implemented in partnership with Youth Association for Habitat, UNDP and Microsoft Turkey aims to strengthen the ICT use capacities of young people. In this sense, the Project aims to empower young people to become employable in the IT sector with **special emphasis on girls' education**, and more significantly for them to be participative in the e-transformation process of Turkey, mainly focusing on the establishment of computer laboratories of the Local youth Councils.

Taking into consideration the chance of having Microsoft as a partner, this project was **exemplified by UNDP and Microsoft as a good practice to strengthen digital inclusion in Turkey** at the International Public Private Partnership summit between 14 and 15 September 2006 and at the Information Society Symposium between 1 and 2 November 2006.

As a replication and consequence of this initiative, our partners, Microsoft Turkey - with UNDP collaboration for visibility on international and national platforms through Local Agenda 21 youth platforms - are now developing a new program titled **"Bridging Digital Divide"** to increase the number of ICT literates with a new partner, Vodafone. This new Project will provide e-learning as a tool to increase capacities of young people on ICTs through the translation into Turkish of the training tool of Microsoft and will be localized within the framework of the **Empowerment of Youth for e-transformation** Project. More information is available at <http://bilenlerbilmeyenlerebilgisayarogretiyor.net/>.

5. Mediterranean Youth Movement Turkey

This project aims to support the social capacities of the youth and help them to participate in the new information-based global economy to realize their full potential through a peer education model on advanced IT and networking skills. The project is being supported by CISCO Systems, the Istanbul Technical University, the Turkish Informatics Foundation as well as the Youth for Habitat Association, has as target population the Mediterranean Youth Movement Project as the socially disadvantaged young people of age 16-26. More information is available at <http://www.bilisimdegenchareket.com/>

6. Youth Increases the Quality of Life in their Cities

Being the main partners Coca-Cola company as the donor and Youth for Habitat Association this project **launched a grants scheme** to support financially and technically, the youth organizations and platforms in Turkey **for their “social responsibility projects”** on **improving the conditions of the cities** to make their environment healthier, more convivial and more socially livable for increased social interaction and the betterment of community relations as a way to enhance collective well-being and social capital.

So far, 22 different Youth projects from all around the country have been supported. Some of the projects are;

a) “Give Life to Orchids”

The aim is to contribute environment-conscious at local level in the city of Kahramanmaraş where one of the significant flora area exists in Turkey.

b) “A Hope to the Faded Faces of Buds”

Aims at making physiological consultation center more visible and enhancing the functional usage of the center by increasing its recognition and the public awareness.

c) “We are holding a Mirror to our Education Life”

Aim is to provide employment opportunities for 20 young people from economically disadvantaged areas of Beyoğlu by providing vocational training.

More information is available at <http://www.hayataarti.org/>.

7. A National Human Development Report on Youth in Turkey

The theme of UNDP’s National Human Development Report in 2007 is “Youth in Turkey”. The rationale for this choice of topic is very straightforward. Roughly half of Turkey’s population is under 24 years old. Making sure that this next generation of economic and social actors are prepared for their futures—as workers, managers, parents, citizens, and community leaders—is critically important for Turkey’s efforts to achieve higher sustained growth and reduce poverty. Since human development is a cumulative process, any missed opportunities to invest in and prepare this generation will be extremely costly to reverse, not only for the young people but also for the society as a whole.

The overall objective of the report is to identify the key constraints that prevent Turkish youth from playing an active role and assuming their responsibilities in the society. Within this aim, the report will try to illustrate the opportunities that are available to young people and capabilities of young people to identify their alternative options and realize their choices. Young people's expectations will also be discussed in order to make a realistic projection to the future.

The analysis and the evaluations projected will be based on the values of the Turkish society (religion, customs, culture, family, etc.) as a whole. The report will depend on voices of the youth themselves, youth organizations at local and national level and the policymakers that deal with youth issues. Both global and local perspectives and legal issues will be taken into consideration. There are main cross-cutting issues such as inequalities, migration and mobility, gender and interaction of youth with the society and vice versa. Existing legislation concerning each subject will also be covered in the report.

Using the above mentioned analyses and cross cutting issues, the report will include the awareness building on various factors—well-being, education, labor market, health, media, participation, etc. that determine the success or failure of youth in achieving their goals.

The method of approach will be closely linked with the human development and human rights concepts. The core idea of human development stems from enriching human life by broadening choices and strengthening capabilities. This idea is inevitably linked with what human rights stands for: the right of equal opportunities and decent life for all.