

# Generation Connect Podcast

## Episode 4: Empowering youth in times of digital change

With Natálie Terčová, Roman Gojayev and Vigneswara Ihita Gangavarapu.

Hosted by Darica Egorova

## Transcript

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**Intro:** Hi Everyone! Welcome to the Generation Connect podcast co-designed with youth for youth. The ITU Generation Connect initiative aims to engage global youth alongside the leaders of today's digital change by empowering youth voices in the digital development dialogue. Tune in every month to listen to inspiring stories of youth all across the world on the power of technology for sustainable development. Get involved by joining our global community of future leaders shaping the future of tomorrow.

**Darica Egorova:** Hi everyone and welcome to the fourth episode of the generation connect podcast, co-designed with youth and for youth.

I'm Darica and I'm part of the Generation Connect team from ITU, and I will be your host for today. In this episode we're going to look at different ways to navigate times of digital changes and uncertainty, especially for youth.

Indeed, as we enter a new era of digital innovations several concerns arise surrounding youth's future, as well as new opportunities in this digital world of tomorrow. So how to find the right balance? To talk about this today I am joined by three incredible guests. Our Generation Connect Visionaries board members, Roman and Ihita, as well as Natalie our European Union envoy from Czech Republic.

So, welcome everyone, and thank you for joining me today to discuss this important topic. Your personal experience and advice can be of great help and support to all the young people tuning in today to listen to our stories. So, to start off, it would be nice if you could introduce yourselves in a few words for all our listeners. Who are you and what do you do? Natalie you'd like to go first?

**Natálie Terčová:** Yes! Hello again everyone. It's a pleasure to be here. My name is Natálie Terčová and I'm a Youth Envoy for Generation Connect Europe at the ITU. Apart from that I work as a specialist at the interdisciplinary research team on Internet and Society at the Masaryk University. My research interest focuses on digital skills, online privacy and online risks among children and adolescents.

**Darica Egorova:** Thank you very much Natalie. Roman you want to follow up?

**Roman Gojayev:** Yes sure. So, I'm a youth worker, facilitator, and artist. I am the co-founder of the gender hub Azerbaijan Social Platform, and I am a member of the Expert group on Youth rights at the European Youth Forum. And obviously I am a member of the Generation Connect Visionaries Board at ITU.

**Darica Egorova:** And then Ihita?

**Ihita Gangavarapu:** I am Ihita Gangavarapu. I am a member of the Generation Connect Visionaries Board and I'm pursuing a master's program in computer science research, in the areas of cybersecurity, Internet of Things and Smart Cities. Including my work as the founding member of UN

Internet Governance Forum recognize youth IGF India, where we focus on youth empowerment and engagement so it's a huge pleasure to be here today, thank you.

**Darica Egorova:** Thank you so much everyone and it's a pleasure to have you here. So, in our previous episodes we have discussed different topics related to youth's future. Indeed, in a world that's getting more and more fast-paced, it's easy to feel lost and late. However, this new digital world is also full of potential and many opportunities that are waiting to be seized, which could make a great positive change in today's society. So, I would be very curious to hear about your personal stories of these times.

So, to begin, could you please maybe guide us through your academic journey? Where are you now? What did you study? So maybe we could start with you Ihita? Would you like to share this with us?

**Ihita Gangavarapu:** Definitely. Honestly, I have not always known, you know, what I should be doing. In fact, I can still say that I still keep exploring areas that might interest me. So, in my high school, I was unsure what to take up that will eventually direct the path for my career. And I was interested in exploring sociology, economics but there was a societal inclination you know to take up sciences.

Irrespective of this, you know I felt the pressure of landing a stable job and I think that adds to you as a high school student. So, I decided to take up engineering in my bachelors, which over time I've actually started enjoying.

**Darica Egorova:** Thankfully.

**Ihita Gangavarapu:** Yeah, definitely. But a very interesting thing in my academy journey is that, right after my bachelors, I took a conscious decision to take this unconventional path of not taking up a job right after, but instead take almost two and a half years to explore various domains, try things out, learn, build on the living skillsets. Eventually now I'm, you know, pursuing my masters in an area that interests me. So I think taking a step back is important.

**Darica Egorova:** Yes, it is indeed very important. Thank you very much.

**Roman Gojayev:** I would also like to build on what Ihita said. I haven't been really as lucky as she did, but I have survived. For me I haven't had a chance to have education where I can actually explore my skills, knowledge and perspectives. But gender stereotypes, cultural differences and also the financial stability made me study engineering.

So, I have found myself study something that I'm not really interested in. And then I have found myself that I'm really in depression and mental health in my first course. So, I have decided to explore myself in different ways. I have started doing my voluntary internship in different NGOs, Youth organisations, companies, etc. I think that wasn't really hard to get to this point, but, you know, I felt a bit vulnerable in this process because of the gender gap and also the digital gap so.

**Darica Egorova:** Thank you so much Roman for sharing your story. I think a lot of people can relate to that. What about you Natalie, would you like to add something?

**Natálie Terčová:** Sure, so I started my undergraduate studies in 2016 and I studied media and communication studies. And then I went on to complete my master's degree and I chose two fields. It was media studies and social work counseling. So, I would say that the field of media psychology is a matter of heart for me in which I see great societal challenges.

And as it was already mentioned by Roman, my motivation there was that I felt it was important to focus on building this skillset for younger generations and bridging the digital divide. So yes, in my case, it was kind of a straightforward timeline, but it was always about my passion and what I felt was right.

**Darica Egorova:** Thank you very much Natalie. It's very interesting. I also study media and communications, so I relate to what you just said.

So, many young people encounter inner doubts and concerns about their future, at some point

during their academic journey, just like you just shared with us. Which has been even more intensified because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Have you experienced that as well? And what lesson did you learn through these uncertain times?

**Roman Gojayev:** Hmm I mean there was doubt for me as I said before and I think especially with Covid-19 pandemic, the university has been transited to the online and some universities actually didn't.

**Darica Egorova:** Indeed.

**Roman Gojayev:** So, I was working for the Youth organizations at this time. We had to talk so much about digital youth work. And this all about the competences, skills that young people should have in their journey. It was a bit doubtful for also the future. Because, for example, yesterday we had discussed about the year 2022. It was really hard for young people to imagine this and if I would ask my grandma how it looked like when the first smartphone came to her hand - it's very difficult for her to imagine the 2022 that we're living in.

**Darica Egorova:** Isn't it.

**Roman Gojayev:** Yes, so if we imagine like 200 years later, I think different technologies and AI will be a direct part of our lives. So yeah, I think that's why we have to think about exploring more and more, and this is actually I think what young people will be able to do so.

**Darica Egorova:** Thank you very much. What about you Natalie? How was it for you?

**Natálie Terčová:** For me it was very hard. It was an extremely challenging and stressful time. I was supposed to be graduating, so I graduated online. And I also experienced something like "imposter syndrome". There were days when I wondered if I should even go on for a PhD.

**Darica Egorova:** Hmm I see. It was a tough time indeed.

**Ihita Gangavarapu:** I resonate a lot with the imposter syndrome that was mentioned by Natalie. Because after my bachelors I was at home, and I was trying to figure it out, and I was building on my skillsets, etc. I had a lot of challenges that I was working on. Even mentally, staying motivated every day was one very big challenge.

But during Covid you also saw people losing their jobs. Then, lots of, you know, young people were all studying and working from home. We started looking for online courses, but in that process of exploring subjects and opportunities, you can feel very overwhelmed.

For me, personally, this was a very hard call that I had to take that I decided to do my masters in India, instead of my dream of doing it in the U.S. But one thing I would like to say is that you know learning doesn't stop with having a formal education or a physical education. So, education is a continuous process. So the academic journey shouldn't stop.

**Darica Egorova:** Thank you so much for sharing your side of the story. I think the Covid-19 pandemic period was hard for everyone, but it's great that you managed to get through it.

So, Albert Einstein once said that "in the middle of every difficulty lies an opportunity". Some other people say that if opportunity doesn't knock, you have to build a door. So which statement do you relate the most to and why? What about you Natalie?

**Natálie Terčová:** Hmm that's a good question. I myself relate most to the second statement I would say, because I believe that you can't expect opportunity to find you on its own. For example, I always knew that I wanted to work alongside great scientists and academics one day, so I worked hard on myself beyond what my studies gave me. So, I built this door of special skills let's say and it paid off! Today they are my colleagues and I'm very lucky to be in such a great team. But if I hadn't been this proactive, I believe it would never have happened.

**Darica Egorova:** What about you Ihita? What statement do you relate the most to?

**Ihita Gangavarapu:** I think I relate with the first one. For example, with Covid I personally was able

to extend multiple online interactions and have better access to events. And I think it could be an example of an opportunity during a difficult time. And, you know, they should continue doing it more hybrid because it makes it more inclusive and more learning to happen.

**Darica Egorova:** Yes I agree. Online education and hybrid education opened a new scope of interactions, especially for youth. I think it would be interesting to observe it on the long term.

So, we have talked a little bit about it before, about your transition into the professional world. So I would like to know, did it feel like you had to step out of your comfort zone to face those challenges? And what advice would you give to young people today that are afraid to make this move? So, Natalie would you like to give your opinion on that?

**Natálie Terčová:** Absolutely. Well, let me just start by saying that I'm more of an introvert myself, so for me almost my whole life is about stepping out of my comfort zone. So it is very unpleasant at first, but it teaches you a lot. So definitely don't be afraid to be authentic, because it's normal to doubt ourselves at first, to put on all sorts of masks to please others. But what I've learned and, I believe is right, is that we're all still human after all. And the best thing to do is to stay yourself and not be afraid to make mistakes.

For example, for me, when I switched this like job situation, it was very complicated. But in the end, I'm very grateful for how complicated it actually was, because it taught me a lot and I'm grateful for it.

**Darica Egorova:** Thank you Natalie for this very positive message! What about you Roman?

**Roman Gojajev:** Well, that's, I think, a very great question. I mean, before it was a little bit complicated, because at the time of my graduation, Covid-19 had started around April. And then just one day after my graduation, I had been offered to work for the National Youth Council of Azerbaijan. So that wasn't really hard, but it wasn't something that came out in just one click. That was something that I did by myself, and it was also stepping out of this comfort zone. I had so many challenges that really helped me so much.

**Darica Egorova:** Last but not least, Ihita. What advice would you give to young people today?

**Ihita Gangavarapu:** Yeah, so I've been in academia for the longest time and yet to enter the formal workforce. But I can always tell you that you should learn to live and enjoy the process, because you can be afraid of making this transition, but learn to push through because the results will definitely be worth it.

**Darica Egorova:** Thank you very much. So, all of you are also very active in youth digital inclusion. So, as you probably know, new technologies can sometimes be a double-edged sword. On one side, new challenges could arise with their implementation, but on the other side, they can also be the key to solving those challenges. So, in what way do you think the new emerging technologies in general, and for example the ICTs, can empower youth and create new opportunities for them?

**Ihita Gangavarapu:** So, lots of challenges definitely do arise with their deployment and these are very genuine concerns. But I would say that, you know, in the olden times when we had sewing machines, there were lots of discussions around that and there was a fear of losing jobs through automation. But over time we've learned to, you know, integrate that in our lives and then look for more opportunities to make life even more easier.

So now more and more people are able to leverage the technology for their growth. But we have to make sure that the people have the opportunities and skillsets to participate in the development of the technology.

**Darica Egorova:** Thank you Ihita for your great contribution. What about you Natalie, would you like to add something?

**Natálie Terčová:** Sure, so I myself see also a great opportunity in the field of education. Because it turns out that the ICTs are great at developing all sorts of skills that children need for today's world. For example, the elements of gamification are proving to be very effective. And I genuinely hope that the experience of online learning has shown that there are other ways to educate people than the

traditional teacher-centered approach. So yes, I believe that this is precisely why we need to educate the younger generation on how to maximize the benefits that ICTs bring, while minimizing the risks that they undoubtedly entail as well. So, education I believe, is an area that really needs to be focused on.

**Darica Egorova:** Indeed, education is a field where ICTs can be very beneficial.

**Roman Gojayev:** I just want to highlight we had that discussion yesterday, over can AI and ICTs create jobs in the future. And if this actually increases or decreases the jobs in future. So yes, it creates because, we create new technologies that really help us increase the quality of the human being. So that's very important how we look, how we make the approach and I think there are huge opportunities over that.

Right now, we're discussing so much about making universities more digital and there are still teachers, professionals also lacking those skills and competencies. So that's why increasing and also translating the ICTs skills in a curriculum of school is very important for making sure of the results that can have the education system.

**Darica Egorova:** Thank you very much Roman. Ihita?

**Ihita Gangavarapu:** So, like you mentioned, the new technologies can be seen as a double-edged sword, which I think is true. There are lots of apprehensions that arise with new technologies coming into the market. And there are lots of challenges like digital divide, and you know automatization of work, etc. So, I think that since technology is anyway going to be a part of our lives and with new technologies coming, we have to make sure that we somehow niche proliferate technology for it to become a commodity. For people to be able to access it efficiently, easily, and also making sure that people have the right and relevant skillsets to contribute to the development of the technology itself.

And like my fellow colleagues today mentioned, it's important to have an updated school curriculum with the recent market trends. We need to make sure that the youth have the right guidance to look for new job opportunities in the emerging areas, and ways for them to update themselves for very meaningful employment.

**Darica Egorova:** Thank you very much Ihita. To bounce back on what you just said, I think you are very involved in this field. You're the co-founder of Youth IGF India, a platform recognized by the UN IGF to engage youth in Internet governance. And then Roman, you used to coordinate a research project on digital youth work. Natalie you're a Generation Connect Youth Envoy for ITU in Europe. Can you tell us a bit more about why you have decided to take action?

**Natálie Terčová:** Well, I personally felt that I could use my experience as a junior researcher from international projects, such as the horizon 2020 wide skills project that i'm currently involved in, which focuses exactly on digital skills of children and adolescents and use this to help create better opportunities for the younger generations and generations yet to come. Because I believe that there is a need to transfer knowledge from academia and research and science fields to practice. So that is also why I decided to study counseling, so that I can help those who undoubtedly needed to transfer this knowledge about how technologies, how media work, how they affect us, to practice. To actually help younger generations. So that is what I felt was, maybe not missing, but needed.

**Darica Egorova:** Roman would you like to contribute?

**Roman Gojayev:** Yeah well, we saw that young people are lacking this digital skillset to integrate into online work and digital work in general. And we have decided to make sure that young people have, first of all - the access of technologies and Internet because not only in my own country but also around Europe, there are still young people that have no access. So, I have decided to take action to make sure that my generation right now, the future generation has enough knowledge, resources and competences to enjoy their rights to the Internet, technologies and social life.

**Darica Egorova:** Amazing! Thank you for sharing this with us. Ihita would you like to say something as well?

**Ihita Gangavarapu:** So I've been involved in the Internet governance domain since 2016 now and you know, in the process of engaging with various organizations and stakeholders I realized that youth is a very important stakeholder. So, I figured that in India a huge chunk of the population are

youth. And we have a lot of challenges. There is a diversity in terms of perspectives, in terms of experiences that need to be, you know, voiced. So it's important for young people to be aware of the various topics around the governance of the Internet. And they need to know what the opportunities or platforms are, where they can voice themselves and the challenge that affects them and their societies as well.

And they need to build that confidence that their voice will have value. So, this in this process, you know my colleague and I, we started the youth Internet Governance Forum India, which is a United Nations Internet Governance Forum recognized platform to engage young people in Internet governance. Not just in India, but we look for global collaborations and all their challenges and all their perspectives are brought to the table.

**Darica Egorova:** It's great that all of you took these matters into your own hands and decided to take action. To circle back on our conversation, I would like to know if you would say that the idea of entrepreneurship, which is creating somehow your own opportunities, jobs, and careers, through self-learning, and maybe with the help of the ICTs, could be the solution to the current youth feeling of uncertainty about the future? Do you see young people taking more action in the future for their future? Roman would you like to answer this first?

**Roman Gojayev:** Yes, my pleasure. I just want to highlight that I'm not the expert in this, but we are having different kinds of projects to make sure that young women, especially, have the concrete skillset to create their own entrepreneurship idea. Because we want to see this process not just on the side of gender equality, but also gender equity because young women are less represented in economic development. Lately in my own country and in Europe. So that's why we are doing this mentorship project for women to create their own businesses, to make sure that they access to the feasible and stable economy. So that's why I think yes, entrepreneurship idea is very important for the future of work in general.

**Darica Egorova:** Thank you Roman. What about you Ihita? What do you think of the idea of entrepreneurship?

**Ihita Gangavarapu:** I believe that entrepreneurship will help. But personally, guiding the youth for the future, you know it's really important and, for example. I was looking for opportunities to start something of my own earlier during my exploring phase, and at that point, I was navigating the Internet. So then I think I realized that navigating the Internet meaningfully and safely is also a very big challenge. So, I believe that entrepreneurship will definitely help in, you know, settling with the uncertainties or challenges, like Roman mentioned about gender bias exclusion. So, if you were to start something of your own, you are in power of your own opportunities, of your own decisions.

**Darica Egorova:** Amazing. Natalie?

**Natálie Terčová:** I might just add to what my colleagues have already mentioned. That the empowerment of young people is very important, dare I say crucial? And I wish that in the future, young people will be more involved in shaping the world around them, therefore, their own future after all.

Let me just say that I really like what Bohumil Kartous - an expert on innovation and education - said is that we can't take children to virtual reality on a steam engine. So, this might highlight the need to actually have young people taking more action into building good opportunities for their own digital future.

**Darica Egorova:** Okay thank you Natalie. It's almost the end of today's podcast. I sincerely thank you all for joining today's episode and sharing your inspiring stories with us. To conclude, I have one last question for you. Looking back at your journey today, what would you like to tell your younger self and other young people out there? Ihita would you like to say something?

**Ihita Gangavarapu:** Yeah, I would like to tell my younger self to enjoy the process and learn the art of continuous learning, because things tend to take an unplanned route, but it's all part of the learning and it's a process. So don't be stagnant, because this entire learning creates and builds a lot of confidence and personality in you, and that can go a long way.

**Darica Egorova:** Natalie would you like to add something?

**Natálie Terčová:** Well, I would say two things. First, just don't be afraid to go after big goals, because at first many dreams seem unattainable, but over time one learns that they're just not the final destinations, but rather checkpoints. And the second piece of advice would be don't be afraid to ask for help. It's not a weakness to take advice.

**Darica Egorova:** Last but not least - Roman.

**Roman Gojayev:** Yes, thank you so much, I think Natalie and Ihita something very important, and I would like to, you know, highlight that. What I want to say is that the future is something that no one own it, and no one control it. This is what we do. This is what we create. And this is the future of us, so just make sure that what you do comes back to your own. Don't wait for others to give you something because the future is yours, and you have to control it.

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