



PRESS

The European Commission announces sixteen Young Leaders who will take centre stage during the European Development Days

Sixteen young people aged 21 to 26 from across the globe have been invited by the European Commission to take part in the Young Leaders Programme at this year's European Development Days (EDD 2018). By providing a platform to these young and bright talents, the Young Leaders Programme aims to enrich the debate about gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, the main topic of this year's edition of the EDD.



The 16 young leaders have been chosen for their exceptional skills, expertise and passion to contribute to the debate on sustainable development for all, and in particular for their commitment to gender equality. They will share their unique experiences with EDD 2018 participants in Brussels on 5-6 June.

Chosen among 283 applicants from 82 countries, the sixteen young leaders are all actively engaged in development and social projects in their countries with the aim to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015 by the international community.

During their stay in the Belgian capital, the Young Leaders will have the opportunity to visit European institutions and participate in workshops, discussions and debates with European Commission policy makers, international leaders, development professionals and representatives of the private sector.

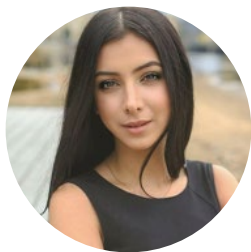
European Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven Mimica, said: *"More than half of the world's population today is under the age of 30. It is not enough to work on building a better future for the younger generation. We need to build it with them, give them the stage they need to put their brilliant ideas into practice. I look forward to meeting these inspiring young people during this year's EDD"*.

This year's Young Leaders represent a wide range of countries, which include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brazil, El Salvador, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, the Republic of Congo, Sudan, Sweden, Syria, and Uganda.

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Taffan Ako
Sweden, 23 years old

WOMEN/GIRLS, PEACE AND SECURITY

She is a former Iraqi refugee from Kurdistan who fled to Sweden in 1997. While pursuing her Bachelor in Political Science at Karlstad University, she is the Official coordinator of One Young World Ambassadors for Scandinavia and Eastern Europe. She founded the organization EmpowHERment and the foundation named TISFF in 2015. Her organization aims to assist and provide women and young girls who have been former ISIS sex slaves or put through human trafficking, with education, group therapy and individual activities that have been therapeutic for them. Her foundation finances integration projects for children and women in Europe and in Iraqi Kurdistan. She has carried out much work the past 5 years in Syria, Iraq, Cambodia and Europe. Although Taffan carries huge passion for youth empowerment and human rights, her main focus has always been women and girls education/rights.



Shwetal Shah
India, 26 years old

WOMEN/GIRLS IN DIGITALISATION

Shwetal was chosen as a UN Empower Women champion for change: she decided to focus on the issue of gender imbalance and role model representation in the field of tech, making a documentary that featured women across different levels of their careers working in private and public sector. She has founded "Explore Science", working on encouraging women in Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and has won the O2 Think Big Best STEM award. She currently works for an edtech company where she contributes to making a video game to teach coding to kids between 8-13, with a special focus on girls.



Esther Nakajjigo
Uganda, 23 years old

WOMEN/GIRLS AND MIGRATION

At 17, Esther was named Uganda's Ambassador for Women and Girls. She donated her university tuition and started a community health facility with a Teenage Centre supporting child mothers. She owns a popular reality television show on teenage pregnancy called "Saving Innocence Challenge" applauded by EU in Uganda as one of the best self-sustaining girl-lead models in the world, championed as well as financed by local girls for local girls. Amidst the world's refugee crisis, she is championing "Lift up her Voice" Expedition where girls from selected universities around the world innovate for a decent life for refugee women and girls in a Global Girls Movement. She has won 5 National Awards and a Geneva Women's World Summit Prize. Esther's passion is to give migration a human face.



Hope Jeremiah Offor
Nigeria, 23 years old

WOMEN/GIRLS AND HEALTH

Jeremiah, who is a recent graduate of Medical Laboratory Science with specialty in Histopathology/Cytopathology from the prestigious University of Benin, Nigeria, is the Programme Officer for Comprehensive Sexuality Education at the Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria, Edo State office, providing over 2000 secondary school students, mostly girls, with age-appropriate and culturally sensitive comprehensive Sexuality Education. He is a fellow for the President Barrack Obama initiated/US government-funded annual Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) West Africa Regional Leadership Centre Cohort 8 2017, enriching his work as a sexual and reproductive health and rights activist for women and girls. Due to his commitment of ensuring access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services for marginalized women and girls, Jeremiah was recently selected to be a member of the Women Deliver young leaders class of 2018.



Dorcas Apoore

Ghana, 23 years old

WOMEN/GIRLS AND THE ECONOMY

Dorcas is a team leader, mentor and trainer in her community focusing on economic empowerment, social inclusion of disabled rural women and poverty reduction. She also works on Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) education of rural girls and women and fighting against school dropouts. Dorcas is currently studying Development Planning at University for Development Studies Wa of Ghana. In 2014, she founded "ASIGE Ghana" (Advocacy for Social Inclusion and Girls Education), a woman-based organization that empowers women through basket weaving, currently employing 219 women.



Diwa Samad

Afghanistan, 23 years old

WOMEN/GIRLS IN POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

Diwa holds a Master of Economics from the University of Malaya and is a Malaysian International Scholar. She is currently serving as the Director of Aid within the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, at the Administrative Office of the President. She has previously served as Deputy Director of Policy and Plan. Diwa has also worked for the World Logistic Council Development (WLCD) as a Senior Researcher and Deployment coordinator for the Global Digital Economy Platform. Through her work she conducted a wide range of research activities and has published several articles.



Ernesto Hernandez Otero

El Salvador, 26 years old

GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

Ernesto has a Bachelor Degree in Math and Sciences from the Université Pierre et Marie Curie in Paris and is a middle school teacher on technology science. He has mentored a group of girls for Technovation contest, which implied programming, creation and elevator pitch creation of an app made by young girls, with the objective of overcoming their fears to code. He is part of the Global Shapers Community, pushing for gender equality in education through local projects. He is also an entrepreneur and has launched his own business, with the social purpose to improve school cafeterias by providing healthy food.



Olaoluwa Abagun

Nigeria, 26 years old

WOMEN/GIRLS'S HUMAN RIGHTS

Olaoluwa is a qualified legal practitioner with 4 years of experience in grassroots organising for girls' rights and programme implementation for girls' education. She founded a local NGO - Girl Pride Circle Initiative - that has the objective of galvanizing communities to safeguard girls' rights and invest in girls. Through this organization, she mobilized 270 adolescent girls into drafting an Action Plan for the prevention of sexual violence against girls and young women within the community: the Action Plan was adopted by the Local Government shortly after. She has also advocated for girls/women's rights across strategic global platforms, including the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly. Olaoluwa works to enable girls become active change makers, in a virtuous cycle of empowerment.

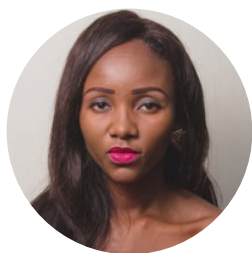


Grace Banda

Malawi, 24 years old

RURAL WOMEN/GIRLS AND DEVELOPMENT

Grace is a Bunda College graduate and holds a Bachelor Degree in Agriculture, specializing in Horticulture. After attending the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) 2018, she realised her role and responsibilities, deciding to combine her passion on empowering women with her expertise on agriculture, that led her to develop a project that creates natural contraceptives methods, made from Moringa leaves. The project is run by women trained by her, who are also trained on how to conduct campaigns on the effectiveness of the contraceptives.



Phonsina Archane

Republic of Congo, 24 years old

ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND GIRL CHILD

Passionate about women, girls and youth's rights with emphasis on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Phonsina is currently enrolled for a Master's degree at Mount Kenya University, she is a Mandela Washington Fellow Alumni dedicated to activism and advocacy on SRHR issues around Sub-Saharan Africa. A former UNDP intern, she received a training from UNAIDS on HIV/Aids and currently works at Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health – TICAH for a network of SRHR activists regrouping over 7 sub-Saharan African countries, the "MAMA Network". The network aims to improve adolescents and women's empowerment by expanding access to SRHR services for sustainable development through training, activism, and advocacy.



Natalie Tingo

Kenya, 25 years old

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Natalie is an ardent and fearless End Female Genital Mutilation/cutting activist. She has more than six years' experience in the non-profit sector and she is the Founder & Director of Msichana Empowerment Kuria, a young women-led grassroots based organization that is committed to and actively works to end Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) through numerous local social and educational initiatives in Southern Kenya. She is a human rights activist, a role she fulfils because she believes a world free of violence is possible for all of us. She is herself a survivor of violence. She facilitates structured community dialogues on ending violence and FGM, building sustainable models and initiatives to demystify myths and misconceptions on FGM as a social norm.



Lais Rocha Leao

Brazil, 24 years old

WOMEN/GIRLS IN THE URBAN SPACE (SUSTAINABLE CITIES)

Lais is a graduate in Architecture and Urban Planning. She currently leads teams of volunteers for data research in favelas to urge governments to take actions, mapping for the communities' analysis; she has been frequently in contact with institutions and local city councils to produce city planning and housing deficit data. She previously conducted researches on gender equality in appropriation of urban spaces, related public policies and social conflict. She is also an active member of local movements for political renovation and for the empowerment of women's voice in the political context.



Salma Abdallah

Sudan, 26 years old

WOMEN/GIRLS AND THE ECONOMY (FOCUS ON TRADE)

Salma Abdalla is a 26 years old Sudanese and has lived in Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Sudan and now Egypt. As an intern at Regional Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (RCREEE), she works on a project called "Women and energy". It aims at expanding economic opportunities and alleviating poverty by encouraging women entrepreneurship in the sector of clean and renewable energy, given its diverse possibilities and promising future. Through her work, she focuses on the role of women in the energy sector, particularly towards the attainment of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Agenda 2030, the Paris Agreement and the AU Agenda 2063.



Shah Rafayat Chowdhury

Bangladesh, 22 Years Old

WOMEN/GIRLS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Shah is a passionate environmentalist and social entrepreneur. He is the Co-founder and President of Footsteps Foundation, a social enterprise based in Dhaka, Bangladesh, which designs and implements social ventures and projects addressing various community development issues, especially regarding the environment, education, poverty alleviation, involving women in crucial decision-making processes. He designed Project Trishna in 2015 to address the issue of access to clean drinking water by creating a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) model through which corporate representatives, as well as individuals, provide funding and actively maintain purification systems, working closely with women business leaders. He is currently majoring in Environmental Economics and Policy at the Pennsylvania State University.



Bushra Dabbagh

Syria, 26 years old

WOMEN/GIRLS IN EMERGENCIES

Bushra pursued a Master of Science in molecular biology, ecology, and immunology from the University of Vienna, as well as a Master of Science in Biotechnology and Enterprise from Northeastern University in Boston. She is the founder of *Eelitna*, a foundation that provides psychological and financial support for Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Aleppo, through which she developed educational catch-up classes for children and youth. She is also a Project Manager for *Core Relief Assistance to Vulnerable Population of Aleppo* at the Al-Ihsan Charity and Development organization. She is currently founding “*She Learns*”, an online platform that aims at creating a network of experts that believe in the values of gender equality in education, in order to provide females with online courses, while also networking them with scholarship providers.



Farhad Wajdi

Afghanistan, 25 years old

SPECIAL EVENT (YOUTH)

Farhad holds a Bachelor in Business Administration at the Virtual University. He is the founder of “Ebtakar Inspiring Entrepreneurs of Afghanistan”, an NGO that aims at encouraging unemployed youth and underprivileged women to empower their ideas, which can be implemented into successful social enterprises. He works as a part-time procurement consultant in a USAID funded program for the Afghan Deputy Ministry of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET). Before that, he used to work as Finance Officer for a UNESCO funded project, as Project Officer for Global Partnership of Afghanistan (GPFA) and as Admin Assistant in a World Bank funded project. Recently, Farhad has been designated as a semi-finalist for a prestigious Atlas Corps Fellowship in the United States.

Background - Women and Girls at the Forefront of Sustainable Development

The European Development Days (EDD) highlight Europe’s commitment to building a sustainable and fairer world. The forum builds on the core belief that cooperation is key to achieve real change towards a poverty-free and sustainable world where everyone has the prospect for a decent life. An essential aim is thus to inspire the desire to work together in a spirit of true partnership through facilitating networking.

This year the EDD will take place in Brussels on 5 and 6 June 2018 and focus on the empowerment and engagement of women and girls in global sustainable development. The EDD 2018 will examine and discuss the goals of the 2030 Agenda and the EU’s commitment to gender equality.

The EDD 2018 forum – Women and Girls at the Forefront of Sustainable Development: protect, empower, invest – will be structured around the three main themes: Physical and psychological integrity of women and girls, Socio-economic rights/empowerment of women and girls, Voice and participation for women and girls, and the 5 “Ps” of the 2030 Agenda: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, Partnership.

Everyone is given a voice in this open, collaborative and inclusive platform. Each year, the global development community is invited to contribute directly to the official EDD programme by proposing activities and sessions.

Each year, the forum attracts more than 6 000 participants from over 140 countries, representing 1 200 organisations from the development community. The forum fosters a true spirit of partnership with all development actors. Since its launch in 2006, the forum has been an incubator of new ideas to bring about real change towards a poverty-free, sustainable and fairer world, where everyone has the opportunity for a decent life.



For more information about the Young Leaders Programme, please visit:

<https://eudevdays.eu/youngleaders2018>

For more information about the EDD, please visit:

<https://eudevdays.eu/>

The media section is available [here](#)

You can find the programme, regularly updated, [here](#)

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