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PRESS RELEASE

D-8 ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION

D-8 HOST INAUGURAL ‘YOUTH BRIDGES PROGRAMME’ TO MARK INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY

Marking the International Youth Day, the Secretariat of the Developing-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation (D-8) hosted the inaugural ‘D-8 Youth Bridges Programme’ at its headquarters in Istanbul -- bringing together young University students from D-8 Member States currently studying in Türkiye.

Designed as a platform for cross-border learning, dialogue and networking, the Programme connected D-8 youth with eminent Experts from international organizations, business leaders, entrepreneurs and innovation specialists -- focusing on Artificial Intelligence, future skills, entrepreneurship, innovation, and regional cooperation.

In his address, D-8 Secretary-General H.E. Ambassador Sohail Mahmood apprised the young participants of the founding vision of D-8 as well as its current state and future trajectory. He also highlighted the Member States’ steadily increasing focus on youth engagement and empowerment. The Secretary-General particularly emphasized that “the future must be built *with* the youth” calling for greater investment in their skills, creativity, digital capabilities and entrepreneurial potential. In a world increasingly shaped by AI, digitalization and changing patterns of work, he stressed the importance of equipping young people not only to adapt to transformation, but to lead it. He also highlighted the need for stronger platforms that enable young people to connect across borders, exchange ideas, turn innovation into solutions for shared challenges, and realize new opportunities.

The Experts segment brought together representatives of key D-8 partner institutions, including the UNDP Istanbul International Centre for Private Sector in Development (IICPSD), Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum (ICYF), MÜSİAD Genç, Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Türkiye (TOBB), Bilişim Vadisi (Informatics Valley), and SESRIC. Presentations offered practical insights into AI-enabled entrepreneurship and the future of work, youth empowerment, values-driven enterprise, business networking and investment, innovation ecosystems, and youth trends across D-8 and OIC countries. Speakers also shared real-world entrepreneurial experiences, including lessons from successfully expanding a business presence to more than 40 countries.

Following the expert presentations, a dynamic interactive session enabled students to engage directly with the D-8 Secretary-General and participating experts, exchanging views and raising



questions on AI and its implications for jobs and career choices, opportunities for youth-led startups, access to markets and networks, and the practical challenges of entrepreneurship. The dialogue underscored the importance of connecting young people with knowledge, opportunities and regional networks, and creating space for their ideas to contribute to economic and social transformation.

Youth cooperation has received sustained attention at the highest political level of the Organization. The 10th D-8 Summit, hosted by Bangladesh in 2021, was held under the theme “*Partnership for a Transformative World: Harnessing the Power of Youth and Technology*,” while the 11th D-8 Summit, held in Cairo in 2024, focused on “*Investing in Youth and Supporting SMEs: Shaping Tomorrow’s Economy*.” The Youth Bridges Programme gives practical expression to this high-level vision by bringing young people directly into the D-8 cooperation process.

The initiative also supports the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

The ‘Youth Bridges Programme’ builds on the growing momentum of D-8 youth cooperation, including the first D-8 Youth Summit in 2021, the Dhaka Declaration on Youth adopted in 2024, and the Baku Youth Declaration of 2025. Together, these initiatives reflect the Organization’s continuing efforts to translate political commitment on youth into practical cooperation and sustained engagement.

The Programme was organized by the D-8 Secretariat in cooperation with the Embassies and Consulates General of D-8 Member States in Türkiye, with valuable contributions from partner institutions. It concluded with the presentation of certificates, a group photograph, and a networking reception, providing participants with further opportunities to connect and exchange ideas.



Istanbul, 12 August 2026