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TECHNOLOGY AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

EDUCATION | INDEPENDENT MEDIA | CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT

Technology presents economic and educational opportunities for young people and their future.

Access and training to technology helps youth development by building practical skill sets, improving the quality of education, and expanding peer-to-peer and cross-cultural networks.

Young people can use technology training to become mentors and leaders within their communities, further demonstrating the important role that youth play within society.



Since 1968, youth development and leadership training has been a core component of IREX's educational and professional development programs. The **Internet Access and Training Program (IATP)** and **Global Connections and Exchange** provide technology opportunities for youth development across Eurasia.

IREX helps young people:

- conduct research and analyze information on the Internet
- develop practical computer skills, including Web design, graphics, and presentation
- participate in global discussions through web publishing, online forums, and blogging
- become mentors and leaders to further contribute to their communities

More than **227,000** users aged 30 and under have used IATP technology centers, and more than **130,000** have received computer training. Nearly **45%** of the nongovernmental representatives that use IATP centers are under 30 years of age.

Developing Future Community Leaders and Mentors through Computer Training

IATP empowers young people to take action on local issues and offers technology resources and training to develop the skills necessary to become future leaders and mentors.

- Tech Age Girls serves as a model to encourage women's leadership in the field of technology through training, mentoring, practical experience, and community service.
- Computer skills and knowledge provide economic opportunities in areas where there are limited job possibilities.
- IREX establishes online linkages between Eurasian and American schools to promote cross-cultural discussion of issues such as democracy, diversity and tolerance, civic participation, and culture. Students also initiate community service projects.
- Online forums on Earth Day and Global Youth Service Day lead to neighborhood clean-up efforts and tree planting campaigns throughout Eurasia.
- IATP contributes technical training to Youth Leadership Camps across Eurasia, allowing participants to find grants, information about issues, and communicate with young leaders worldwide.
- Young volunteers teach computer skills to hearing-impaired children in Turkmenistan and orphanage residents in Moldova.
- The Minister of Youth, Sport, and Tourism in Azerbaijan, discusses issues such as youth employment and ecotourism online with young IATP users around the country.

“We are discussing interesting current issues with our peers in real time online, and sharing ideas and opinions, which is really beneficial and exciting for us. This is an amazing experience we have never had before.”

- student from Tajikistan

Tech Age Girls

Tech Age Girls serves as a model to encourage women's leadership in the field of technology. Working in partnership with local women's organizations and universities, a core of young technology pioneers, girls aged 12 to 16, are matched with a female mentor who provides guidance during an intensive training program in Web design and leadership skills that culminates in the creation of their own websites. Participants complete internships and when they return home, the girls mentor their peers to implement new projects in their schools and communities. The program is expanding to Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and Turkmenistan. The young women not only gain new skills and confidence, but also set an example for their peers, showing that women can be successful leaders and advocates of information technology.



Increasing Social Activism

Online discussions and seminars bring to light and create a safe forum to discuss culturally sensitive topics such as domestic violence, civil rights, and the social integration of people with disabilities. The forums also serve as conflict mitigation tools to foster dialogue on difficult issues, such as political conflicts and the status of internally displaced persons.

- Internally displaced children in Georgia communicate with children in Abkhazia to discuss the dispute that prevents the children returning to their homeland.
- The Organization of Young Activists in Ukraine creates a website for the hearing-impaired in Eurasia and publishes information and hosts forums on a topic rarely discussed.
- Young people create peer-to-peer networks, through global online resources such as TakingITGlobal (<http://www.takingitglobal.org>) and YouthActionNet (<http://www.youthactionnet.org>).

Engaging Youth in the Political Process

The Internet serves as a key tool for civic education, monitoring elections, and becoming politically active. Web sites also act as watchdogs to fight corruption in education, business, and government.

- Across Eurasia, young people log onto online discussions about elections and the resulting outcomes.
- IATP hosts seminars for first-time voters in which the participants learn about their civic rights and duties, voting procedures, and election rules.
- Online events discuss proposed constitutional reforms during the public commenting phase of the legislative process.