Building an Equitable Digital Future: Youth Perspectives from Northeast Asia

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This fact sheet presents 13 policy recommendations developed by youth from Northeast Asia as part of the Futuring Peace in Northeast Asia initiative, supported by the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UN DPPA). Bringing together young people from diverse national, disciplinary, and lived backgrounds, the initiative explored how global digital governance efforts, including the Global Digital Compact (GDC), could be translated into regionally grounded and contextually responsive approaches. The recommendations span across five thematic pillars: digital inclusion, secure digital economies, rights-based digital spaces, data governance, and AI regulation. They are intended not only to inform policy, but also to create space for youth engagement with global and regional norms and bring youth experiences into policy conversations.

1. Close Digital Divides

Recommendation 1: Expand Digital Infrastructure in Rural and Inland Areas with Accompanying Educational Programs
- Prioritize investment in internet connectivity, electricity, and device access in rural, remote, nomadic, and minority-language communities across Northeast Asia.
- Pair infrastructure development with localized digital education programs delivered in relevant languages and linked to essential services such as healthcare, agriculture, and education. These efforts should be co-designed with local communities to ensure long-term engagement and impact.

Recommendation 2: Establish Youth-Led AI Literacy and Innovation Hubs
- Create community-based hubs in schools, libraries, or other public venues for youth-led digital and AI literacy initiatives, particularly in areas with limited connectivity or access to formal education.
- Utilize offline-compatible, multilingual learning tools to ensure inclusive participation and foster peer-to-peer learning, intergenerational exchange, and youth leadership.

Recommendation 3: Promote Long-term, Multi-Stakeholder Investment Models
- Shift from short-term pilot programs to sustained digital inclusion strategies through long-term partnerships involving governments, private sector actors, and civil society.
- Adopt innovative financing mechanisms, such as blended finance, revenue-sharing public-private partnerships, and open licensing for public interest use, to build resilient, locally rooted digital ecosystems.

2. Deliver an Inclusive, Open, and Secure Digital Economy

Recommendation 4: Provide Targeted Support for Marginalized Digital Entrepreneurs
- Develop inclusive digital entrepreneurship programs that offer funding, mentorship, and network access for underrepresented groups, including women, youth, LGBTQ+ individuals, migrants and rural innovators.
- Scale support for regional initiatives such as *Women in AI Asia-Pacific*, *D3 Jubilee*, and UNDP's *Youth Co:Lab*, which equip youth and communities with tools to drive digital innovation.

Recommendation 5: Increase Accessibility of AI Tools for Micro and Informal Enterprises
- Support the development of affordable, user-friendly AI applications such as voice assistants and mobile platforms that are compatible with basic devices and available in local languages.
- Draw on models such as Mongolia's *eKiosk*, China's *Smart Handicraft Village*, Japan's *RIKEN AIP Lab* and the ROK's *AI Voucher Program* to empower small-scale entrepreneurs, especially in rural and minority-language contexts, through inclusive, locally adapted AI solutions.

3. Foster a Safe and Human Rights-Based Digital Space

Recommendation 6: Implement Safeguards Against Digital Harms such as Deepfakes and Online Harassment
- Establish legal, technical, and support systems to address the risks of deepfakes, targeted harassment, and disinformation, particularly those aimed at women, and invest in reporting and takedown systems, content verification mechanisms, and support frameworks for reputational repair.
- Support civil society organizations that provide digital legal aid, psychological case and community-based victim advocacy.

Recommendation 7: Fund Intersectional Digital Safety Initiatives
- Develop inclusive digital safety frameworks in collaboration with youth, persons with disabilities, migrants, and ethnic minorities.
- Ensure that tools are accessible, multilingual, and designed with cultural and contextual sensitivity.

Recommendation 8: Establish Ethical Standards for AI in Peacebuilding
- Implement ethical oversight and human rights-based evaluation for AI tools deployed in conflict prevention, hate speech monitoring, or early warning systems.
- Ensure multi-stakeholder governance, including civil society groups and women's organizations in the design and review of how these tools are built and used.

4. Advance International Data Governance

Recommendation 9: Facilitate Youth-led Forums on Regional Data Stewardship
- Institutionalize regional youth dialogues on data governance to foster trust and cross-border cooperation, drawing from models such as the *APRU Student Simulation* and the *Youth Internet Governance Forum*, and empower young people to co-create policy through funded research and government engagement.

Recommendation 10: Pilot Cross-Border Data Sharing in Low-Sensitivity Sectors
- Launch regional data-sharing initiatives in areas such as education, health, and sustainability to build trust and test interoperability.
- Establish youth-focused data sandboxes and ethics committees that allow experimentation with real datasets while ensuring privacy and oversight.

Recommendation 11: Develop Culturally Informed Regional Privacy Standards
- Formulate privacy frameworks that reflect Northeast Asian values such as communal wellbeing and institutional trust, while upholding universal data rights.
- Follow examples such as the ROK's *MyData* initiative and support civil society in co-developing culturally grounded digital rights norms.

5. Enhance Global Governance of Artificial Intelligence

Recommendation 12: Mandate Inclusive Oversight and Harm Assessments for AI in Conflict and Security Contexts
- Require independent harm assessments of AI systems used in areas such as predictive policing, migration systems, and public messaging, with particular attention to potential discriminatory effects or unintended harm to marginalized populations.

Recommendation 13: Launch a Regional AI Education Initiative Led By Youth For Youth
- Develop and implement peer-led AI literacy programs that equip young people with foundational knowledge of how AI functions, its capabilities and limitations, and its ethical implications, encouraging youth to serve as educators within their communities.
- Integrate efforts with public opinion surveys to ensure that emerging AI policies are informed by community priorities and reflect diverse regional perspectives.