

United Nations Development Programme



YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY:

**Fostering
Youth-Inclusive
Political Processes**

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The Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security (GCYPS) is the leading platform for shaping global policy and practice on youth, peace, and security. The GCYPS facilitates exchange, coordination, and collaboration between more than 70 organizations from civil society, including youth-led and youth-focused organizations, UN entities, donors, academia and inter-governmental bodies. The GCYPS is co-chaired by the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY Peacebuilders), Search for Common Ground (SFCG) and the United Nations (Peacebuilding Support Office – PBSO and United Nations Population Fund – UNFPA).

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Executive Summary

Recent developments have highlighted the crucial role young people play in advancing peace and security. Yet, a significant aspect of the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda—political participation of young people—still requires attention.

Currently, our world is home to a record 1.8 billion young individuals (between the ages of 10 and 24). Not involving these young people in political processes, for any reason, negatively impacts not only them but also our broader communities. Despite its importance, many young people still encounter barriers when trying to engage in political and civic activities.

This Guide addresses this challenge. It provides insights into the reasons behind, the barriers to, and the methods for enhancing the political participation of young individuals. Illustrated with inspiring global examples, the Guide concludes with specific recommendations for stakeholders, especially those championing the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda, to bolster their future initiatives.

The first section of the Guide delves deeply into both the compelling reasons for and the persistent challenges to youth political participation, all within the framework of Youth, Peace, and Security.

Among the reasons emphasized for ensuring the political participation of young people are its recognition as a fundamental human right, its capacity to directly address the unique needs of young individuals, its potential to fortify democracies by ensuring inclusive political processes, its undeniable importance in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in ensuring that no youth is left behind, and its value as a strategy to effectively localize the SDGs.

Conversely, the Guide doesn't shy away from highlighting the myriad challenges young individuals encounter in their quest for political participation. These challenges encompass financial barriers, a pervasive lack of quality education, existing legal impediments, the presence of institutional and organizational hurdles, deep-rooted socio-cultural barriers coupled with harmful gender norms, a palpable sense of distrust felt by young individuals, the alarming trend of shrinking civic spaces, and the distinct difficulties found in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, especially those exacerbated by displacement. Additionally, there is a concerning lack of comprehensive data on youth political participation, further complicating efforts to address these challenges.

The second part of the Guide explores more closely how young people are politically participating in relation to peace and security issues. Firstly, highlighting their involvement in formal political processes, such as in electoral processes by voting, campaigning for political parties, observing, running for office themselves or participating in youth councils.

Next, the focus is on their involvement in youth activism and civic engagement. Attention is given to the political involvement of young people in fragile or conflict-affected contexts, whether during ongoing armed conflict, during peace processes or in post-conflict or transitional justice settings. And, finally, it includes reflections on the increasing participation of young people in deliberative democracy processes.

The third section of the Guide focuses on key stakeholders and tools for enhancing young people's political participation. It emphasizes the role of Parliaments, detailing methods to increase youth representation, effects of electoral systems, quota application, political financing regulations, narrowing the age discrepancy between voting and running for office, and amplifying youth voices.

Subsequently, more information is provided on the role of Youth Parliaments, caucuses, Parliamentary Committees, local governance institutions, and political parties, including mentor programmes, youth party wings, outreach programmes, broader leadership approaches, the security sector, and the media.

The Guide introduces various means and instruments designed to support the implementation of the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda. This includes the development of National Action Plans, initiatives for accountability and oversight, strategies in legislation and lawmaking, approaches within public administration, and budgeting tactics. The latter encompasses youth-sensitive budgeting, participatory budgeting, and budget advocacy.

In its concluding section, the Guide delves into specific case studies from Mexico, the Philippines and Somalia. These examples shine a light on tangible challenges, opportunities, and instances of youth political participation within the YPS Agenda framework.

To wrap up, the Guide offers recommendations aimed at invigorating and expanding the political participation of young people. It also presents an overview of pertinent international frameworks and conventions, along with potential resources for those interested in further reading.

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Acronyms

ACCORD	African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AYPN	African Youth in Philanthropy Network
AYPN	Asia Youth Peace Network
BUILD	Bringing Unity, Integrity and Legitimacy to Democracy
BYNP	Barbados National Youth Parliament
CTBTO	Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
ENCUP	Encuesta Nacional sobre Cultura Política y Prácticas Ciudadanas – National Survey on Political Culture and Citizenship Practices
ERC	Election Resource Centre
EYAPSCSI	Empowering Youth as Agents for Peace and Social Cohesion in the Solomon Islands
EYF	European Youth Forum
FBA	Folke Bernadotte Academy
GNWP	Global Network of Women Peacebuilders
GPPAC	Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict
GZOPI	Gaston Z. Ortigas Peace Institute Incorporated
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IDFI	Institute for Development of Freedom of Information
ILO	International Labour Organization
INE	Instituto Nacional Electoral (Mexico)
INUV	Instituto Nacional de la Juventud (Chile)
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
LEAP	Lebanese Elections Assistance Project
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and/or Questioning, and Asexual and/or Ally
NAP	National Action Plan
NDC	National Dialogue Conference
NDI	National Democratic Institute
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PILDAT	Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAYoF	Southern African Youth Forum
SEGOB	Secretaría de Gobernación – Mexican Secretariat for Home Affairs



SFCG	Search for Common Ground
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UN-DPO	Department of Peace Operations
UN-DPO OROLSI	Department of Peace Operations – Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions
UN DPPA	United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UN-HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund – United Nations Children’s Fund
UNMIK	United Nations Mission in Kosovo
UNOY	United Network of Young Peacebuilders
UN PBSO	United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UNSOM	United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia
UN WOMEN	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WG-YPB	Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding
WPAY	World Programme of Action for Youth
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
YCA	Youth Connekt Africa
YDI	Youngstars Development Initiative
YIAGA	Youth Initiative for Advocacy Growth & Advancement
YLP	Youth Leadership Programme
YPM	Youth Parliament of Malawi
YPS	Youth, Peace and Security

Introduction

Young people have always been politically active, particularly in times of change. Whether by taking to the streets, rallying their communities or joining political battles. They have always been the changemakers at the forefront.

But when it came to consolidating change, drafting the policies, deciding on legislation and making the political decisions that would change their lives, they would often be sidelined, ignored or silenced.

The political participation of young people is essential for several reasons. Firstly, it is their inherent human right. Secondly, their unique needs might go unaddressed without their involvement. Additionally, they represent a substantial segment of the population, even forming the majority in some countries. Most importantly, for us to achieve lasting peace and create thriving, stable democracies, the active and meaningful involvement of the youth is indispensable. Without them, our efforts toward societal change will always remain unfinished.

The Progress So Far

Since 2015, there's been growing recognition of the pivotal role young people play in spearheading positive change. In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹ and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)², young individuals are distinctly identified as vital agents of change and essential contributors to its realization. Their meaningful inclusion underpins the 2030 Agenda's commitment to "leave no one behind." Notably, their contributions are foundational in championing peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, as underscored in SDG 16.

The shift in the understanding of young people's role in peace and security began to take form through declarations such as that of the Secretary-General in his 2012 report *Peacebuilding in the Aftermath of Conflict*, in which he advocated the participation of "a wider set of actors" in peacebuilding efforts, including young people.³

Then, in 2014, the Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding (WG-YPB) developed the *Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding* to inform strategies and programmes promoting the meaningful participation of young people in peacebuilding.⁴ To complement these guiding principles, a practice note was developed to provide evidence of successful programming on YPS.

1 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>

2 <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

3 https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/67/499

4 <https://www.undp.org/publications/guiding-principles-young-peoples-participation-peacebuilding>

The working group, renamed Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security, is co-chaired by the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, Search for Common Ground and the United Network of Young Peacebuilders and plays an instrumental role in the implementation of the YPS resolutions.⁵

During the first Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security in August 2015, hundreds of young people jointly drafted the Amman Youth Declaration, which called for more significant partnerships with young people in addressing issues of peace and security, violence prevention and peacebuilding, gender equality, and young people’s empowerment.⁶

The twin resolutions on sustaining peace (A/RES/70/262 and S/RES/2282) signaled a transformation of the United Nations’ approach to preventing and resolving conflicts.⁷ The Sustaining Peace Agenda shifted the focus away from siloed security responses and towards conflict resolution and collective, whole-of-system actions that build the resilience needed for societies and institutions to address peace and security challenges.

On 9 December 2015, the Security Council took a monumental step by unanimously adopting Resolution 2250⁸. For the first time, it acknowledged “the important and positive contribution of youth in efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security”.⁹ The resolution outlines five pillars for action. It advocates for systems that facilitate the meaningful involvement of young women and men in peace processes and dispute resolutions. Furthermore, it seeks to address the root causes fueling the surge in violent extremism and conflict.

The momentum around the new ‘Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda’ grew in conjunction with the shift of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture towards a greater focus on conflict prevention. The resulting sustaining peace approach has been intrinsically linked to the goals of the YPS agenda since then.

The Security Council has adopted two subsequent resolutions dedicated to YPS. In 2018, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2419 calling for the meaningful inclusion of young people in peace processes.¹⁰ In 2020, the Council adopted Resolution 2535, laying out concrete steps for the operationalization of the YPS agenda, including a request for the United Nations to improve capacity-building and technical guidance related to YPS.¹¹

Launched in 2018, the pioneering *United Nations Youth Strategy: Youth2030* has steered the UN System’s focus towards prioritizing young people. Rather than simply acting on their behalf, the strategy emphasizes an inclusive approach that values their input, amplifies their voices, and recognizes them as partners and leaders.¹² This Youth Strategy encapsulates the comprehensive, youth-centric vision

5 https://www.youth4peace.info/About_GCYPS

6 https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/amman_youth_declaration.pdf

7 https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_262.pdf and [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2282\(2016\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2282(2016))

8 <https://www.youth4peace.info/UNSCR2250/Introduction>

9 [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250\(2015\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250(2015))

10 <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13368.doc.htm>

11 <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2535>

12 https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/18-00080_UN-Youth-Strategy_Web.pdf

championed by the YPS agenda. Notably, the fifth priority, focused on peace and resilience-building, positions young individuals as pivotal drivers of peace, security, and humanitarian efforts.”

Commissioned by Security Council Resolution 2250, the inaugural progress study titled ‘The Missing Peace, A Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security’ was unveiled in 2018. This study ardently called upon governments and the multilateral system to transition from a strictly security-focused, reactive stance on violent conflict. Instead, it advocated for a holistic approach to violence prevention, centralizing the integral role of young people.¹³ Such an approach recognizes that, although a small minority of young people may engage in violence, the majority are peaceful and demonstrate exceptional forms of resilience to situations of conflict and insecurity.

To assist the translation of these ambitions into reality, the ‘Youth, Peace and Security, a Programming Handbook’ was developed in 2021 by the United Nations.¹⁴ It offers guidance on how to develop interventions that are responsive to the situation and needs of young people and meaningfully engage diverse groups of young people throughout the process.

More recently, the United Nations Secretary-General, in his ‘Our Common Agenda’ report, highlighted the importance of better listening to and working with young people and outlined several challenges related to young people’s exclusion from political participation and decision-making.

The momentum garnered through the relentless activism of young people and the increasing recognition of governments and the multilateral system of the imperative to involve youth meaningfully rather than see them as a threat is now solidifying and generating the political will for change.

Youth Political Participation and the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda

Allowing for the political participation of young people is a crucial element to promote young people’s meaningful involvement in peace and security. However, when it comes to the implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda, it is still often overlooked. Political participation is often mistakenly understood as something separate or different from peacebuilding and conflict prevention. These two domains, while both significant, require more seamless integration.

As acknowledged in UNSCR 2250, youth political participation is not just complementary but essential to the fulfillment of the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda. It’s a cornerstone of meaningful youth engagement. Without it, genuine progress remains elusive.

This is the impetus behind this Guide, which aims to shine a light on youth political participation within the broader context of Youth, Peace and Security. Our goal is to outline prevailing trends, underscore the challenges, evaluate the modes of youth participation, and pinpoint critical stakeholders and methods to amplify their engagement. Furthermore, the Guide seeks to intensify focus and prioritization in this pivotal domain.

¹³ <https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2018-10/youth-web-english.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.youth4peace.info/YPSHandbook>

Objectives

This Guide aims to serve as a comprehensive resource for practitioners and experts devoted to advancing the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda, with an emphasis on the first pillar concerning participation. Its primary objectives include:

- Providing a succinct overview of the trends, challenges, opportunities, and strategies to enhance the political participation of young individuals within the YPS Agenda framework
- Encouraging intensified focus and endeavours to champion the political engagement of youth in peace and security realms; and
- Delivering tangible suggestions, illustrative examples, and actionable recommendations to facilitate this engagement.

It's crucial to note that the Guide's purpose isn't to dictate UN policy.¹⁵



Photo: UNDP China / Dylan Lowthian

¹⁵ With respect to youth participation in elections: UN electoral assistance is governed by a framework originally established by the General Assembly in 1991. Moreover, internal UN system policy in this field is set by the USG/DPPA in the capacity of UN focal point for electoral assistance matters in consultation with other UN entities.

Methodology

The Guide is an initiative of the Task Force on Youth in Politics of the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security, co-chaired by UNDP and the Asia Youth Peace Network (AYPN). It was drafted by two international consultants, under the guidance of the UNDP Youth Global Programme Manager, with support from the members of the Task Force and the global coalition, as well as a range of other experts.

It is based on desk review, interviews with experts, and consultations with the Task Force throughout the writing period.

Country specific experts were further consulted for the examples highlighted throughout the text, as well as for the case studies included in the Guide.



Photo: UNDP Mali

Target Audiences

This Guide is tailored for a diverse audience, including but not limited to:

- **Members of the Global Coalition on Youth Peace and Security** to offer practical programming insights, including trends, challenges, and opportunities, to further the political participation of young people to advance the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda;
- **Practitioners beyond the Members of the Global Coalition**, including but not limited to United Nations colleagues, international, regional and national development organizations, youth-led and youth-focused organizations, movements and networks, and peacebuilding organizations, to encourage the recognition of the necessity to prioritize the political participation of young people in the pursuit of peace and security; and
- **Young people** at the local, national and regional levels to be inspired to continue their efforts to realize the political participation of youth in their communities and societies to enable the realization of lasting and sustainable peace.



Photo: UNDP / Jaclyn Licht

Working Definitions

Conflict refers to the real or perceived clash of interests, needs, opinions or principles of different individuals or groups of individuals. Conflict in itself is not necessarily violent. It is inherent to all societies and human interactions and is a crucial driver of progress and development as long as they are addressed in a non-violent manner.

Meaningful Youth Participation transcends the boundaries of just ‘youth-centric’ issues. It demands the involvement of youth in every facet of an initiative, from policy formulation and implementation to monitoring and review. The reach of young people involved must be broad and representative. Young people should not only be ‘included’ but allowed space to participate and have an influence on par with other stakeholders. In essence, meaningful participation provides youth not just a voice, but also the agency to effect change.¹⁶

Peace does not mean the total absence of conflict. It is both the absence of violence in all forms and the unfolding of conflict in a constructive way. A further distinction can be made between negative and positive peace, with negative peace referring to the absence of violence or fear of violence and positive peace also including the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies.



Photo: UNDP / Freya Morales

16 https://en.duf.dk/fileadmin/user_upload/Editor/documents/DUF_materialer/DUF_Publikationer/DUF_2019_Meaningful_Youth_Participation_Towards_2030_and_Beyond.pdf

Political Participation refers to a broad range of activities through which people develop and express their opinions on the world and how it is governed and try to take part in and shape the decisions that affect their lives.

Security is the state of being free from danger or threat. According to UNDP, human security means that people should be able to exercise their choices safely and freely, while being relatively confident that the opportunities they have today are not lost tomorrow.

Youth: There is no one definition of youth that has been agreed to globally. The United Nations uses a statistical definition of “youth” as people aged between 15 and 24 years old, “for statistical purposes” and “without prejudice to other definitions by Member States” (United Nations General Assembly, 1981). However, various United Nations agencies use different definitions, as happens at regional and national levels, also taking into account other criteria such as educational, socio-cultural, economic and financial factors. UNSC Resolution 2250 defines “youth” as people aged 18–29 years but notes the variations that exist at national and international levels.

Given the range of countries and the variety of initiatives covered, this Guide uses a flexible definition of youth ranging from 15 to 35. It also uses the terms “youth” and “young people” interchangeably.

Youth Participation is about more than just involvement; it’s about empowering young individuals to take an active role in their personal growth and the development of their communities. This engagement equips them with vital life skills, fosters an understanding of human rights and citizenship, and promotes positive civic action. For this participation to be genuinely effective, it’s imperative to provide young people with essential resources. This includes access to relevant information, comprehensive education about their civil rights, and the means to exercise those rights.¹⁷

¹⁷ <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-participation.pdf>

PART ONE

Enhancing Youth Political Participation as a Key Priority for the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda



Enhancing young people’s participation in decision-making and establishing long-term policies to address their economic, social and political aspirations is fundamental to sustaining peace at all levels. UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security recognizes the importance of political participation by urging *“Member States to consider ways to increase inclusive representation of youth in decision making at all levels in local, national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflict (..) and, as appropriate, to consider establishing integrated mechanisms for meaningful participation of youth in peace processes and dispute-resolution”*.¹⁸

There are several reasons to consider youth political participation as a crucial element of realizing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda. The following section will look into some of the main reasons why this is the case.

Why Youth Political Participation Matters

Today, we find ourselves in a world with the largest generation of young people in history, some 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 to 24 or approximately 23.7 percent of the global population.¹⁹

This means that now more than ever, youth need to be included. They need to be engaged, they need to be put front and center. They need to participate, influence and be part of decision-making. Their energy and innovation need to be harnessed and strengthened to have them be the change makers and leaders our world needs to strengthen social cohesion, sustain peace, and achieve the SDGs. They should be given a voice in political decision-making processes.

Participation as a human right.

It’s essential to recognize that the significance of participation goes beyond mere statistics. Participation is a foundational human right, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and echoed in numerous subsequent Conventions and Declarations.

The rights to political and public participation are pivotal for fostering democratic governance, upholding the rule of law, promoting social inclusion, and stimulating economic development. Moreover, they play an instrumental role in advancing all human rights. Such rights empower individuals and groups, serving as essential tools to counteract marginalization and discrimination. They stand inseparable from other quintessential freedoms, including the rights to peaceful assembly, association, opinion, expression, education, and access to information.²⁰

Naturally, these same rights apply to young people. Youth have the right to have their voices heard and have a role in making the decisions that shape their lives and communities. When eligible, they should be able to vote, to stand for office and decide on the fundamental questions that shape their individual and collective future. Young people have the right to assemble, protest, and express their opinions, whether on or offline.

¹⁸ [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250\(2015\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250(2015))

¹⁹ <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2015/04/10-things-didnt-know-worlds-population/> and <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/One%20pager%20on%20youth%20demographics%20GF.pdf>

²⁰ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/EqualParticipation.aspx>

These rights are deeply embedded in international human rights law, encapsulated within an expansive framework of treaties, conventions, and agreements. Additionally, they're anchored in national laws and legislations across the globe. A detailed overview of these conventions and resolutions can be found in Annex on International and Regional normative and policy frameworks to enhance youth participation.

Under international human rights law, States bear more than just an obligation to protect young people's rights to political participation. They are mandated to respect, protect, and fulfill these rights. This entails not only refraining from impeding the exercise of such rights but also preventing others from doing so. Furthermore, States are tasked with implementing laws, legislations, and policies, as well as allocating necessary resources, to actively enable young people to fully enjoy their rights to political participation.

To respond to the needs of young people.

When it comes to many of the key challenges our world faces, young people tend to be amongst those the hardest hit. Whether it is armed conflict, climate change or the COVID-19 pandemic, young people are among the most affected, not just because of the direct consequences, but because they are mostly not consulted on the measures taken to address them. Young women face interlocking forms of discrimination, and those complex challenges often affect them even more harshly.

In 1995, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY).²¹ This framework guided the formulation of public policies across 15 priority sectors, aiming to enhance the well-being of youth globally. In response, governments worldwide initiated the crafting of youth policy strategies. They provided a platform for state officials and agencies to synchronize policies and initiatives across these sectors. Additionally, they spurred these agencies to channel financial, human, and material resources towards youth-centric programmes. Notably, countries like Denmark adopted a transversal approach. Instead of consolidating everything under a singular youth policy document, they produced multiple policy documents, each addressing distinct facets of young people's lives.²²

However, despite these advances, few youth policy strategies are developed and used and most of them remain limited in scope and impact. To respond to the needs of young people, governments need to ensure that policies are rights-based, inclusive, participatory, gender-responsive, comprehensive, knowledge-based and evidence-informed, fully resourced, accountable and properly consulted or co-created with, if not designed by, young people.

Young people should be entrusted to address pressing subjects, including those concerning peace and security, rather than being often



Photo: Office of the UN Youth Envoy / Joel Sheakoski

21 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/world-programme-of-action-for-youth.html>

22 https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/governance-for-youth-trust-and-intergenerational-justice_c3e5cb8a-en

relegated to what some may deem as ‘soft’ issues. The mere token involvement of youth isn’t enough. For policies to genuinely resonate with and impact the lives of young people, their substantive involvement in the design, implementation, and oversight of these policies and budgets is crucial. Without this active participation and a genuine commitment from political institutions, the efficacy of these policies will remain constrained.²³

To strengthen democracies and make political processes more inclusive.

In his remarks on the International Day of Democracy, observed on 15 September 2023, the UN Secretary General, while recognizing the threats to democracy, “in this time of tension and turmoil”, warned that civic spaces are shrinking and recalled the importance to “expand meaningful participation of young people in decision-making processes at every level”.

Exclusion and the silencing of dissenting voices is often a key component of such eroding or backsliding. However, many initiatives, actions, and protests led by youth throughout history and across the world have shown that young people are often among the first to speak and stand up. That young people make a vital contribution to strengthening and renewing democracies and their efforts are crucial to addressing democratic backsliding. As such, they should be recognized as powerful and active agents of change in democratic systems.

Young people also have a vested interest in doing so, not just for today but for the future. Youth will have to live the longest with the consequence of political decisions and thus have the strongest motivation to ensure decisions are made with a long-term perspective.

To achieve the SDGs and ensure no one, and no youth are left behind.

‘The future of humanity and our planet lies in our hands. It lies also in the hands of today’s younger generation, who will pass the torch to future generations. We have mapped the road to sustainable development; it will be for all of us to ensure that the journey is successful and its gains irreversible,’ proclaims the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.²⁴

Young people’s participation and empowerment are crucial components for the realization of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. They played a key role in formulating the Agenda. They voiced their needs and ideas through a broad consultation process both nationally and to the UN. Their participation was substantial through the UN Major Group for Children and Youth in negotiations and the online My World Survey, with more than 7 million young people voting for their priorities for a better world.²⁵

The 2030 Agenda explicitly names young people as “critical agents of change” and prioritizes them throughout the 17 SDGs. Young people are manifested in more than 60 of the 169 SDG targets explicitly or implicitly.²⁶

23 <https://youth4peace.info/system/files/2022-02/YPS-guide-for-public-officials-1.pdf>

24 United Nations, Transforming our world, the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, para. 53. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>

25 <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2014/12/7-million-voices-weigh-future-development-agenda-un-survey/>

26 In 2017, the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development developed the Guiding Principles for Supporting Young People as Critical Agents of Change in the 2030 Agenda, in which people’s participation and empowerment were defined as a priority for implementing the 2030 Agenda.

SDG 16 specifies the commitment to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”. The inclusion of an SDG focused on peace, security, and human rights follows strong criticism of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for having failed to account for the correlation between sustainable development with peace and human rights.



THE 16 X 16 INITIATIVE PROMOTES YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN FORGING PEACEFUL, JUST, AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

The “16 x 16 Initiative” acknowledges and champions the pivotal role that young women and men assume as leaders across 16 youth organizations, movements, and networks. As agents of change, they are integral partners in forging peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. The initiative is backed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and is carried out via the UNDP Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace.²⁷

SDG 16 underscores the reality that none of the SDGs can be realized if anyone is left behind. Without a whole-of-society approach with a particular focus on those groups traditionally being marginalized, the entire Agenda is at stake. This should make youth political participation a priority for all invested in the SDGs.



THE SDG 16 INNOVATION CHALLENGE FOR YOUTH-LED JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY SOLUTIONS

The SDG 16 Innovation Challenge, organized by Accountability Lab, supports young men and women aged 15 – 35 years to develop creative solutions for SDG 16. Young participants discussed – amongst others – redesigning the justice system to make the system more accessible for poor people, amplifying the voices of women in advancing the rule of law, and enhancement of corporate and government accountability.²⁸

Localizing the SDGs

Under the global framework of the SDGs, local governments and civil society organizations are working with young people to translate the SDGs into national and local goals and targets. Young people are increasingly involved in defining, implementing and monitoring strategies and policies to realize these localized priorities. They influence local policy processes, drive innovation, and hold local governments accountable for progress.



Photo: Office of the UN Youth Envoy / Joel Sheakoski

²⁷ <https://www.undp.org/publications/16-x-16-initiative>

²⁸ SDG 16 Innovation Challenge.



EMPOWERING LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO DRIVE THE SDGS

Restless Development in Sierra Leone supports young volunteers to partner with communities across every district of Sierra Leone to lead on accountability, promote gender equality and improve healthcare. Restless Development's compelling project involves assisting young individuals in gathering data about education, health, and social service providers. They aim to empower local communities to drive change, enabling them to demand improved and transparent services from these providers.²⁹

Challenges to Youth Political Participation

Despite their critical contributions to society, many obstacles remain to guaranteeing meaningful youth participation in decision-making processes. Young people remain largely excluded from formal political processes and from civic engagement, not because of a supposed lack of experience but primarily due to economic, legal and socio-cultural barriers. The lack of mutual trust between young people and political leaders and institutions reinforces the exclusion of young people from decision-making processes. Their exclusion is embedded, both explicitly and implicitly, in various laws, cultural norms, and community practices.

Besides, in fragile contexts, the persistence of violence or the threat of violence, can be important barrier to youth political participation, especially for young women.

Fostering youth meaningful political participation goes beyond increasing numbers. It requires the expansion of young people's roles and engagement in political processes and institutions, as well as in civic life. It demands attention to improve young people's roles in representative political processes, and also in wider policy and political processes that directly impact their lives and their communities.

Today, young people face multiple obstacles to enter the political sphere, but once elected, they are also facing barriers to get their voices heard and influence decision making processes. In this section we look deeper into some of these obstacles.

Financial barriers and threats

Research conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) presents concerning overview of the financial situation of many young people. Their report, "Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020," indicates that around the world, one in five young people are neither employed nor engaged in education or training. This scenario is concerning not only for their current situation but also as a potential predictor for their future prospects.³⁰

29 <https://restlessdevelopment.org/country/sierra-leone/>

30 ILO, Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020, [Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020](#).

The financially precarious situation of young people has a significant impact on their ability to participate in political life. For many young people living in fragile or conflict-affected areas, the primary concern is to survive. In addition, in many regions, young people are also responsible for supporting their families. Combining this with community work, political activism, or running for office is nearly impossible.

More so, finding and maintaining decent work is challenging for all, but in particular for young people new to the workplace. Given the inevitable job insecurity that many young people face will in certain situations make them less forthcoming when it comes to speaking publicly and freely about sensitive topics for fear of not getting or losing a job.

Financial uncertainty also forces young people to migrate either within their own country or abroad, searching for new opportunities and a better future. This often strongly impacts their opportunity or ability to engage in politics, even if their right to do so does not diminish by their relocation. This migration results in a double loss: their places of origin are deprived of their potential contributions, and their new homes miss out on the fresh perspectives that these young minds could bring to political dialogues and decision-making.

Running for office, including nomination fees and costs of campaigning that come with it, is expensive and therefore remains too often reserved for those with access to financial resources and particular social networks. Young people tend to not be among those that do.

As women and men often have different levels and types of political support networks, young women might find financial obstacles even more difficult to overcome. On average, female politicians receive fewer private donations than their male counterparts and rely more heavily on party sponsorship.³¹



Photo: Office of the UN Youth Envoy / Joel Sheakoski

31 <https://www.idea.int/news/break-financial-bias-levelling-playing-field-women-politics-through-political-finance-measures>

The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network platform³² for example provides insights into the cost of nomination fees in various countries. Preliminary research from data available on electoral commissions websites reveals that since then, nomination fees have been increased in many countries. Remarkably, these costs tend to be very high in those countries that suffer from extreme poverty. *Similarly*, the significant amounts of money involved in election campaigns disadvantage young candidates who often lack the financial resources and networks for sponsorship.

Financial instability and economic challenges serve as significant barriers to political participation for young men and women. Moreover, these difficulties can demotivate youth activism and curtail their civic engagement. Such economic constraints not only hinder their freedom of opinion and expression but also constrict the civic spaces where they could otherwise voice their perspectives and concerns.

Lack of Quality Education for Many Young People

While significant strides have been made in expanding educational access over the past decades, many young individuals still remain out of the schooling system. UNICEF data from 2021 reveals just two in three children of lower secondary school age attended either lower or upper secondary school, and only one in two children of upper secondary school age attended either upper secondary school or higher education.³³ There are pronounced regional disparities, with stark differences based on socio-economic backgrounds. Alarming, the gap in educational opportunities is most pronounced in the least developed nations, those mired in instability, and regions affected by armed conflict. Given the observed trend where those lacking formal education tend to be less politically active, it underscores the urgency to prioritize and invest in quality, accessible education for all.

Legal Barriers

In most countries, young people can vote from 18 years old. However, there are exceptions. For instance, Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Scotland, and Nicaragua permit individuals to vote from the age of 16. In Greece, Indonesia, North Korea, and Timor Leste, the voting age is 17. On the other end of the spectrum, young individuals in Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Samoa, Singapore, and Tonga must wait until they reach 21 before they are eligible to cast their votes.

Although the voting age remains relatively consistent across countries, there's a more considerable variation when it comes to the minimum age required for office candidacy. Data collected by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 2020³⁴ reveals that in nearly 69 percent of countries, a discrepancy exists between the age at which individuals can vote and the age they can stand for parliamentary office. As of 2020, the median eligibility age for the lower chambers was 21, and for the upper chambers, it was 30³⁵. This gap between the minimum age requirement to vote and the minimum age for candidacy both directly and indirectly impacts youth representation and broader youth political participation. Firstly, it directly prevents younger individuals from contesting elections and holding representative positions. Secondly, it indirectly communicates a discouraging message: that politics isn't a realm for the youth.

32 https://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/archive/questions/replies/862570690/mobile_conversation_view

33 <https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/secondary-education/>

34 <https://www.ipu.org/youth2021>

35 <https://www.ipu.org/youth2021>

Institutional and Organizational Barriers

Generally speaking, politics, regardless of what level, still tends to be dominated by older men and political elites, which has created institutional and organizational barriers that exclude young people, in particular young women. While in many places around the world public institutions are attempting to open their doors to women and youth, these barriers do not disappear easily.³⁶

Continued efforts by public institutions to engage with young people are needed, however, it is equally important to review institutional settings and capacities inside states, not only as “natural formal spaces” to advance the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda within government but also for youth to engage in the decision-making process and the designing of policies that are youth sensitive. If those efforts are not made, weak youth institutions and other governmental bodies risk becoming politicized structures that lose the ability to act independently, resulting in limited participation of youth.

Such obstacles for meaningful youth engagement include, but are not limited to:

- Little or no operational/administrative support for youth to perform their function or gain the capacities to do so efficiently.
- No flexibility in work hours or lack of childcare facilities.
- Lack of means to reach out to youth constituencies.
- Backlogs in the modernization of tools and lack of ICT support for young parliamentarians and staff.
- Lack of opportunities for youth to build networks; and
- Absence of career opportunities for young men and women to get into leadership positions.

Overall, the above-mentioned challenges are at times further exacerbated by the lack of institutional capacities. Weak or tainted institutions significantly hinder meaningful youth participation. Instead, it can lead to ineffective or tokenistic engagement and young people drowning in inefficiency, eventually losing their belief in the political system.

To become truly accessible to young people, in particular young women, and remain relevant in increasingly complex societies, public institutions will have to reflect on how current practices and rules of procedures hinder the political participation of youth. One means to do so is to appoint a youth ombudsman.

Socio-Cultural Barriers and Harmful Gender Norms

Expressing one’s own opinion, questioning political decisions, speaking openly about sensitive issues is not evident for young people in societies where older generations dominate the public discourse.

Traditionally, respect for the elderly is an almost universal concept. However, this concept has evolved differently across the globe, as some places now have a culture that strongly idealizes youth, while in others, respect for the elderly, whether determined by age or by the longevity of

³⁶ <https://www.ipu.org/youth2021>

service in an organization or institution, still holds strong.³⁷ Such an ingrained ‘culture of seniority’ combined at times with highly hierarchical societies can pose great challenges on youth political participation. Both for young people themselves to overcome internalized biases, but also for them to overcome the cultural resistance to breaking tradition.

The obstacles to registering as voters, casting their votes, running for office, and participating in peace processes are even higher for young women, facing discrimination based both on age and gender. Patterns of intimidation, harassment and violence against women in political life discourage many young women from entering doing so.

A 2016 IPU study³⁸ reveals that sexism, harassment, and violence against women parliamentarians exist to different degrees in every country, affecting many women parliamentarians. The study’s findings reveal that 81.8 percent of all respondents were victims of psychological violence. Among the kinds of psychological violence, 44.4 percent of those surveyed said they had received threats of death, rape, beatings or abduction during their parliamentary term.

According to the same IPU study, women under the age of 40 are at even greater risk of becoming victims of sexual harassment, among others in the form of sexist remarks, intimidation, threats and degrading treatment on social media.³⁹

As stated in the 2021 UN Women Guidance note on Preventing violence against women in politics,⁴⁰ the threat of gender-based violence can prevent young women, from participating in public affairs, voting and being electing, and therefore from exercising their rights.

A recent UNDP study also shows that LGBTI+ people face various hurdles in politics due to criminalization, discrimination, and exclusion. They also endure harassment and violence, needing to tackle safety concerns and combat discrimination to participate fully.⁴¹

Much progress has been made when it comes to enrolment of girls in school, however, traditional societal expectations of women and girls, such as deeming their primary responsibility as caregivers, remain stubborn. Young women who attempt to become politically involved are often confronted with sexism, harassment, violence, and stigmatization, leading them to abandon politics altogether.



Photo: UNDP

37 <https://web.uri.edu/iaics/files/03-Guo-Ming-Chen-Jensen-Chung.pdf>

38 <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians>

39 <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians>

40 <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2021/Guidance-note-Preventing-violence-against-women-in-politics-en.pdf>

41 <https://www.undp.org/publications/building-inclusive-democracies-guide-strengthening-participation-lgbti-persons-political-and-electoral-processes>



Youth Distrust in Political Institutions

The World Values Survey,⁴² the Gallup World Poll⁴³ and various regional Barometers (Afrobarometer,⁴⁴ Eurobarometer,⁴⁵ Latinobarometro),⁴⁶ all indicate a global decline or persistent deficiency in citizens' trust in democratic institutions. The declining lack of confidence is witnessed in all age groups, including the youth. The responses to the COVID-19 pandemic by governments appear to have exacerbated this erosion of trust. Given that trust underpins the legitimacy of public institutions, this trend is deeply concerning.

OECD evidence⁴⁷ shows that government values, such as high levels of integrity, fairness, and openness of institutions, are strong predictors of public trust. Moreover, a government's ability to reliably provide public services and address new needs is vital for bolstering institutional confidence.

Without trust in democratic systems, political institutions and processes, getting more young people to participate in politics will remain challenging. A lack of political trust discourages young people from casting their vote, from joining a political party, or standing for office. This trend, however, has not completely prevented young people from participating in politics or influencing decision-making.

Shrinking Civic Space for Young Activists

Worldwide, civic space is shrinking. Never have so many political activists and human rights defenders, including many young people, been harassed, threatened, detained or killed for raising their voice, mobilizing their communities or opposing large corporations.

The 2021 CIVICUS world map⁴⁸ paints a worrying picture of the current state of play of civic space across the globe. The map shows 24 countries with closed civic space, 38 with repressed space, and 49 with obstructed space. Just 43 countries receive an open rating, and 42 countries are rated narrow. CIVICUS named, in its "People Power Under Attack" 2019 report,⁴⁹ youth as one of the five groups most exposed to assaults on their fundamental freedoms.

Moreover, the rapid implementation of restrictions and lockdowns during the COVID-19 response often bypassed public scrutiny, suppressing opposing views and, in some cases, criminalizing those exercising their rights to expression and assembly. This is set against a backdrop where governments increasingly use anti-terrorism and national security laws to exert control over citizens and limit genuine youth participation. Tactics include requiring official permits for protests, refusing registration for youth-led organizations, and restricting foreign funding.⁵⁰

42 <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>

43 <https://www.gallup.com/analytics/318875/global-research.aspx>

44 <https://afrobarometer.org/>

45 <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/screen/home>

46 <https://www.latinobarometro.org/lat.jsp>

47 <https://www.oecd.org/gov/trust-in-government.htm>

48 <https://monitor.civicus.org/>

49 <https://monitor.civicus.org/PeoplePowerUnderAttack2019/>

50 <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Global-Report-on-Protecting-Young-People-in-Civic-Space.pdf>



DEFENDING THE DEFENDERS: PROTECTING YOUNG ACTIVISTS IN CIVIC SPACES

Across the world, young activists, human rights defenders and peacebuilders are being arbitrarily arrested, held in pre-trial detention, refused bail and imprisoned for activities that fall firmly within their right to freedom of expression, association and assembly. They are charged with planning violent insurrections, sedition, terrorist activities or affiliation, lese majesté or threats to national security.

Others have had to go into hiding, flee their country or have been disappeared or killed. The risks that young people face and the threats they have to endure for their political participation are genuine and should be at the forefront of any programme or project that aims to increase the political participation of young people.

As highlighted in the report “If I Disappear – Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space”,⁵¹ developed by the United Nations Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth in collaboration with the Protection Working Group under the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security, there’s a pressing need to enhance protection mechanisms and make them more accessible for young peacebuilders.

The study of 2017, “The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security”,⁵² mandated by the UNSCR 2250, also highlighted that in too many cases the civic space is unsafe for young people’s activism. Increasingly recognized as a global imperative, the United Nations Secretary-General cited “public participation and civic space” as a priority area within his 2020 human rights call-to-action.⁵³



Photo: UNDP

51 <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Global-Report-on-Protecting-Young-People-in-Civic-Space.pdf>

52 <https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2018-10/youth-web-english.pdf>

53 <https://www.un.org/en/content/action-for-human-rights/index.shtml>

In 2021, the Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth commissioned a global report on protecting young people in civic space. The resulting report “If I Disappear – Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space”⁵⁴ argued that young people experience a wide range of socio-cultural, political, digital, legal, physical and financial threats that intersect with their age and prevent them from participating safely in public and political affairs.



THE POTENTIAL RISKS OF YOUTH ACTIVISM OUTSIDE OF ESTABLISHED YOUTH MOVEMENTS

It has been observed that youth involved in protests or civic disobedience in many countries seem to be getting younger. Especially in repressive regimes, glimpses of potential democratic futures or examples from nearby nations have sparked hope and a drive to be agents of change. While the political awakening of younger individuals is commendable, their activism often operates outside established youth movements or civil society. This detachment makes it challenging to educate them about potential risks and their rights or offer protection against threats, harassment, or more severe consequences.

Digital threats

The online realm offers vast opportunities, especially for the current generation, known as digital natives, who adeptly leverage these platforms, including for political engagement.

However, long gone are the days when the Internet was seen as a peaceful place for people to come together and exchange ideas. Trolling, misinformation, attacks, hate speech and abuse, all with real-life consequences off-line, have made the online world a complex space where many positive things are still possible but where one needs to be constantly vigilant of many serious security concerns.

Youth activists are reporting that due to their activism online, they experience, among other things, cyberbullying attacks, hateful messages, sexist comments, suspension of social media accounts and pressure from different actors to delete content.⁵⁵

Moreover, young activists are increasingly victims of violations of data privacy, surveillance and government interference online. Malware, troll armies doxing, phishing, and Internet shutdowns are increasingly being used in attempts to control what dissenting voices say online and to close civic spaces further.

While many, including the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peace assembly and association and the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, argue that all human rights apply online same as they do offline, in reality, many governments are passing laws and legislation that clamp down on online spaces and raise serious concerns for human rights violations.

54 <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Global-Report-on-Protecting-Young-People-in-Civic-Space.pdf>

55 <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Global-Report-on-Protecting-Young-People-in-Civic-Space.pdf>

Of particular concern is the effect of online violence on young women. A 2021 UN Women study, though highlighting the need for a comprehensive global definition and data on online violence, indicates that women are disproportionately targeted and face severe consequences.⁵⁶

Barriers to Youth Political Participation in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Areas

An estimated 408 million youth, equivalent to 23 percent of the global population aged 15-29, are affected by violence or armed conflict. More so, in many conflict-affected or fragile states a majority of the population, at times up to 60 percent, is considered to be youth.⁵⁷ This comes at a high cost, among others, it is estimated that more than 90 percent of all deaths directly caused by armed conflict are young adult males.⁵⁸ The impact that growing up and living in such conditions has on them is life-altering and long-lasting.

Growing up and living in a conflict-affected area has a significant impact on the growth and development of young people. Exposure to conflict, violence and insecurity, economic deterioration and breakdown of societal structures have a significant and, at times, long-term impact on their psychological well-being. Exposure to hunger and poverty leaves them vulnerable to underdevelopment and disease. At the same time, they are often unable to attend school or gain employment and are at risk of sexual violence or exploitation. Mainly young women are at risk of the latter, while some also face forced marriages or early childbirth.⁵⁹

Growing up amidst a culture of violence and societal polarization based on conflict divides results in young people navigating a fragmented and unstable world, where they are often seen as agitators and sources of volatility. Often unwillingly, this restricts their ability to understand the political realities of their surroundings and further limits their ability for meaningful political participation.

Migration and displacement

In 2021, 11.4 million displaced people were between the age of 15 and 24 years old.⁶⁰ Under universal and regional human rights standards, restated in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, internally displaced persons enjoy the right to political participation on the same basis as their non-displaced compatriots. Being displaced is not sufficient or reasonable cause for denying or restricting the exercise of the right to vote. However, reality in various countries shows that it often is.

Internally displaced youth face many obstacles to participating in decision-making processes, from practical difficulties posed by displacement situations and deliberate policy choices.

56 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/brief-online-and-ict-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-during-covid-19>

57 <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-armed-conflict.pdf>,
https://plan-uk.org/file/youth-action-in-fragile-settings/download?token=qleXw_Mn
<https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/youth-bulge-a-demographic-dividend-or-a-demographic-bomb-in-developing-countries>,
<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/PopAgeStructures%2526CivilConflict12.pdf>,
<https://www.cfr.org/background/effects-youth-bulge-civil-conflicts>

58 <https://www.youth4peace.info/progress-study>

59 <https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/CON71.pdf> and <https://conflictandhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13031-020-00308-7>

60 https://www.un.org/en/content/action-agenda-on-internal-displacement/IDPs_by_age_group.shtml

Data Collection on Youth Political Participation

Collecting and analyzing data is increasingly recognized as a vital step in guiding policy development and informing initiatives. The choice of which data is collected and used is not open-ended but one that impacts strategic decisions and activities to foster the participation of young people. Inclusive policy and programming – ensuring no one is being left behind – demands collecting disaggregated data, allowing governments and organizations to identify who is being left behind and why, identify effective measures to address root causes, and monitor and measure progress.

Increasingly, to monitor the progress of the SDGs, national institutions and international organizations are investing in collecting age-disaggregated data to monitor the progress of youth political participation at various levels.

Indicator 16.7.1 was designed to measure progress towards this target by examining the representation of different population groups in three areas of public life: a) parliaments, b) public service and c) the judiciary.

Indicator 16.7.1a examines the proportions of positions (by age group, sex, persons with disabilities and population groups) in public institutions (national and local), including within the legislatures. For youth, it examines the proportional representation of women and ‘youth’ amongst individuals in decision-making positions in national legislatures.⁶¹

In March 2020, a globally accepted methodology to measure the representation of different population groups in public service was adopted. SDG 16.7.1b examines the extent to which women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other nationally relevant population groups are represented in public service, compared with the proportion of those groups in the general population.

To get a better view of the progress made in youth representation in public services, it was agreed to collect data and report on the representation of age groups below 35 years, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65 and above.⁶²

UNDP is supporting countries in adjusting their data collection process to be able to report on this indicator. For example, UNDP supported Bangladesh to align its national data collection framework with the data requirements for SDG 16.7.1b and to increase awareness of key government stakeholders on the importance of collecting such data.⁶³

61 <https://data.ipu.org/content/parline-global-data-national-parliaments>

62 <https://www.undp.org/policy-centre/oslo/publications/brief-advancing-inclusive-decision-making-sust-dev-representation-public-service-through-sdg-1671b>

63 https://www.sdg16hub.org/system/files/2021-06/Brief_SDG%20Indicator%2016.7.1B_-_%20FINAL%20DRAFT.pdf

PART TWO

From Representation to Inclusion: How Young People Are Participating Politically

Photo: UNDP New York / Freya Morales



Political participation is multifaceted. Whether through voting, protesting, running for office, launching online campaigns, or joining political parties, all these avenues are valid means for young people to engage. Their involvement should be actively encouraged, especially within the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda framework.

When promoting youth political participation, supporters should keep several factors in mind:

- Young people themselves are not a homogeneous group and thus ensuring diversity among and between the young people included is crucial. Too often, urban, highly educated, and affluent young people end up being put forward. While not negating the value of their involvement, young people whose identity intersects with other marginalized communities, such as Indigenous Peoples, people with disabilities, LGTBQ+ and women, should be given additional support to gain their representation.
- The participation of young people in one area of politics opens the door to creating a broader culture of inclusion, and their involvement should be at all times approached with that objective in mind. Their contributions to building peace should be narrated beyond the political party, negotiation table or protest to ensure it furthers the socialization of young people as active contributors to the betterment of society. Notably, the promotion of the political participation of young people should not come at the expense of the inclusion of other key stakeholders, such as women or Indigenous Peoples. Inclusion should not be turned into a competition.
- Young people's right to participation and protection in politics should therefore be considered and prioritized from the outset and in each stage of politics, regardless of what forms it takes.⁶⁴

Some of the ways in which youth are politically participating and some of the challenges and recommendations that come with that are described in the following section.

Youth Participation in Political Processes and Institutions

Despite robust international and regional frameworks to protect the rights of young people to participate in politics, more often than not, they remain excluded and underrepresented in decision-making positions. The exclusion of young people from political decision-making processes does not only mean a violation of their rights, it also undermines the representativeness of political systems.

It also represents a missed opportunity to benefit from youth experiences, technical know-how and innovation to adapt political institutions and processes to new and complex challenges of contemporary society.

Meaningful and sustained youth engagement requires that young people be involved in all aspects of policymaking and decision-making through mechanisms such as youth advisory boards for government entities, youth Parliaments, and regular meetings and dialogue with members of Parliament and local councils. – United Nations World Youth Report 2018⁶⁵

64 <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Global-Policy-Paper-Youth-Participation-in-Peace-Processes.pdf>

65 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2018/12/WorldYouthReport-2030Agenda.pdf>

Youth and Voting

Voter turnout is an essential indicator of citizens' participation. There are several difficulties in comparing voter turnout across generations and regions. Different countries use different definitions of young people; official voter turnout figures are not consistently available from electoral authorities across regions, and collected data is still too often not disaggregated by age. However, data collected through surveys across the world are sketching a discouraging picture. The “UN World Youth Report on Youth Civic Engagement (2016)”⁶⁶ revealed that voter turnout has decreased in all democracies since the 1980s and that the turnout decline is concentrated among youth.

In Europe, according to the “European Youth Forum Report (2015)”⁶⁷, almost 60 percent of eligible voters between 16 or 18 and 24 years old opted not to vote in their country's most recent national election. In Asia, the Asia Barometer Survey (2014)⁶⁸ indicates that youth turnout rate in the region is generally 15-30 percent lower than that of people older than 35. At the same time, findings from the latest Afrobarometer⁶⁹ (November 2021) show that 18 to 35-year-olds are far more likely (35 percent) to have skipped voting than middle-aged (20 percent) and older (16 percent) citizens.

Most countries have a minimum voting age of 18 years. However, in the last ten years, several countries have lowered theirs to 17 or even 16. Today, 17-year-olds can vote – in some or all types of elections – in Greece, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Sudan. In Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Austria, Cuba, Guernsey, Isle of Man, Jersey, Malta, Nicaragua, and Scotland, the voting age was even lowered to 16 for some or all types of elections.⁷⁰

Civic education

Worldwide, civic education initiatives empower young people to participate actively in society. Civic education programmes go beyond voter education and information. They are essential in helping young people understand how the political system works and encourage them to participate in political processes, including voting in elections, expressing their views and opinions, and participating in public debates and discussions about civic and democratic life. They also promote critical thinking, encourage tolerance and inclusivity and provide leadership and civic engagement. It is crucial that those civic education programmes and initiatives are designed by and/or in consultation with young people, as to make them adapted to their needs and aspirations.



Photo: UNDP / Ariana Lindquist

66 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/publications/2016/07/world-youth-report-on-youth-civic-engagement/>

67 <http://tools.youthforum.org/annual-report/index.html>

68 <https://issuu.com/undp/docs/rbap-dg-2014-youth-n-democratic-cit/69>

69 [Africans say governments aren't doing enough to help youth](#)

70 <https://blog.batchgeo.com/voting-age-around-the-world/>

While civic education initiatives are vital to empower young people, harnessing their full potential and guaranteeing their rights to participate in electoral processes, all stakeholders must join forces to create a more enabling environment for youth electoral participation.

To increase the participation of young people, Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) – together with all electoral stakeholders, relevant governmental entities and civil society organizations – need to work together with young people to assess the impact of the electoral processes on the participation of youth. It requires closely examining electoral frameworks and procedures and supporting youth-led initiatives to guarantee that young people can participate meaningfully in designing and implementing electoral processes.



EMPOWERING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES

In Zimbabwe, the Election Resource Centre (ERC) – a think tank and advocacy organization on electoral and democratic issues – works to inform effective citizen participation as well as strengthen policy engagement towards the improvement of the quality of electoral and democratic practices in the country. ERC partnered with WELEAD TRUST – a youth leadership and advocacy organization committed to bringing youth together to co-create a safe space for youth to lead – to gain a better understanding of low voter participation amongst youth.⁷¹ In the new Zimbabwe Electoral Commission strategic plan, youth received a more prominent role, with dedicated activities to engage with young women and men throughout the electoral cycle.

To boost young people’s readiness and enthusiasm to engage in elections constructively, UNDP’s Lebanese Elections Assistance Project (LEAP), in collaboration with the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections, held informational sessions. As part of a broader Get-Out-the-Vote campaign, these sessions covered various aspects of the electoral cycle, such as the new electoral law, the election calendar, necessary voting documents, pre-printed ballot papers, and election observation across multiple universities in Lebanon.⁷²

In Nepal, in 2021, UNDP’s Electoral Support Programme (ESP) mainstreamed youth in its electoral activities. The ESP designed an “Election Question and Answer Book” to strengthen youth electoral knowledge. The ESP conducted a virtual interaction with youth volunteers and the National Youth Council members, encouraging them to register as voters. The ESP also developed “*Nirwachan Siksyā*, a mobile application, a civic and voter education outreach tool targeting the youth.⁷³

The organization of periodic and genuine elections is essential to ensure inclusiveness, prevent electoral-related violence, and build lasting peace. A lack of transparency, misinformation, fraud and corruption lead to increased distrust among voters. Such a loss of trust can have different consequences among youth. Some might lose interest in politics altogether and refuse to further participate in a “spectacle democracy.” Others might get involved with protesting the results.

71 <https://www.peaceinsight.org/en/organisations/election-resource-centre-erc/?location=zimbabwe&theme>

72 <https://lebanon.ec-undp-electoralassistance.org/awareness-sessions-conducted-on-youth-and-elections/>

73 <https://undpnepal.medium.com/how-undp-nepal-mainstreamed-youth-empowerment-in-2021-5d3a4d4ef677>

While most will do so peacefully, elections do at times come with violence before, during and after they are held, and with that, seriously endangering peace and stability.

Mobilizing youth to vote, disseminating political party manifestos and reporting on electoral results from polling states throughout the country is done increasingly through social media platforms. Thus, electoral stakeholders have every interest in closely monitoring the use of social media platforms. Enhanced partnerships with media and tech companies can offer insights into social media usage, aiding in devising strategies to minimize risks of compromising electoral integrity via these platforms.

UN electoral assistance

UN electoral assistance is provided at the specific request of the Member State concerned or based on a mandate from the Security Council or General Assembly. Before assistance is agreed and provided, the UN assesses the needs of the Member State to ensure that the assistance is tailored to the specific needs of the country or situation. As the UN Focal Point for electoral assistance, the Under-Secretary-General (USG) for Political Affairs and head of DPPA approves and determines the parameters of all electoral assistance provided by any UN entity and is supported in that function by the Electoral Assistance Division (EAD). Therefore, the work done by the UN to support youth participation in electoral processes must align with the same requirements and respond to a prior request for electoral assistance.⁷⁴

Youth and electoral observation

The presence of electoral observation missions has become a relatively common practice in elections across the world. Whether organized by international or regional institutions, such as the African Union (AU), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Organization of American States (OAS), the Commonwealth Secretariat, Council of Europe and the European Union, or led by domestic civil society organizations, the objective of such a mission is to provide an independent and impartial assessment of all aspects of an electoral process, including the legal framework, the political context, and the transparency and effectiveness of the electoral preparations.

Electoral observation missions also assess the inclusivity of elections by looking at the participation of various groups in society, such as women, minorities, persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons, and refugees. However, given the limited space for all these subgroups in reports, the analysis and recommendations on youth participation often remain very limited.

International electoral observation missions do not systematically evaluate youth participation throughout the entire electoral cycle. The expansion of international instruments on youth political participation and the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda could accelerate the development of methods to assess youth engagement throughout the electoral cycle more systematically.

74 See UN Electoral Policy Directives and Guidelines. <https://dppa.un.org/en/elections#Electoral%20Resources>

While the role of civil society organizations and domestic observers cannot be overestimated, they often lack the financial and logistical capacity to take part in election observation missions, and observe the elections fully, especially in remote areas. More substantial support and collaboration with civil society organizations and local observers to assess youth engagement throughout the electoral cycle could foster means to make elections more inclusive and peaceful.



EMPOWERING YOUTH ACROSS BORDERS

Voto Joven⁷⁵ is a Venezuelan organization – consisting of university students, community leaders, workers and members of political parties – established in 2009 to increase the participation of young people in electoral processes. The organization promotes electoral registration and participation and monitors the conduct of electoral processes. In 2010, they motivated approximately 750,000 young people to register in the Electoral Registry prior to the parliamentary elections.

Acknowledging Uganda's status as one of the countries with the youngest populations worldwide and valuing the pivotal role of youth in peace and security, the Coalition for Action 1325 collaborates with them to champion peaceful elections as candidates, voters, and electoral observers. In January 2021, drawing inspiration from the women's situation room model, the Coalition established the Youth Electoral Observatory. Managed by young individuals, both female and male, this observatory acts as an early warning and swift response system to counteract violence in the phases leading up to, during, and following elections.

During the 2018 presidential elections in Madagascar, the civil society observatory Safidi mobilized a total of 7,000 observers, with 62 percent of them being young people and 47 percent being women, deployed throughout the country.

Agora Election Observation⁷⁶ organizes Election Observation Missions in Europe, focusing on youth participation in elections and providing a youth perspective on electoral processes by training and deploying young observers across Europe.

Youth and Political Parties

Globally, political parties are experiencing a decline in formal membership. The publication 'New Forms of Political Party Membership: Political Party Innovation' by International IDEA offers insights into this diminishing trend in formal memberships.⁷⁷ Additionally, it delves into the innovative approaches political parties are adopting in response, including the introduction of new membership models.

75 https://www.facebook.com/VotoJovenVE/about/?ref=page_internal

76 Agora Election Observation is the independent successor of the AEGEE Election Observation, which has organized Election Observation Missions since 2014. <https://www.projects.aegge.org/eop/about/>

77 <https://undpnepal.medium.com/how-undp-nepal-mainstreamed-youth-empowerment-in-2021-5d3a4d4ef677>

While global data disaggregated by age on political party membership and activism is lacking, the limited research available confirms that young people are following the general trend of decrease in political party membership and general participation with and in political parties.

To get a sense of the level of participation of young people in civic society, the 2022 Flash Eurobarometer 502 – Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth,⁷⁸ published by the European Commission, surveyed the degree of participation over the preceding months of 15 to 30 years old in various organizations ranging from sports clubs, youth clubs, cultural, environmental to human rights organizations. Of all the organizations listed, with a participation of only 8 percent, young people were the least likely to have participated in a political organization or a political party.

New opportunities for political engagement and activism outside of political parties, the rise of social media and online activism, the perceived lack of efficacy of traditional political parties, and a lack of representation of youth in political party structures make political parties less attractive for young people. If political party leaders are taking young people seriously, they must adapt to these new realities and reflect on new ways to engage with youth. Political parties, acknowledging the importance of engaging with youth in a structural manner, are reflecting on new forms of membership, reaching out to youth by establishing youth wings and mentorship programmes and investing in online engagement with young people.

Youth Representation in Parliaments

Since 2014, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has been gathering data on youth participation in parliaments. This decade-long effort has yielded information on parliamentarians’ ages, the presence of young parliamentarian networks, caucuses, and parliamentary groups addressing youth issues.



Photo: UNDP New York / Freya Morales

78 See UN Electoral Policy Directives and Guidelines. <https://dppa.un.org/en/elections#Electoral%20Resources>

The recent IPU 2021 Youth Participation in National Parliaments Report⁷⁹ offers a nuanced perspective on youth involvement in Parliaments.

On the positive side, there's a noticeable uptick in Parliaments featuring networks of young parliamentarians, specialized caucuses, and committees championing youth-related public policy issues. From the 2021 IPU survey respondents:

- 16 percent had networks of young parliamentarians.
- 16 percent established a caucus of young parliamentarians.
- 21 percent maintained a caucus centred on youth concerns.

Additionally, youth parliaments are present in 56 percent of the surveyed nations.

Conversely, the growth rate for young parliamentarian numbers is tepid. IPU's 2020 data highlights the continued underrepresentation of young people. The specifics for 2020 are:

- A mere 2.6 percent of parliamentarians were under 30.
- 17.5 percent were below the age of 40.
- 30.2 percent were younger than 45.

Though male MPs predominate across all age brackets, younger MPs tend to exhibit a better gender balance relative to their older peers. Younger age groups boast higher female representation. This gender representation wanes in the senior age categories, reaching its nadir in the eldest cohort.⁸⁰

Youth Councils: Potential Pathways to Genuine Political Engagement

Youth councils represent a contemporary method of engaging young people in the decision-making process. They often come under the guise of formalized entities backed by a regulatory structure. These councils can exist at various levels, from local to international, and can be affiliated with governments, NGOs, educational institutions, and other organizations.

The core strength of youth councils lies in their potential to:

- 1. Facilitate meaningful engagement:** Through these councils, young people are often granted a genuine opportunity to voice their perspectives and contribute to discussions that shape policy and societal direction.
- 2. Empowerment and skill development:** Being a part of such councils can provide young individuals with the tools and understanding they need to navigate the often-complex world of policy and governance. They gain experience in negotiation, debate, advocacy, and leadership.
- 3. Inclusion:** Ideally, youth councils are designed to be representative, ensuring that diverse voices within the youth community are heard from various socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, and other demographics.

⁷⁹ https://www.facebook.com/VotoJovenVE/about/?ref=page_internal

⁸⁰ Agora Election Observation is the independent successor of the AEGEE Election Observation, which has organized Election Observation Missions since 2014. <https://www.projects.aegge.org/eop/about/>

However, the efficacy and integrity of youth councils can sometimes be compromised:

1. **Potential for manipulation:** There are instances in certain regions where these platforms become co-opted or heavily influenced by political parties or other vested interests. This can dilute the genuine voice of the youth and divert the council's trajectory towards that of the influencing party's agenda.
2. **Lack of inclusivity:** Without policies promoting inclusiveness and internal democratic governance, these councils can end up being echo chambers that cater only to a specific subset of the youth population.
3. **Under-resourcing:** A youth council without proper funding, support, or channels to engage in genuine advocacy can end up being a symbolic entity rather than a functional one.

For youth councils to genuinely act as catalysts for positive change and to amplify the voice of young people, several critical ingredients are needed:

- **Autonomy and independence:** Councils need to operate independently of political or other external influences.
- **Transparency:** Clear operational guidelines, open elections or appointments, and regular communication with the public can increase trust and legitimacy.
- **Proper funding:** Adequate resources ensure that the council can operate effectively, engage in research, run programs, and advocate with genuine impact.
- **Channels of advocacy:** Establishing direct lines of communication and collaboration with governance institutions can empower these councils to play an active role in the formulation of youth-centric policies.
- **Capacity building:** Regular training sessions and workshops can equip the council members with the necessary skills to be effective representatives and advocates.

In conclusion, while the concept of youth councils offers a promising avenue for the enhanced political participation of young people, their successful implementation requires careful planning, genuine commitment to youth empowerment, and continuous oversight to ensure they remain true to their intended purpose.

Local youth councils

To bolster democracies and devise policies tailored to the needs of the younger generation, it's pivotal for young voices to be included in decision-making at every level, especially locally. Even though challenges persist in local governance participation, many initiatives highlight the active engagement of youth in local councils. These councils, established and managed by the youth for their peers, empower young individuals to express their perspectives and influence policy and decision-making processes.



Photo:
UNDP New York /
Freya Morales



LOCAL TO NATIONAL: FOSTERING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE FROM PALESTINE TO BRAZIL

In Palestine, starting in 2008, with support from USAID, Youth Shadow Local Councils were created to follow local government leaders to learn about good governance practices. Over the years, the councils have gone beyond engaging youth in citizen participation activities and increasing awareness of local government issues. Since 2014, the shadow youth councils became Local Youth Councils, and as of 2016, 20 local youth councils were installed in the Westbank, involving 17,000 young men and women. The Youth Councils have had an impact on four levels: empowerment of young men and women; increased recognition of young people as active contributors to the well-being of their community; partnership building between communities; and the creation of a national network for youth networking, local governance, civic engagement and youth policy.

In Salvador, Brazil, the Municipal Youth Council of Salvador represents the young population in the Municipality. It is a permanent collegiate body linked to the Municipal Secretariat for Policies for Women, Children and Youth, with an advisory and supervisory function. The Council also includes representatives from religious, cultural, racial and LGBTQ+ minorities, artists, entrepreneurs, political parties, and people with disabilities or reduced mobility. Representatives of the Council have sought to establish a municipal environment conducive to youth engagement on diverse issues and themes and promote connections with other councils and youth networks in the region.⁸¹

National Youth Councils

In numerous countries, various youth organizations collaborate to form National Youth Councils. They aim to influence the development of public youth policies. When these councils are representative, democratic, and operate independently, they stand as the most prominent and credible bodies representing young people's perspectives at the national level.



Photo: UNDP / Getty

81 <https://www.c40.org/what-we-do/building-a-movement/global-youth-mayors-forum/playbook/>



INCLUSION IN ACTION: THE EXPANSIVE REACH OF YOUTH COUNCILS IN DENMARK AND IRELAND

For the Danish Youth Council (DUF), inclusion is not an empty concept. It brings together 77 member organizations covering 600,000 individual members. These are very different types of youth organizations varying from political, scout, religious, student, exchange, social, disabled and cultural youth organizations, covering almost all areas of voluntary organizational life in Denmark.⁸²

In Ireland, The National Youth Council is a membership-based organization representing the shared interests of voluntary youth organizations. Youth organizations are joining forces to advocate on issues that impact the lives of young people. Furthermore, the Council promotes the development of evidence-based, high-quality specialist youth work practice and builds member organizations' capacity. The Council counts 1,400 staff supporting 40,000 volunteers to work with 380,000 young men and women.⁸³

Regional Youth Councils

Poverty, migration, conflict, violence, corruption, and youth unemployment do not stop at national borders and require regional responses. To influence policies at the regional level, National Youth Councils organize themselves into Regional Youth Councils. Regional Youth Councils also form essential platforms for exchanging knowledge and experiences and create a safe place for discussing themes that are too sensitive to be brought forward by youth at the national level.

The Caribbean Regional Youth Council,⁸⁴ for example, brings national youth councils from the Caribbean together and works towards regional representation, integration and cooperation.

Youth Activism – Youth Civic Engagement

Over the last decade, young people worldwide have been mobilizing and taking to the streets, demanding more inclusive and representative political systems. This surge in youth activism may be in direct response to their perceived exclusion from formal political decision-making. According to data collected and analyzed by the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), youth and youth groups were a major demographic and political component of protests in 2019. Survey respondents identified youth as part of protests in 93 percent of countries and as the primary part in 65 percent of countries. Young women and men, along with middle-aged women and men, were the demographics most likely to lead protests in 2019 by a significant margin.

82 https://en.duf.dk/fileadmin/user_upload/Editor/documents/DUF_materialeler/DUF_Publikationer/DUF_2019_Meaningful_Youth_Participation_Towards_2030_and_Beyond.pdf

83 Example: Ireland. <https://www.youth.ie/about/>

84 <https://caricom.org/institutions/caribbean-regional-youth-council/>



THE RISE OF YOUTH ACTIVISM FOR DEMOCRACY AND JUSTICE FROM ASIA TO AFRICA

In recent years, Asia has seen the rise of an informal and transnational network of young activists, each engaged in their struggles for democracy in their cities and countries, often referred to as the Milk Tea Alliance. Predominantly consisting of young people from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand and Myanmar, they have exchanged tactics, expressed solidarity with each other and raised awareness about the needs and aspirations of individual youth leaders across borders. A broader coalition of youth movements from countries such as South Korea, the Philippines, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Belarus and Iran have now joined the ranks in their push for change.

An estimated 15 million to 26 million people, including many young people, participated in the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests in the United States, making it one of the largest movements in history.

In April 2019, Omar al-Bashir was deposed by mass youth demonstrations in Sudan. Following Al-Bashir's departure, protests continued against the transitional military government.

In 2019, under pressure from months of youth-led street protests, Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika resigned, and protesters continued to demand the end of military control over the country.

Since 2019 in Venezuela, students have been taking to the streets to protest social and economic injustice. Many young people are engaged in movements to build a culture of peace in a militarized society. "United in Action" organizes dialogues between migrants and local communities to reduce tensions between them. The Laboratory of Peace trains and coordinates citizens to take nonviolent action for democracy.

Since 2012, the youth movement "Lucha" has been protesting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, starting in Goma, to demand fundamental rights, social justice, and democracy. The movement inspired many other youths in Burkina Faso, Senegal and South Africa.

Youth organizations and activists work together both on and offline, regionally and globally, to make their demands for democracy and human rights heard. Given the risks this brings to many of them, it is critical for national, regional and global allies to support their rights to freedom of expression and protection.



Photo: UNDP / Fay Daoud



ELEVATING YOUTH ADVOCACY: GLOBAL INITIATIVES FOR EMPOWERMENT AND PARTICIPATION

To protect young people from repression, members of the Millennials Movement, invited to the ECOSOC youth forums, brought forward the politically sensitive statements of young people from other countries in Latin America. In this way, young people made their voices heard without endangering themselves in their own country.

In Ukraine, UNDP's partnership with the Ministry of Youth and Sports within the context of the Youth Worker Programme focused on three main aspects of youth empowerment: youth engagement in civic life, youth impact on democratization and human rights, and youth engagement in policy- and decision-making at the subnational level. A holistic approach to youth empowerment, the three facets of the programme all contributed to the development of the Government's "Youth of Ukraine 2021– 2025" programme and did so using a multitude of platforms, including in-person gatherings at various levels, online platforms, in-person training, and interactive studying including through video games. It provided critical insights into the benefits of approaching holistic, multistakeholder and multiplatform approaches to youth empowerment using a combination of top-down and bottom-up initiatives.

The evaluation of the programme revealed that it made significant contributions to the professionalization of youth workers, especially in softer aspects like fostering a professional community. The platform effectively raised awareness about the need to provide quality opportunities for youth workers. However, there is still a need for more concerted efforts to translate these achievements into enhanced youth engagement in Ukraine.

Youth activism and meaningful participation in the public sphere also translates into climate action and climate activism. The UN support global efforts to meet the Paris Agreement goals and the Sustainable Development Goals and recognize the crucial role that young people play in advocating for their rights to a healthy environment and solutions to the climate crisis.

The Youth4Climate solutions initiative,⁸⁵ a global initiative co-led by the Government of Italy and UNDP aims at supporting more dedicated actions to ensure effective, active, and meaningful youth participation in environmental forums and decision-making processes, with regards to the climate crisis.

Youth in Politics in Fragile and Conflict Affected Contexts

Violence, armed conflict, and insecurity deeply and lastingly impact societies. In certain fragile and conflict-affected societies, a pervasive culture of violence can distort political processes. For example, some societies might normalize the use of arms as a route to political involvement.

Given that violence and armed conflict permeate every facet of life and disrupt the social fabric, it's unsurprising that numerous young people feel compelled to engage in politics. Notably, the vast majority choose non-violent avenues of participation.

85 <https://community.youth4climate.info/dashboard/solutions>



However, in some circumstances, young people are forced to join or be recruited by criminal, terrorist or armed groups to participate in conflicts, particularly young men. These incidents can be influenced by gender perspectives within society, which are shaped by cultural and regional understandings of concepts such as masculinity and security.⁸⁶

As outlined in the sustaining peace agenda, peacebuilding is an inherently political process aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, recurrence or continuation of conflict. Young people have a critical role to play throughout the process, including in decision-making processes, from negotiation and prevention of violence to peace agreements.

Ongoing Violence or Armed Conflict

When it comes to the political participation of young people in conflict-affected or fragile states, the more significant majority of young people will choose to participate through non-violent means. They might decide to join the youth wing of a political party, form a youth movement, or engage with local powerbrokers. Others might create or participate in community-based groups and organizations attempting to contribute to peacebuilding.

That said, in areas affected by violence or armed conflict, a substantial number, if not the majority, of combatants tend to be youth, predominantly young men.⁸⁷ Reasons for which they will join vary significantly from person to person. To fully grasp their needs and motivations, it's crucial to delve into why young people align with armed forces or non-state armed groups, recognizing the differing experiences of young men and women. Consequently, applying a youth perspective to any conflict analysis or stakeholder assessment is essential. This includes gathering data segregated by age and gender as a standard practice.

While the reasons for why young people decide to take up arms vary widely, becoming a combatant in itself is a political act. The empowerment and altered identity that comes with taking up a weapon goes far beyond the mere practical implications of power it gives them, it alters the stance they can claim for themselves as opposed to that traditionally assigned to them in the hierarchy of society. Notably, how this unfolds varies significantly between young men and women.⁸⁸

Becoming politically involved in a conflict affected or fragile state comes with significant complications and risks. In many conflict affected or fragile contexts, formal or central government structures are weak or do not function, particularly in remote or isolated areas. Political processes are not the same in all contexts, and alternative or communal political structures can be predominant, often led by community or traditional leaders.

Support to young people actively looking to influence political structures and power brokers in relation to peace and security should be context-specific and locally driven. Those supporting from abroad should be humble in their ability to give advice. They should – led by the young people and broader local community – question all their assumptions of conflict and political dynamics

86 https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Child-Victims/Handbook_on_Children_Recruited_and_Exploited_by_Terrorist_and_Violent_Extremist_Groups_the_Role_of_the_Justice_System.E.pdf

87 <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Practice%20Note%20Young%20Peoples%20Participation%20in%20Peacebuilding.pdf>

88 As highlighted by various experts interviewed for this Guide.

and how politics and political participation work, including the accepted place, role and rights of young people, and apply a Do No Harm and conflict-sensitive approach to any efforts that involve youth political participation or the YPS Agenda.

This does not mean young people should stay out of politics in conflict affected or fragile contexts. On the contrary, their involvement might be more crucial there than anywhere else. However, both the young people and those supporting them should be aware of the risks of their engagement, including their physical security, threats to their human rights, digital security and overall mental well-being.



BALANCED ENGAGEMENT OF YOUTH IN CONFLICT ZONES

One challenge that presents itself when engaging with young people in a conflict-affected or fragile state is a situation in which young people supported by international organizations or agencies are perceived to be aligned with one of the parties in a given conflict, including but not limited to situations in which such a party might be categorized as a terrorist group or is accused of perpetrating crimes against humanity or other atrocities. If, in such instances, an organization or agency decides to continue to support a given young person, this puts them at risk of being criticized for being associated with questionable actors, while refraining from doing so might lead to questions of partiality. It is crucial for organizations or agencies involved in such situations to be aware of this risk and to have clear and transparent regulations in place if such concerns arise.

Peace Processes or Negotiations

Over the last couple of decades, hundreds of peace agreements have been signed.⁸⁹ Many of these did not last, not in the least due to the exclusion of young people, as well as other crucial segments of society, such as women, Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

The meaningful inclusion of young people is increasingly seen as a way to bolster the legitimacy and sustainability of peace processes. In many conflict-affected areas, young people constitute a significant portion of the population. Ensuring their support for a peace process greatly enhances the prospects for lasting peace. As they comprise a majority in many of the countries or regions involved, there is both a political, a human-rights-based and demographic imperative for this. Moreover, in many situations, young people form a large segment of combatants, whether by choice or circumstance. This underscores the need to incorporate them effectively if a ceasefire is to be achieved.⁹⁰



Photo: Office of the UN Youth Envoy / Joel Sheakoski

89 <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Palik%2C%20Rustad%2C%20Methi%20-%20Conflict%20Trends%20A%20Global%20Overview%201946-2019%2C%20PRIO%20Paper%202020.pdf>

90 https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/YPPP-Symposium-Summary-Report_Helsinki-March2019-Final.pdf

To optimize the peace process, it's essential to recognize young people as positive contributors rather than potential disruptors. This perspective values their energy, creativity, and innovative capacities. Instead of seeing them primarily through a lens of volatility – a common but narrow view – it's crucial to adopt both practical and human-rights-based approaches to their involvement. To understand the roles and impacts of young people in peace processes, their involvement has been segmented into three categories, delineated by their proximity to official negotiations:

- **In the room:** This refers to direct youth participation within formal peace negotiations and dialogues.
- **Around the room:** This captures those young individuals who, while not directly part of the negotiations, remain closely connected and can influence or enter the room through various means.
- **Outside the room:** This encompasses youth who participate via informal routes and alternative methods, staying engaged even if they're not directly connected to the formal peace process.⁹¹

While youth participation at all stages of a negotiation – inside, around, and outside the room – is crucial and should be integrated, it's particularly vital to have them actively involved at the negotiation table. This ensures that their needs and interests are addressed in peace agreements, bolstering the prospects for sustained peace.

However, it's essential to recognize that proximity to the negotiation table doesn't necessarily equate to influence. A young observer inside the room might exert less sway over the negotiation's outcome than an external youth leader spearheading a community movement.



CHARTING THE COURSE: THE GLOBAL STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN FOR YOUTH INCLUSION IN PEACE PROCESSES

In January 2022, the inaugural global strategic action plan for incorporating youth in peace processes, titled “We Are In This Together,” was unveiled. This five-year plan aims to transition from the “why” to the “how” of including youth in peace initiatives. It was conceived following the 2019 release of the policy paper “We are Here: An integrated approach to youth-inclusive peace processes” and the “First International Symposium on Youth Political Participation in Peace Processes.” This strategy serves as a roadmap to foster peace and mediation processes more attuned to and inclusive of young voices.

The strategy builds on the understanding that traditional models of peace processes – elite-centered, exclusionary, short-term focused, and male-dominated – require a significant shift to address today's interconnected conflict issues. Young people's meaningful participation, representation, and engagement in the design and outcomes of peace agreements are fundamental for inclusive peace to sustain and endure.

The five-year Strategy builds on four interconnected pillars of Institutionalization and Policy, Capacity Strengthening, Knowledge Solutions, and Community of Practice and Partnerships. In addition, the strategy advocates for the protection and security of young people in spaces of participation, both in shaping and implementing any agreement. Recognizing the gendered dimensions of peace processes, the strategy furthermore underscores the need to invest in young women and young men equally.⁹²

91 <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Global-Policy-Paper-Youth-Participation-in-Peace-Processes.pdf>

92 <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/YPS-five-year-strategic-action-plan.pdf>

Post Conflict and Transitional Justice

Peace agreements are only the start of the road to lasting, positive peace. The validity of the documents signed at the end of negotiations and dialogues is determined by their implementation. To some extent, the same can be said for the participation of young people. Excluding young people from post-conflict political processes can significantly jeopardize the prospects of sustainable peace.

Young people, in particular young men, often represent the majority of combatants.⁹³ However, this youth dimension is often overlooked when it comes to the design and implementation of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR) processes. Such lack of a youth lens overlooks the particular experiences of young former combatants and their specific needs.

Young women though make up for an estimated 10-30 percent of armed forces and groups across the world.⁹⁴ Their experience and needs will differ even further from their male counterparts and should be acknowledged, particularly when it comes to their vulnerability to gender-based violence, unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.⁹⁵

Young people associated with armed forces or armed groups often have no education or discernible employable skills to fall back on. They regularly find themselves with lasting remnants of war, like trauma or drug addiction. Or find themselves being ostracized by their communities. Merely offering them their due mobilization package upon handing in their gun leaves them vulnerable to joining or being recruited by other armed or criminal groups.⁹⁶

Moreover, at times, the transition back to being a ‘mere’ young person is not so straightforward. There is a strong gender dimension to this too related to views on concepts such as masculinity and security. Expecting young people to hand over this power and meekly take up their allotted place in society is a risky leap of faith.



Photo: UNDP / UNFPA / UNICEF / Aurélia Rusek

93 <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Practice%20Note%20Young%20Peoples%20Participation%20in%20Peacebuilding.pdf>

94 <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Practice%20Note%20Young%20Peoples%20Participation%20in%20Peacebuilding.pdf>

95 <https://www.unodc.org/modules/IDDRS-5.20-Youth-and-DDR.pdf>

96 <https://www.unodc.org/modules/IDDRS-5.20-Youth-and-DDR.pdf>



Ensuring the political participation of young former combatants, or at the minimum, a youth lens, in the design and implementation of DDR and SSR processes is, therefore, both a practical necessity and a means to enhance long-term effectiveness and sustainable peace.

However, such inclusion should not come to represent or be interpreted as a glamourization or prioritization of those young people who became engaged or associated with an armed group over those who did not. In all conflict-affected or fragile contexts, those that did not become involved in the violence far outnumber those that did. The political involvement of this broader community of young people in DDR and SSR processes should be a centrepiece of a needed whole-of-society approach.

Similarly, transitional justice and reconciliation processes should be encouraged to proactively and meaningfully include young people, whether through formal state-led initiatives or grass-roots community projects. Dealing with the past and accepting the lived experiences of conflict, including the involvement of youth both as perpetrators and victims, ensuring justice prevails, but also reimagining relations and restoring trust, are essential puzzle pieces to rebuilding a society from the remnants of war and cannot be realized without putting young people front and centre in all that is done to accomplish this.

To be able to do so meaningfully, long-term funding is crucial. More often than not, support for peace processes decreases with the signing of peace agreements and possibly the first few months or years after that. However, to ascertain lasting positive peace, involvement and support for post-conflict societies, especially for those efforts supporting and addressing youth political participation, need to be continued long after that.



YOUTH ADVOCACY IN ACTION: UPHOLDING THE PEACE AGREEMENT IN COLOMBIA

The peace processes in Colombia, which resulted in a final agreement in 2016, has been hailed as one of the most inclusive negotiations in history and was inclusive, at least to some extent, of young people. However, the real challenge lies in the execution of this ambitious agreement, especially concerning the reintegration of ex-combatants, which has been notably slow.

In response, Colombian youth have taken a proactive role. Social movements like Paz a la Calle (Peace on the Streets) and Defendemos La Paz (Let's Defend Peace) have actively promoted peace negotiations, agreements, and ongoing implementation. These youth-led initiatives, often pursued at significant personal risk given the uptick in harassment and human rights violations against young activists in recent years, have been instrumental in bolstering public support for the peace agreement.

Nonetheless, to fully achieve not only the goals outlined in the peace agreement but also a sustainable peace in Colombia, it's imperative to further recognize, facilitate, and amplify the role of young individuals in upcoming DDR initiatives.⁹⁷

97 <https://www.stimson.org/2020/disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration-programming-with-colombias-youth/>



NAVIGATING THE PERILOUS WATERS OF YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN PEACE AND SECURITY

Political participation around issues of peace and security, particularly in but not limited to conflict-affected and fragile states, is dangerous. It comes with a multitude of risks ranging from being ostracized, victimized by smear campaigns, online bullying or direct violence.

While the political participation of young people around peace and security is crucial and should be prioritized, this should be done with full recognition and awareness of these risks, and young people should be, to the extent possible, prepared for and protected from being harmed. Attention should also be given to situations in which the alignment or engagement with international organizations or institutions might put young people at risk of retaliation or reprisals from local adversaries.

In doing so, a holistic approach to safety and security should be sought, taking into consideration not just their physical security but also the protection and guarantee of their human rights, digital security and mental well-being.

Youth Participation in Deliberative Processes

“ We need to make our democracies more inclusive. This requires bold and innovative reforms, such as selecting parliaments by lot instead of election, in the way many jury systems work. This would prevent the formation of self-serving and self-perpetuating political classes. ”
– Kofi Annan⁹⁸

According to the 2020 OECD research titled “Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave,” there has been a marked increase since 2010 in the use of deliberative processes by public authorities to bolster citizen participation in decision-making.⁹⁹ These initiatives span all government levels, with a notable prevalence at the local level. They primarily address issues that tangibly affect citizens’ daily lives and topics where individuals can readily share their perspectives and experiences.

Deliberative democracy uses a random selection process of participants to give everyone in society equal opportunity to participate, meaning that if random selection methods are correctly applied society should be represented in all its diversity. Old and young people, men and women, citizens with high and low educational levels and from different ethnic and societal backgrounds will have equal opportunities to participate. Random selection helps to bring diverse groups, opinions, and interests together.

Given the exponential use of deliberative processes for public decision-making, it is evident there is a need to conduct more research and analyse the impact such initiatives have on the political participation of young people, including those who are disengaged from politics.

98 <http://www.g1000.org>

99 <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/339306da-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/339306da-en>

When designing and implementing deliberative processes, there are possibilities to ensure the inclusion of young people from various backgrounds. Measures to ensure such diversity include targeted activities to reach out to (challenging to reach) young people, reserving a percentage of seats for young people, and, if needed, providing additional support to engage with young people who do not feel confident to participate in political processes. By designing and implementing youth-sensitive deliberative procedures, meaningful participation of young people with different backgrounds can be obtained, gaining policies that consider the needs of various groups in society.



STANFORD UNIVERSITY HOSTS DELIBERATIVE DISCUSSIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Stanford University, in collaboration with the Berggruen Institute and Equal Citizens, hosted a virtual event that united 1,500 young participants for democratic deliberation. Spanning two days, attendees engaged in focused discussions in small groups via a specialized online platform crafted by the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University. They explored various proposals encompassing climate change, electoral reform, national service programmes, COVID relief, and the potential rise in the minimum wage.¹⁰⁰



Photo: North South Center of the Council of Europe

100 <https://haas.stanford.edu/news/more-35-colleges-and-universities-take-part-nations-largest-deliberative-democracy-event-young>

PART THREE

Partnering with Political Actors as a Powerful Way to Advance the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda and Inclusive Peacebuilding

Photo: Office of the UN Youth Envoy / Joel Sheakoski



Violence, armed conflict, and the absence of positive peace can profoundly impact every facet of society, affecting both public and private life. The intrinsic links between peace, security, development, democracy, and the fulfillment of human rights necessitate a comprehensive and simultaneous pursuit of these objectives by all countries. Crucially, this calls for a whole-of-society approach, ensuring the engagement and inclusion of all societal segments. Perhaps most importantly, it underscores the need for the meaningful inclusion of young people in these efforts.

Peace and security are often dictated by politics and power, creating challenges for young people seeking to engage in these areas. And so, the young people attempting to participate politically in peace and security – whether in elections, through parliaments or by taking to the streets to protest – find themselves confronted by closed doors or tokenistic inclusion.

That reality is in line with the dominant and harmful narrative of young people as being inherently violent and easily radicalized. Whether participating in elections, through parliaments, or in street protests, young people often encounter closed doors or are offered only tokenistic inclusion. This situation aligns with the prevailing and detrimental narrative that portrays young people as inherently violent and easily radicalized.¹⁰¹ Such a misconception not only becomes a significant barrier to youth political participation in peace and security matters but also leads to additional obstacles, such as repressive or discriminatory legislation. These stereotypical views are heavily influenced by gender, depicting young men as violent aggressors and young women as passive victims of armed conflict.

To promote the YPS agenda young people must have key allies. In the following section, we explore how various stakeholders can become allies for young people to advance peace and security.

Parliaments

Parliaments are often overlooked as crucial players in advancing the YPS Agenda. However, around the world, parliaments are establishing new initiatives to change this by engaging with and bringing on board young citizens.

Getting more young people into parliament

“ You need more young MPs in parliament on the inside who will advocate on behalf of young people. The more you get young people into the parliament, the more you will get the voice of youth inside the parliament. Discussing or reaching them is easier than older members of the parliament. ”

– Zied Touzani, Founder and President of Tun’Act¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ <https://undocs.org/en/S/2018/86>, https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2018-04/16.%20TP_Youth%20affected%20by%20violent%20conflict_IEP.pdf, <https://www.gppac.net/beyond-lion-or-lamb-stereotype-youth-conflict>, <https://nomadit.co.uk/conference/ecas7/p/5166>

¹⁰² Youth Participation in Parliaments and Peace and Security A contribution from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) to the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security mandated by Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015).

To increase the number of young candidates and youth representation in parliament, it is vital to scrutinize how legislative frameworks, policies and practices from political parties and financial regulations might impact the opportunities for youth to run for office and get elected.

Impact of electoral systems on youth political representation

The choice of electoral system can significantly influence youth political representation. Electoral systems or voting systems are sets of rules that determine how elections are conducted and how their results are determined. Three main types are widely used globally: 1) plurality/majority electoral systems, 2) proportional electoral systems, and 3) mixed electoral systems.¹⁰³

The United Nations does not endorse any specific system, and Member States have the freedom to choose their system as long as it aligns with international obligations.¹⁰⁴

Although the United Nations does not promote any specific electoral system, the IPU report highlights different electoral systems presenting varying obstacles and frameworks for young people's participation.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, the selection of a particular electoral system can significantly affect the opportunities available for young individuals to engage in politics. When designing or reforming electoral systems, countries need to consider how to enhance youth political participation.

Quotas

The successful implementation of gender quotas in increasing women's representation in parliament is evident in countries where such measures have been aptly applied. In Mali, for example, the percentage of women parliamentarians tripled, from 9.5 percent to nearly 28 percent, after introducing a new quota law.¹⁰⁶



Photo: Office of the UN Youth Envoy / Joel Sheakoski

103 See United Nations, Policy Directive 16 September 2013, UN support to electoral system design and reform. https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/ead_pd_un_support_to_electoral_system_design_and_reform_20130917_e.pdf

104 See United Nations, Policy Directive 16 September 2013, UN support to electoral system design and reform. https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/ead_pd_un_support_to_electoral_system_design_and_reform_20130917_e.pdf

105 See IPU Youth Report. <https://www.ipu.org/files/ipuyouthreportenlrpdf>

106 <https://www.ipu.org/youth2021>

In recent times, some countries have begun to introduce quotas for youth, although these are still less common than quotas for women. Such quotas can be categorized into three main groups: reserved seats, legislated candidate quotas and political party quotas. Reserved Seats are parliamentary seats designated explicitly for youth representation, established by law as a fundamental part of the electoral process. Legislated candidate quotas require political parties to include a minimum number of young candidates in their electoral lists. Their effectiveness depends on factors like candidate placement and the electoral system. In countries lacking legal mandates, political parties may voluntarily introduce quotas to ensure the representation of youth.

Rwanda, Morocco, Kenya and Uganda have reserved seats¹⁰⁷ for youth representatives. The Philippines, Tunisia, Gabon, Kyrgyzstan and Egypt have legislated candidate quotas¹⁰⁸ for youth. And Nicaragua, Romania, Mexico, Montenegro, Viet Nam, El Salvador, Sweden, Mozambique, Cyprus, Lithuania, Hungary, Senegal, Angola, Turkey, Croatia, Israel, Switzerland and Ukraine have youth political party quotas.^{109 110}

While there is limited research on the effectiveness, interrelation, and impact of various quota systems, it is evident that a comprehensive assessment of their design and implementation is imperative to create a real impact on youth political representation. This assessment should pay special attention to the potential impact on women's representation.



EMPOWERING THE VOICE OF YOUTH: THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT OF YOUTH QUOTAS IN YEMEN'S NATIONAL DIALOGUE

In the lead-up to establishing the national dialogue process in Yemen in 2011, young people were an essential part of the grassroots protests. In part due to this, parties agreed to create a 20 percent youth quota for the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), which set out to draft the new constitution.

By collaborating – including in their voting – as a bloc, as well as strategic alliances with other caucus, such as women and civil society representatives – they managed to attain a significant role and power in decision-making of the NDC.

While not without its challenges, the overall impact of their role and agency contributed to a transformation in the prevailing mindset about youth political participation, including the different roles youth have in conflict settings ranging from combatants to victims, survivors and peacebuilders.¹¹¹

107 Reserved seats: parliamentary seats specially set aside for youth representatives. They are reserved by law and are an integral part of the electoral process.

108 Legislated candidate quotas: political parties are legally required to have a minimum number of young people on their roster, typically as part of party lists.

109 Individual parties adopt their own quotas, without any legal requirement.

110 <https://www.ipu.org/youth2021>

111 See "Yemen's Independent Youth and Their Role in the National Dialogue Conference": https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2013C23_wzr.pdf

Given the fact that donors, international organizations and various governments are increasingly putting young people at the centre of their actions to build inclusive, safe and peaceful societies, it is timely to pool resources from all actors involved in advancing youth political participation together and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experiences on the introduction of the youth quota. Joint efforts by various stakeholders can, as the success of women quotas has proven, support the establishment of a more enabling environment for young people. In doing so, it would be imperative to draw out lessons learned of instances in which there was success and closely monitor the implementation.

Interviewees for this Guide mentioned that quotas for young people seem not always to level the playing field for young people with limited financial resources, as reality shows that political parties too often favour young people who have the financial capacity to contribute to the campaigns of political parties. Therefore, while introducing quota systems will help to get more young people into parliament, it will be vital to design quota systems and introduce temporary special measures, in a way that leads their presence to be meaningful and to ensure diversity among them, particularly prioritizing representation from youth with limited financial means and political networks.

Regulating political finance to level the playing field

Differences in access to financial resources create an uneven playing field for those interested in entering politics and hinder young people's meaningful participation. Money becomes highly problematic when there are no legal frameworks or mechanisms to control donations and expenditures of political parties and candidates.

The United Nations Convention against Corruption¹¹² outlines the basic concept of political finance transparency in article 7.3, which calls for states to *'consider taking appropriate legislative and administrative measures (..) to enhance transparency in the funding of candidatures for elected public office and, where applicable, the funding of political parties'*.

The lack of financial regulations and the high and escalating costs for nomination fees and campaigning are limiting candidacies to wealthier individuals and organizations. Cultural and social barriers further complicate youth access to campaign financing. Some states, however, are revising legislation to remove such financial barriers. They are earmarking subsidies for youth and introducing targeted public funding for political parties. In Kenya, according to Article 26.1 of the Political Parties Act 2011,¹¹³ at least 30 percent of direct public funding provided should be used for "promoting the representation in Parliament and the County Assemblies of women, persons with disabilities, youth, ethnic and other minorities, and marginalized communities." According to Article 18 of the 1475 Bill (2011) of Colombia, public funding must be earmarked for the "effective inclusion of women, youth, and ethnic minorities in a political process."¹¹⁴

As nomination fees for candidates remain often too high for young people, some countries are lowering the nomination fees for young candidates. For example, in the Gambia, for the 2021 elections, nomination fees for youth (as for women and persons with disabilities) were lowered for the

112 <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CAC/>

113 <http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/PoliticalPartiesAct.pdf>

114 <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/reforming-political-finance-for-more-diversity-in-political-office.pdf>

Presidential, National Assembly, Mayoral, and Council elections.¹¹⁵ In Kenya, for the 2022 elections, nomination fees for youth (as for women and persons with disabilities) were reduced by 50 percent.¹¹⁶

Closing the age gaps between the minimum age to vote and run for public office

Governments are increasingly acknowledging that age restrictions can be a significant barrier to increased youth participation in politics. As a result, there is growing consideration towards lowering the age requirements for running for public office. However, implementing such changes is a gradual process. The alignment of the minimum age to vote and that to run for public office has, in those instances, been preceded by intense campaigns, consultations, and discussions with various stakeholders.



PROMOTING THE RIGHTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE TO RUN FOR PUBLIC OFFICE

The global campaign “Not Too Young To Run”¹¹⁷ was launched at the first United Nations Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law in Geneva. The campaign, organised through a partnership of the Office of the UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, UNDP, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the IPU, the European Youth Forum (EYF) and the Youth Initiative for Advocacy Growth & Advancement (YIAGA), aimed to promote young people’s right to run for public office and address the wide-spread issue of age discrimination.

In Nigeria, the Youth Initiative for Advocacy Growth and Advancement (YIAGA), Youngstars Development Initiative (YDI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) partnered in 2017 to implement the Not Too Young To Run’ campaign. After a Bill addressing age requirements to run for office was passed in the Senate’s first and second readings and was being reviewed by the National Assembly’s House Committee on Constitution Review, YIAGA and YDI mobilized youth across the country to hold National Days of Action in their states with one common goal: engage their state representatives to support the passage of the Bill. In 2018, the bill entered into force, making it possible for 25-year-olds to enter the House of Representatives, a five-year age reduction from the previous requirement.¹¹⁸

Ensuring young people’s voices are heard in parliament

*Not only are few youth elected to Parliaments, but youth voices are rarely heard in parliamentary hearings and other dialogues between MPs and citizens. This has a development impact, including the relative absence of youth voices in setting and monitoring policies to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (UN 2018b: 102).*¹¹⁹

115 <https://www.elections.org.zm/2021/05/06/nomination-fees-are-paid-by-aspiring-candidates-before-their-nomination-can-be-accepted-by-the-commission-the-fees-are-set-against-each-category-of-elections-and-offer-specified-rates-for-males-fema/>

116 <https://www.iebc.or.ke/registration/?aspirant>

117 <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2016/11/launching-global-campaign-promoting-rights-young-people-run-public-office/>

118 “We are Not Too Young To Run”: Youth in Nigeria March to Support Bill

119 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2018/12/WorldYouthReport-2030Agenda.pdf>

Meaningful youth participation requires moving beyond just numbers; it is equally or maybe even more important to ensure opportunities for young people to routinely and relevantly participate in parliamentary business, such as hearings and consultations.

Ensuring that young people are heard is the responsibility of all members of parliament and cannot be left to young people alone. It requires creating safe spaces in parliament where youth voices are taken seriously. Such spaces are increasingly seen across the world in different forms and arrangements.

As stated in the Global Parliamentary Report 2022, there are many reasons why youth engagement is mutually beneficial for parliamentarians and young people. Above all, youth meaningful inclusion and participation can support parliament's main functions by giving access to in depth information and ideas that are needed for representation, law-making, policy formulation and decision-making that meet young people's expectations and needs.¹²⁰

Youth Parliaments

The term “youth parliaments” generally refers to youth-oriented events which replicate parliamentary procedures and debates. Youth parliaments are established by youth organizations and ministries related to youth and by parliaments to educate and raise awareness among young people about political processes. However, when set up as a permanent structure, aligned with procedures in parliament, youth parliaments can increase the ability of youth to influence agenda setting and make parliamentary processes more youth-responsive.



Photo: Ana Bermudez

120 <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2022-03/global-parliamentary-report-2022>



EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL YOUTH PARLIAMENTS

During the summer of 2021, the Malaysia Young Generation (MyGen) organized a Young Women's Parliament to encourage young women to participate in politics. The event gathered 222 delegates who virtually debated policies related to women's issues, gender equality, and social matters. Participants, including students, representatives from the indigenous Orang Asli community, and activists, gained insights into policy-making and issues important to young women in Malaysia. The Young Women's Parliament also provided a platform for these young women to enhance their knowledge and skills, preparing them for future leadership roles.¹²¹

The Barbados National Youth Parliament (BYNP), for young people between 14 and 21, was established in 2014 and launched in April 2014, stemming from consultations with young people on the National Youth Policy. The BYNP falls under the aegis of the Division of Youth in the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports and connects young people with the members of parliament, encourages youth voluntarism and community work, and inspires young people to engage in political processes in their country.¹²²

The Malawi National Assembly in 2012 established the Youth Parliament of Malawi.¹²³ The objective of the YPM, among other things, is to give youth a platform to voice their views and concerns on critical issues affecting their lives with the assurance that government and concerned organizations would be alerted to the challenges young people face in the country and stimulate them to take appropriate measures to address the situation. The Youth Parliament of Malawi is a joint initiative of the Malawi National Assembly, relevant Government Ministries and Institutions, with financial support from UNICEF. The youth parliament is composed of 193 youth parliamentarians selected from the country's 193 constituencies.

In October 2020, the National Directorate for the Promotion of Citizen Participation of the National Assembly of Panama, with the support of ParlAmericas and the National Forum of Women in Political Parties, gathered more than 250 members and former members of the Youth Assembly of Panama for the first virtual Congress of the Youth Assembly of Panama.¹²⁴

During the Congress, young men and women discussed citizen participation, youth leadership, and gender perspectives within parliamentary institutions and civil society organizations.

121 <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2021/07/27/malaysian-youth-group-organises-women-only-virtual-mock-parliament-in-the-h/1992930>

122 <https://www.facebook.com/BarbadosYouthParliament>; <https://www.unicef.org/easterncaribbean/stories/youth-parliament-gives-adolescents-voice>

123 <https://www.nyasatimes.com/malawi-youth-parliament-starts-april-8/>

124 <https://parlAmericas.org/new/parlAmericas-participates-in-the-first-virtual-congress-of-the-youth-assembly-of-panama/>

Caucuses

“Caucuses” is a collective term designating formal or informal groupings of MPs. They may be formed around a familiar premise, such as ethnicity, gender, religion, age, or around an issue of common interest.¹²⁵

Caucuses can bring together young parliamentarians and/or advocate for youth issues. They are a place to build awareness and political commitment across party lines and across age groups – especially in the absence of a dedicated committee. A major opportunity that comes from having a caucus is that they are also formal platforms for systematically engaging youth organizations.

Data collected by IPU shows that in 2020, the following countries had caucuses of young parliamentarians: Benin, Cameroon, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Finland, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Latvia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nigeria, São Tomé and Príncipe, Spain and Viet Nam.¹²⁶



THE FIRST PARLIAMENTARY YOUTH GROUP IN EL SALVADOR

In 2016, El Salvador amended its Legislative Assembly rules in order to form the first parliamentary youth group.¹²⁷ The goal was to promote initiatives for young people, uphold their rights, increase their engagement and improve their living conditions. The youth group consisted of young parliamentarians aged between 25 and 35.

Some parliaments have formed caucuses dedicated to youth issues, where members of parliament of all ages are able to discuss matters of importance to young people. According to data collected by IPU, the following parliaments have such caucuses: Argentina, Benin, Estonia, Mexico, Poland, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkmenistan and the UK.¹²⁸

All-party groups

Similarly to caucuses, all-party groups (also known as parliamentary groups or cross-party groups) are informal groups of parliamentarians from different political parties who come together to promote the interests of youth. They can play an important role in promoting dialogue and collaboration across party lines on youth issues and in raising awareness of youth issues among parliamentarians.



Photo: Office of the UN Youth Envoy / Joel Sheakoski

¹²⁵ <https://www.ipu.org/youth2021>

¹²⁶ <https://www.ipu.org/youth2021>

¹²⁷ <https://www.ipu.org/youth2021>

¹²⁸ <https://www.ipu.org/youth2021>



ENHANCING YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: THE ROLE OF ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS IN THE UK

In the United Kingdom, several All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) have been established to promote the political engagement of young people. These groups, comprised of Members from both Houses, focus on a variety of issues pertaining to youth.¹²⁹

- **APPG on Youth Affairs:** This group seeks to elevate the prominence of issues affecting young people. It aims to facilitate dialogue between parliamentarians, young individuals, and youth services and advocates for a coordinated and comprehensive approach to policymaking on youth affairs.
- **APPG for Votes at 16:** Established to advocate for extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds, this APPG serves as a forum for cross-party discussions and active campaigning. It brings together politicians, the youth sector, and experts to develop relevant policies and research.
- **APPG on Political Literacy:** Focused on emphasizing the significance of political literacy education, this group strives to bolster youth participation in democratic processes. The ultimate objective of the APPG is to ensure that all young people are politically literate by the time they conclude their secondary education.

Parliamentary Committees and Youth Engagement

Parliamentary committees are specialized bodies tasked with examining specific issues or topics related to policy, public administration, or performance. Their focused nature enables various stakeholders, including organizations and individual citizens, to actively contribute to policymaking, decision-making, or policy review processes.

To guarantee that these committees adequately address the needs and proposals of diverse youth groups, it is imperative to actively involve youth organizations and youth parliaments in the legislative drafting processes. This engagement ensures that the perspectives of young people are considered and integrated into policies and decisions.

Effective youth political participation in the realm of youth, peace, and security demands not only a substantive understanding of the issues and policies under discussion but also a technical grasp of the mechanisms and processes required to engage with relevant committees and groups. This includes staying informed about the schedules, meetings, and topics being addressed by these committees. Providing young people with this knowledge and insight is essential to enhancing their efficacy in such participatory processes.

Moreover, concentrating on parliamentary committees presents an opportunity to harmonize different policies that might be concurrently addressing or impacting the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda. Such coordination can help avoid unnecessary overlap or competition between complementary efforts, thereby ensuring a cohesive approach to addressing the concerns of young people in peace and security contexts.

¹²⁹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmallparty/221130/register-221130.pdf>

Parliamentary reform to take young people's voices seriously

Many youth-targeted initiatives are contributing to making parliaments' work more accessible for young people. Taking young people's voices seriously in parliaments' work on legislation, government oversight, the national budget, and citizen representation also demands reforms of the composition, structures, operations, methods, and work of parliaments. To ensure parliamentary reform responds to the needs of young people, various parliaments are developing new initiatives to consult and co-create with young people.



INNOVATIVE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMMES IN NEW ZEALAND AND GEORGIA PARLIAMENTS

In 2021, New Zealand started with a youth reference group called Rito, which refers to the new, central shoots that emerge in harakeke/flax, without which it dies. The team of young people will be renewed each year. The reference group reflects on how the parliament can better connect with youth and encourages young people to connect with parliament. They also showed, among others, by producing videos, young people what they could achieve by engaging with members of parliament.¹³⁰

In 2018, the Parliament of Georgia, supported by the European Union and UNDP and in partnership with the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), initiated a youth contest titled "Your Idea for Open Parliament." This competition was designed to increase young people's awareness of the concept of an open parliament and to incorporate their proposals into the 2018-2019 Open Parliament Action Plan. The initiative provided a platform for young individuals to contribute to making the Parliament of Georgia more accountable, transparent, and receptive to citizen participation.¹³¹

Local Governance Institutions

Local governance, as defined by UNDP, refers to subnational institutions, systems, and processes that provide services to citizens and through which citizens "articulate their interests and needs, mediate their differences, and exercise their rights and obligations."¹³² In practice, it is mainly at the local level that young people have been able to participate meaningfully, particularly when it comes to issues of peace and security.

Local governance structures amplify young men and women's voice by representing their constituencies and giving them opportunities to participate locally. Many young people start their political careers at the local level, so getting younger people engaged in local politics is a viable way to support capable young leaders.

130 <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/the-house/audio/2018819174/the-new-guard-connecting-parliament-to-youth>

131 [Youth Contest – Your Idea for Open Parliament!](#)

132 <https://www.undp.org/tag/local-governance-and-local-development>

Various countries have implemented subnational quotas to increase youth representation at local levels in acknowledgement of the importance of engaging youth in local politics. Tunisia, Uganda, Kenya, Egypt, Peru, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka have quotas for youth at the subnational level.

Remarkably, comparatively with the national youth quota, these quota percentages tend to be more significant than quotas seen at the national level. This might suggest that the introduction of youth quotas at the subnational level is considered a more politically viable option or seen as less risky than instituting a quota at the national level.

As structures closest to the citizens, local governments have the best view of the interests and needs of young people and are well-positioned to advocate for young people to higher-level actors. In particular, this can give a voice to youth still facing many obstacles to being represented at higher levels of government.

Local governance structures can also nurture political will for sustaining peace and serve as a forum for dialogue between different groups in society.

Political Parties

Ad hoc political party initiatives are not enough to ensure that young people can influence political party agendas, get electable seats on electoral lists or get elected. To remove obstacles to young people's participation in political parties, parties should develop comprehensive strategies to address challenges. To eliminate barriers to youth participation within political parties, parties must devise comprehensive strategies addressing the challenges young people face. This involves considering aspects such as speaking rights, nomination for electable seats, programmatic and voting power, and ensuring that youth perspectives are integrated into key policies.



Photo: UNDP Afghanistan / AEP

Implementing a comprehensive youth strategy may help increase and sustain the involvement and long-term support of young people for the party, whether as members or supporters. It can also remove incentives for youth engagement in violent activities during elections and reduce the risk that youth groups affiliated with political parties or political parties' youth wings get involved in disruptive behaviour.

Strengthening youth capacity in political parties

Political parties are investing in training, seminars, networking events and mentorship programmes to support young members in finding ways to overcome the multiple barriers they face and have their voices heard. Strengthening youth capacity within political parties is crucial. It ensures better representation of young people's perspectives, encourages their active engagement in civic affairs, and brings new ideas and innovation to policy-making. By preparing future leaders, addressing youth-specific issues, and promoting democratic values, this effort contributes to a more inclusive, sustainable, and dynamic political landscape.



EMPOWERING YOUTH IN POLITICS: GLOBAL INITIATIVES FOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

In the United States, the Young Democrats of America (YDA) offers regular training, skill-building seminars, networking events, and pair young members with experienced party members to receive guidance and support as they develop their leadership skills and political careers.¹³³

Similarly, in Colombia, prior to the 2019 elections, the 'Organización Nacional de Juventudes Liberales' established a political training school aimed at nurturing young leaders.¹³⁴

On a regional scale, in 2020, with funding from the National Endowment for Democracy, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) launched the Political Party Leadership Institute (PPLI) as a regional peer-learning platform to enhance the participation of young people in democratic politics and political party processes in the Southern and East Africa (SEA) region. Since its first iteration, the programme has trained over 30 young male and 31 young female party members from ruling and opposition parties from Botswana, Kenya, Malawi and Zambia, helping to create a pool of new emerging young political leaders on the continent.¹³⁵

Such capacity-building programmes tend to have multiple objectives, including:

- To motivate and encourage youth to participate in political leadership;
- To elevate more young men and women to elected and appointed political positions;
- To create support networks for young candidates;
- To strengthen their skills in influencing leaders and decision-making processes and
- To encourage intergenerational dialogue on political leadership and social justice.

133 <https://www.yda.org/sites/default/files/YDA%20General%20Information%20Brochure.pdf>

134 <https://www.partidoliberal.org.co/c.php?id=35&n=juventudes>

135 <https://www.ndi.org/our-stories/enhancing-youth-political-visibility-and-leadership-capacity>

In addition to political parties, civil society organizations are also engaged in empowering and mentoring young people to run for office. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Africa Reconciled, acknowledging the importance of having peacebuilders outside and inside the parliament, is training young people, through Peace Rooms, to become future leaders who can transcend political party interests by means of a robust political discourse, strong connections with youth and solid relations to grassroots movements.¹³⁶

Youth party wings

To counter the decline of youth political membership, political parties across the world have established youth wings, providing a space for young people to participate meaningfully. If given a strong mandate and financial support, youth wings have the potential to become safe spaces for networking, enhance the political skills of young people, provide a platform for young people to influence party policy development and reach out to young voters.

However, youth wings tend to be under-resourced, given little support and a narrow mandate, while also being manipulated and exploited by political elites who use them for their political ambitions. Such treatment has in many instances contributed to youth wings engaging in aggressive and violent politics, in particular around elections.

Still, in other instances these youth wings have actually been able to play a vital role in promoting peace and stability.



IN LIBERIA, YOUNG PEOPLE WERE TRAINED TO CONTRIBUTE TO PEACEFUL AND CREDIBLE ELECTIONS

In 2017, in Liberia, the Peacebuilding Unit of the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), together with the Liberia Peacebuilding Office, organized trainings for political party youth wing representatives to contribute to peaceful and credible elections and to mitigate violence by enhancing the knowledge and skills of the youth for them to become crucial peacebuilding stakeholders. Creating a space for representatives of political parties' youth wings, civil society organizations, the Government of Liberia and the United Nations resulted in commitments of participants to peaceful elections. The process also allowed youth representatives and civil society organizations to exchange information and engage jointly in the prevention of election-related violence.¹³⁷

Youth wings of political parties, if properly set up, run and supported, have the ability to get more young people involved in politics. For this to happen, political party leadership should give youth wings the power to influence nomination processes, set agendas, or write party manifestos.

¹³⁶ <http://africareconciled.org/>

¹³⁷ <https://www.accord.org.za/news/training-representatives-political-parties-youth-wings-liberia/>



TARGETED TRAININGS FOR YOUTH WINGS OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Interviews conducted in 2016 by IPU showed that in North Macedonia, youth wings of the two major parties were primarily responsible for drafting their respective political programmes, enabling them to place greater emphasis on youth concerns, such as youth unemployment and large-scale youth emigration to other countries.¹³⁸

In the Maldives, to strengthen the understanding of members of different youth wings of key political processes, including how they might be able to better engage in these processes and how to effectively advocate within political structures on issues of importance to youth, UNDP designed targeted trainings for the youth wings of political parties in the country.¹³⁹

Political party outreach strategies to engage young people

The perception that young people hold of political parties in their respective countries is a significant factor in determining the potential for collaboration between youth activists and politicians. In countries where political parties are seen as corrupt, elitist and indifferent to the interests of young people, such collaboration is not always evident.

Numerous youth activists who were interviewed for this guide expressed hesitancy to collaborate with political parties. Their reluctance stemmed from a lack of trust in these organizations, coupled with concerns about being perceived as partisan. Additionally, they feared that aligning with political parties might compromise their independence and constrain their ability to candidly address issues such as corruption and governmental accountability.

Such perceptions make it hard to build a constructive relationship between youth organizations and political parties. It is in the interest of political parties to address this predicament to help their future relevance and grow their legitimacy. To do so, they should engage in dialogues with youth organizations to understand their views on the problems youth face and discuss strategies to make politics more accessible for young people. In a similar vein, to be able to increase their political influence is in the interest of youth organizations and youth activists to build stronger relationships with political parties as far as they deem that appropriate.

To foster political discussion between young people and political parties, it can at times be strategic to bring in other stakeholders, such as civil society organizations, universities, the private sector, think tanks and media outlets. Platforms for such multi-stakeholder engagement can provide various entry points for youth political participation, including around issues of peace and security. Some of these are:

- Platforms where universities, civil society organizations, media outlets and political parties come together to provide safe spaces for young people to engage around issues related to the YPS agenda.

138 https://www.ipu.org/sites/default/files/documents/tp_youth_participation_in_parliaments_and_peace_and_security_ipu.pdf

139 <https://www.mv.undp.org/content/maldives/en/home/presscenter/articles/2021/womenspoliticalempowermenttraining.html>



- Multi-stakeholder platforms serve as knowledge networks, providing political parties access to experts on youth, peace and security.
- Multi-stakeholder platforms can reduce the barriers for young people to engage in formal political processes, through the establishment of networks with political leaders.
- Such networks can also be used to mobilize resources, particularly for young people with limited political experience and financial means.
- Through the development, dissemination and adoption of political party manifestos, multi-stakeholder platforms can underpin the positioning of young candidates.

To successfully connect with young people, political parties must engage with them in a meaningful and substantive manner. This engagement should be comprehensive, encompassing aspects such as campaign design and even extending to incorporating young individuals into the campaign team itself.

Given that youth party membership is declining rapidly in many countries, political parties will increasingly need to focus their efforts to engage young people that are not members. Including the inputs of young non-members in party activities, has proven successful in recent campaigns in different countries across the globe. This approach accommodates the changing approach to citizenship among young people, who are more critical and protest-oriented, preferring a form of political participation that is less institutionalized, more cause-oriented and based on social movements.¹⁴⁰



BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN CAPACITY-BUILDING AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

Young people engaging in politics routinely confront an array of obstacles, ranging from legal hurdles to financial constraints and socio-cultural prejudices. Moreover, their active role in both the political arena and the public sphere often exposes them to violence, hate speech, and intimidation.

While numerous international organizations conduct capacity-building workshops to bolster young people's participation in politics, this approach can sometimes miss the mark. A recurring theme from young political figures is the need for more substantive support rather than skill enhancement alone. Young people crave opportunities for impactful participation that are backed by financial and protective measures from organizations.

As one Kenyan interviewee insightfully pointed out, there is a perceived imbalance in the support system. Assistance and recognition are forthcoming when young politicians engage in activities such as conferences or sharing post-election experiences. However, during the most arduous phase – the campaign – this support wanes considerably unless they revert to activism, particularly after an electoral defeat.

As many international organizations are impartial and non-partisan, supporting young people in politics is complicated. Given the sensitivity of supporting politically active young people and the fact that empowered young people still face barriers to participation, it is essential to reflect on new ways to support young people active in politics without jeopardizing the position of such organizations.

140 <https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/Toolkit%20Youth%20and%20Political%20Parties%20-%20w%20Key%20Recommendations.pdf>

Code of conducts for political parties

Some electoral systems use a code of conduct to regulate the conduct of political parties, candidates, and their supporters during an election. These can be voluntary, non-binding agreements that result from a consensus among the parties, or they can be part of the legislative and regulative framework that is binding and enforced. To ensure young people have the means to participate in all stages of an electoral process and are not being used by political parties to incite violence or breach the peace, it is key to involve youth organizations and political party youth wings in the development and implementation of codes of conduct.

Broader Leadership Approaches

All of the above presented opportunities and options have their benefits and challenges. In an ideal world, to fully mainstream the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda efforts should be undertaken on all levels and through all channels. But this requires time, resources, connections, and a profound understanding of the contemporary political landscape.

Finding allies among the broader landscape of leaders – whether of political parties, community leaders or other relevant actors – across the political spectrum allows young people to coattail on the political savvy of potential champions for youth political participation when it comes to youth, peace and security and bypass the need to have to figure all it out by themselves.

Investing in such relations and maintaining them and keeping allies up to date on new developments and insights can help in the creation of crucial connections in the complex process of navigating the political landscape around youth, peace and security.



Photo: Office of the UN Youth Envoy / Joel Sheakoski



EMPOWERING YOUTH FOR PEACE AND EQUALITY: INITIATIVES IN MYANMAR AND PAKISTAN

Before the coup in 2021, the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) and Yangon Youth Network organized workshops in Myanmar to discuss the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agendas. These workshops brought together young women leaders, LGBTIQ+ youth, and male allies advocating for gender equality from various states including Yangon, Karen, Shan, Kachin, and Rakhine. The training sessions allowed participants to reflect on several key challenges and actions needed for sustainable peace and gender equality in Myanmar, such as:

1. The limited awareness of the relevance and importance of the WPS and YPS resolutions amongst the government, women's rights groups, and youth organizations in Myanmar and the need for the adoption of a NAP through an inclusive drafting process.
2. Increasing cases of sexual and gender-based violence against ethnic minority groups and the need for accessible global and regional mechanisms and platforms to condemn and demand accountability from their government for the Rohingya genocide and effective implementation of the WPS and YPS resolutions.
3. Increase youth electoral participation as a key strategy to demand accountability for gender equality, human rights, and sustainable peace from political decision-makers.
4. Established a network of Young Women Leaders to meaningfully participate in, influence, and lead community-based peacebuilding and advocacy to implement the WPS and YPS resolutions.

In Pakistan, in 2021, to prioritize the future of young people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the think-tank, Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) and UNDP jointly conducted a Youth Dialogue on Mainstreaming Young Men and Women in Policy Processes in Peshawar. This initiative aimed to build young people's capacity to meaningfully engage in youth policy planning with decision-makers in the Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In addition to building their engagement capabilities with policymakers, students learned to develop practical policy recommendations for effective engagement with legislators to facilitate inclusive and pro-youth legislation and policy making.¹⁴¹

141 <https://pildat.org/youth1/dialogue-between-youth-and-members-of-the-provincial-assembly-of-khyber-pakhtunkhwa>



FOSTERING YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

In Lebanon, within the framework of the Youth Leadership Programme (YLP), UNDP is working with the youth to transform their ideas for social change into sustainable projects by developing their leadership potential and improving their skills in various social innovation approaches and methodologies. The programme also aims to strengthen the gender sensitive lens and skills during brainstorming and implementation, improve advocacy and presentation skills, and help create a dynamic network of young leaders and innovators.¹⁴²

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has recently become more concerned with the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda. In August 2021, as the result of the 28th ASEAN Regional Forum, it issued a 'Joint Statement on Promoting the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda at the ASEAN Regional Forum'. This was followed in December the same year by the first ever ASEAN Regional Forum Workshop on Youth, Peace and Security, hosted by Brunei Darussalam as the Chair of ASEAN. While commitments made, due to the range of different countries involved, were very broad, it opens the door for further engagement both regionally and at country level to further advocacy on the agenda.

Organizations like the Southern African Youth Forum (SAYoF) have been at the forefront of bridging the gap between regional policy frameworks and youth voices. In 2019, SAYoF hosted the first SADC Youth Forum & SADC Youth Parliament in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The Forum is a youth-led initiative that speaks to the youth deficit in African governance by providing a formalized instrument to channel their inputs to officials of the South African Development Community (SADC) and platforms. In 2021, SAYoF brought together experts and youth from across SADC to discuss "*The Inclusion of SADC Youth in Peace and Security*" as part of the region's 3rd SADC Youth Forum and to reflect on opportunities, challenges and inclusion strategies for youth in peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

In Trinidad and Tobago, in 2020, Young Women in Leadership Trinidad and Tobago and ParlAmericas – in partnership with the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago organized a "Young Women in Leadership" programme. The young women leaders participated in an immersive training programme on transformational leadership, gender equality, inclusive decision-making, and parliamentary processes. The event -organized around International Women's Day – was only the first in a series of national-level initiatives across the Caribbean designed to foster young women's interest in public leadership and support young women in building knowledge, skills, and networks necessary for their work as current and future changemakers.¹⁴³

When international organizations and donors are present in a country in crisis, at times this stimulates a surge in the creation of civil society organizations. Many of these will be based in the capital and seek collaborations and funds from international donors.

Building partnerships and obtaining funds from donors is not easy; writing grant proposals requires expertise and time. Due to the lack of resources and the competition between civil society

142 <https://yiplebanon.org/about/>

143 https://parlAmericas.org/uploads/documents/YWiLTT_Report_ENG.pdf

organizations to get funding, there is a risk that funding does not go to the organization with the most experience and strongest connection on the ground, but those that have become proficient in writing grant proposals.

The practice of many donors of requiring civil society organizations to apply for funding in consortiums further adds to this as the need to have some to become pen-holders while others become just implementing partners creates further tensions.

The Security Sector

The recognition for the importance of youth political participation is spreading, including when it comes to issues related to peace and security and not just among those actors more commonly understood to be of relevance for the YPS Agenda.

Several people interviewed for this Guide highlighted a trend of the security sector, including armed forces and the police, stepping up their efforts to engage and work directly with young people on issues related to peace and security, including, but not limited to the prevention of violent extremism and the war on drugs.

However, many advocates for the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda express ambivalence regarding this development. On one hand, they acknowledge that youth political participation should be widespread, encompassing all facets of society, including the security sector. Moreover, due to the considerable influence and resources that the security sector commands in many regions, collaborations with these entities can provide young people with significant opportunities. These may include access to high-level government interactions and financial support for youth-led initiatives.

However, the narrative guiding these engagements often leans towards perspectives determined by hard-security, and does not always adhere to the conflict-sensitivity or “do no harm” standards promoted by the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda. Additionally, there are risks of youth being manipulated into becoming instruments in a competition for the ‘hearts and minds’ of the general public, especially in highly polarized societies. This situation raises questions about whether it is more effective to join these efforts and attempt to instigate change from within or to resist and advocate for change from the outside. The answers to these questions will likely vary depending on the context and the individuals involved.

The Media

Media – here understood as news media as opposed to entertainment or marketing related communication – has a central role in politics and our societies at large. Often referred to as the ‘Fourth Estate’, news media has the essential contribution of informing, scrutinizing or holding to account, setting the agenda for public discourse and contributing to community building. A free, independent, diverse and professional media is thus a key component of democracy.

However, the media has also played, and in all too many instances continues to play a problematic role. Biased coverage, contributing to the spread and amplification of disinformation and

misinformation, or even outright incitement of hatred and violence are but a few of the ways the media has undermined democracy, and contributed to instability, violence, and armed conflict.

Young people tend to have a complex and challenging relationship with the media. While different per context, there are two main trends that particularly impact this dynamic.¹⁴⁴

Firstly, the current young generation tends to consume news very differently from previous generations. With a greater focus on social media, not only the where and the way they get their news has changed, what they expect or want from their news has changed as well. Beyond mere information, they are looking for meaning, a sense of belonging and representation, among other things, demands that many traditional media outlets as of now have struggled to meet.

The second component that sets the tone for the ways in which young people engage with the media relates to how they are represented. Far too often, young people are excluded from news stories altogether, and when they are featured their portrayal relies on stereotypical negative perceptions, such as them being violent or a source of unrest and chaos.

This problematic relationship of young people with the media does not just impact them, it has broader implications on how the media is able to fulfill its core functions, while for young people it adds to existing barriers to their meaningful participation in politics.



EMPOWERING YOUTH VOICES: INNOVATIVE MEDIA INITIATIVES FOR POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

In 2013, Search for Common Ground together with the Ma'an Network created *The President*, a political reality TV show in which young contestants competed to become 'The President' with viewers voting who should win via text messages. While entertaining and wildly popular, the show also offered young Palestinian youth a crash course in politics, as well as allowing young people to be seen as capable political agents. After two seasons, *The President* spun off into *I am the President*, a Tunisian equivalent that launched in 2019.¹⁴⁵

The *Talk Up Radio Show* is Jamaica's only radio programme developed and staffed entirely by young people under the age of 25. Created by Emprezz Golding, Executive Producer of *Talk Up Youth*, the radio show is a space in mainstream media for young people to talk about issues affecting them, the nation and the world and find solutions to these issues in a youthful, engaging, fun and vibrant format.¹⁴⁶

Access to the Internet is an enabler for political participation. Increasingly, youth political participation is shifting from offline to online participation. Youth organizations and activists use social media platforms to seek support, organize protests, and create online petitions. Political institutions are reaching out to youth to engage young people in policy discussions and organize public consultations on draft legislation online.

144 <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/what-research-says-youth-media-and-democracy>

145 [The President](#)

146 <https://www.talkupyouth.com/talk-up-radio-show.html>

Today's young people were born in the digital age, and have never experienced a world without social media and the Internet. Labeled digital natives, the assumption is that they have an intuitive understanding and ability to utilize all online platforms and tools to their fullest potential.

However, such perceptions underestimate the significant differences in access, innate digital skills and knowledge among and between youth. To a greater extent, it risks that both the support young people still need to navigate the online world is underestimated, while also leaving those that do not have access behind. An estimated 2.2 billion children and young people aged 25 or younger, two-thirds of the global population in that age group, do not have internet access at home, leaving them vulnerable to be left on the wrong side of a rapidly expanding digital divide.¹⁴⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic has further forced many trainings and projects aimed at supporting young people in their political participation online.

Online programmes have, without a doubt, advantages, including cost-efficiency, reaching a broader audience, and reducing travel needs. However, to ensure that no one is left behind, it is critical to closely monitor the impact of switching from offline to online learning and capacity building, especially on those with non or limited internet access and literacy, and reflect on mitigation measures to ensure that policy and programming also reconnects with those who are offline.



BRIDGING THE GAP: DIGITAL PLATFORMS FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNANCE

Shaasan,¹⁴⁸ an initiative of the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation¹⁴⁹ in Nepal, is a youth-led movement that bridges the divide between citizens and elected officials. The initiative is primarily built around a digital platform, but also implements on-the-ground programmes aimed both at citizen empowerment and capacity building for decision-makers to engage, empathize with, and respond to their constituents. One of their main initiatives is a mobile app through which citizens can report public problems to their representatives. These crowdsourced problems are categorized and geotagged for all to see. The representatives are then given a public scorecard based on their response.

INJUV, Chile's National Youth Institute, is a public institution that collaborates with the government in designing policies related to youth affairs. To give millennials across the country the chance to voice their ideas on local community development, INJUV launched an online platform in 2019.¹⁵⁰

147 <https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-and-young-people-internet-access-at-home-during-covid19>

148 <https://shaasan.org/>

149 <https://ceinp.org/>

150 <https://www.citizenlab.co/blog/case-study/case-study-injuv-empowers-millennials-sustainable-development-chile/>

Mainstreaming the Youth Peace and Security Agenda Through Politics

To advance the political participation of young people in peace and security and the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda in particular, the mainstreaming of both through various political institutions and structures is imperative. Mainstreaming would save on energy and resources to get youth participation on the agenda in the first place and allow for efforts to focus on realizing it. Additionally, it ensures efforts to realize youth involvement in peace and security are taken on by a broader arsenal of stakeholders and provides for opportunities for coordination across different efforts.

It is worth noting that there have been limited efforts to mainstream the YPS Agenda, and there are few concrete examples of its impact. However, it is important to understand that this does not necessarily reflect the potential impact that the agenda could have. The lack of recognition for the importance of the agenda continues to be a challenge.

To be able to mainstream the YPS Agenda there are certain needs that are to be addressed, regardless of through which means the mainstreaming is done. These include, but are not limited to:

- The socialization of the YPS Agenda, as well as the important role young people have in realizing peace and security.
- Building skills and knowledge on the different means to do so, and
- Resourcing the agenda in a way that allows for advocates to sustain the efforts needed to get there.

In the quest to mainstream the YPS Agenda though, focus should always remain on the end objective of ensuring the participation of young people in peace and security and should not end up being on prioritizing the YPS Agenda as an end goal in itself.

The following section highlights various political strategies and tools that could be used to further mainstream both the YPS Agenda in itself and the involvement of youth in matters related to peace and security.

National Action Plans

National Action Plans (NAPs), and sometimes regional ones as well, are a set of specific objectives and proposals. They are usually developed through a participatory process that involves a variety of stakeholders. The main purpose of these plans is to prioritize and promote a particular agenda. Although they are not legally binding, these publicly stated intentions often create a momentum of action and provide an opportunity to hold stakeholders accountable for the commitments made.



Photo: UNDP Lebanon

Elevating a particular issue on the political agenda of a country, province or region through NAPs has often been spurred by political will to act on the given issue and come with at least some budget to realize plans.

When it comes to YPS the number of NAPs is still minimal, however, experience of other agenda, in particular the Women Peace and Security Agenda have proven the potential for NAPs as a tool both to promote inclusive political participation and to further the agenda in itself.

Efforts should be increased to gather lessons learned and best practices from NAPs both from those that have been developed related to YPS and on other agendas, and promote the gains made to stimulate more countries to take on the efforts of developing NAPs themselves.



PIONEERING NATIONAL ACTION PLANS ON YOUTH, PEACE, AND SECURITY: FINLAND AND NIGERIA LEAD THE WAY

On 20 August 2021, Finland published its National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security, becoming the first country in the world to do so. The process for the development of the NAP was initiated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2018 and was followed by a process which included a peace survey and targeted consultations. Young people's ownership and participation were the key principles in the preparation of the NAP and was produced in collaboration with young people and youth organizations, central government, research institutes and civil society.¹⁵¹

Following suit, in November 2021, Nigeria became the first African country and the second globally to adopt a National Action Plan on Youth, Peace, and Security. The drafting, review and eventual adoption was a concerted effort between the Government and various youth groups, in particular the Nigeria Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security, which led consultations and validation workshops with government agencies, civil society and community stakeholders and provided technical assistance in drafting the plan. In the final stages of the adoption, young people from all over Nigeria came together to endorse the 55-page document, which further solidified the youth political participation in the process. It was launched by the Minister of Youth and Sports Development and Minister of Women Affairs at a national event that was attended by the Vice President of Nigeria and over 500 youth delegates from all the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria.¹⁵²

151 <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/national-action-plan-on-youth-peace-and-security-focuses-on-young-people-s-participation-in-peace-work> and <https://www.2250finland.fi/en/national-process/>

152 <https://unoy.org/nigeria-coalition-on-youth-peace-and-security-remarks-at-the-un-peacebuilding-commission/>, <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/08/28/youths-endorse-draft-national-action-plan-on-youth-peace-security/> and <https://bbforpeace.org/ypslibrary/2021/11/04/nigeria-launches-national-action-plan-on-unscr-2250-on-youth-peace-and-security/>



OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO INCLUSION

Many international and national organizations operating in conflict areas face challenges in ensuring their efforts are inclusive and accessible. Due to strict security measures, staff of organizations are limited in their movements and activities are often organized in the capital in well-secured buildings. This can create the image that the international community is organizing events for the happy few. Consequently, international efforts have been criticized – among others by various experts interviewed for this Guide – of working on inclusion by organizing very exclusive events.

Language poses another significant barrier to effective partnerships with youth initiatives. The technical jargon used by development organizations can be perplexing for individuals outside these institutions. Working on “inclusive participation,” for example, means little to many young people and can even mean something entirely different depending on the context. One solution might be to focus more on concrete questions and situations relevant to their lives, over having to get lost in debates on terminology.

Further criticism centers on the insufficient use of local languages in the activities of international partners. Relying heavily on English, French, or Spanish can create substantial barriers for young people who are not conversant in these languages. By addressing these issues, organizations can ensure that their efforts are genuinely inclusive and meaningful.

Accountability and Oversight

Words are easily spoken, and commitments are not always genuine. Therefore, efforts to monitor the actual implementation of plans or commitments made are a key component to hold leaders, policy makers or legislators accountable. Whether done in a formal capacity by young parliamentarians or at a more informal level by youth movements, attempts to monitor, document and to hold those responsible to account requires time, effort and resources, as well as the knowledge and skills to do so in a sustained and transparent manner.

Various instances demonstrate young individuals successfully securing commitments from their leaders and representatives, especially during election campaigns. However, the sustained involvement of youth in peace and security discussions, specifically in the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda, frequently wanes due to inadequate long-term oversight and support. This is in part due to them not being supported – both financially and when it comes to the provision of knowledge and skills – beyond a certain timeframe.

Legislation and Law-Making

Creating and adopting dedicated legislation addressing young people’s political participation and their involvement with the Youth, Peace and Security agenda makes commitments or proposals made legally binding. This allows for greater opportunities to hold legislators and administrators to account on the implementation and progress on such commitments, going as far as taking the matter to court in case of non-compliance.

However, while such legislation might claim to be in support of youth political participation that does not mean the process to create such it will automatically be comprehensive or participatory. Both the drafting and introduction of dedicated legislation requires constant vigilance and advocacy from supporters of the YPS Agenda to ensure that whatever is proposed addresses the real issues at stake when it comes to youth, peace, and security and that the drafts are passed as intended.

As of now, not many examples exist of legislation directly and explicitly addressing youth, peace and security. That makes those cases that are being tabled all the more important, both for the particular country involved and as a precedent for others.



ADVOCATING FOR YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN PEACE AND SECURITY: THE U.S. YOUTH, PEACE, AND SECURITY COALITION

In 2019, The Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) and Search for Common Ground (SFCG) co-founded the U.S. Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Coalition, among others to secure the passage of legislation on youth, peace and security, the US Youth, Peace and Security Act. The coalition comprises both youth-led and youth-serving organizations from around the country.

If passed, the legislation will direct the President to create a Youth Coordinator position at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). This coordinator will lead government policy efforts to ensure the meaningful participation of youth in conflict prevention, management, and resolution, and post-conflict activities.

An intended whole-of-government strategy would include priorities such as: funding programmes and microgrants, youth consultations in programme design, financial and technical support to youth-led initiatives, support for young peacebuilders and youth-inclusive transitional justice mechanisms, applying age-disaggregated analysis to barriers to youth participation, as well as agency specific and regional oriented plans.¹⁵³

Public Administration

Public administration allows for a more direct influence by young people on what actually needs to be done when it comes to peace and security. Especially on a local level, whether through local governance bodies or school boards, it provides the opportunity for direct political participation to provide concrete recommendations on a less abstract level.

Allowing young people a voice in concrete projects in their local communities on how to enhance peace and security, as well as co-managing the implementation of such initiatives assures their needs and interests are met, increases their trust and support for governance processes and increases their standing in society.

¹⁵³ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4838/text?r=52&s=1>, <https://meng.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/meng-curtis-phillips-and-fitzpatrick-reintroduce-bipartisan-legislation>, <https://www.sfcg.org/youth-peace-security-act/> and <https://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/youth-peace-security>



EMPOWERING YOUTH FOR PEACE AND SOCIAL COHESION

The “Empowering Youth as Agents for Peace and Social Cohesion in Solomon Islands (EYAPSCSI)” project, a 30-month initiative led by UNDP and ILO, aimed to empower marginalized young Solomon Islanders, especially young women, to actively participate in decision-making and become proactive social entrepreneurs addressing local grievances. The establishment of youth caucuses under the EYAPSCSI project in the Solomon Islands was successful insofar as the project created a platform with the aim to organize young men and women around peacebuilding, social cohesion, and social entrepreneurship, including in areas of the country which were previously neglected. Indeed, such caucuses are a sustainable form of intervention: they are rightfully considered highly effective platforms for discussing and addressing the concerns and issues of youth and wider community, given that they have now become locally-owned initiatives kept alive by communities across the islands.

It is a key example of the benefits of community-level dialogue for the empowerment of young men and women. The societal impact of the project’s demographic focus on young people between the age of 16 and 24, with a particular focus on young women and single mothers, is also non-negligible: indeed, the evaluation noted that the project was highly effective insofar as it led, among other elements, to a change in young people’s behaviour towards citizenship, gender issues, drugs and working with others in targeted communities.

In 2022, the Asian Youth Peace Network, ASEAN Young Public Servants, and @AsiaTVStudios believe in the power of the young leaders to serve the public good and promote good governance. To support this they created an e-magazine series with interviews with young public servants focused on the what cities they want in support of the Peace in Our Cities campaign, which is led by a network of 20 cities and 30 community-based and international partners, as well as the Global Coalition on Youth Peace Security – Youth in Politics Task Force.¹⁵⁴



THE NEED FOR FLEXIBILITY AND SUSTAINED SUPPORT IN YOUTH-ORIENTED PEACEBUILDING PROGRAMMES

Organizations working with young people have emphasized the importance of flexible programmes and funding, particularly in fragile states and societies undergoing conflict or post-conflict transitions. However, governments and national and international organizations frequently struggle to adapt quickly to dynamic situations due to bureaucratic rigidity.

Additionally, building peace takes time. Time further extended by the need for young people to first claim their space in political arenas before they can fully make their meaningful contributions to realizing peace and security. Too often funding or other forms of support are cut short before the objectives needed to attain lasting peace are realized.

¹⁵⁴ <https://www.youth4peace.info/topic/e-mag-series-cities-young-public-servants-want>

Budgeting

Laws, policies and plans mean little unless a budget is allocated to translate them into reality. Influencing budget allocations therefore provides the ultimate opportunity to guarantee both the political participation of young people, as well as a means to ensure such youth involvement is truly mainstreamed by passing a budget which guarantees this needs to be done. Youth sensitive budgeting in parliament, participatory budgeting and budget advocacy are tools to influence the way funding is allocated in pursuit of the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda.

Parliaments and youth sensitive budgeting

In most countries, parliamentary debate on and approval of the national budget is required. As such, parliamentarians are critical actors in ensuring that budget allocations and expenditures are undertaken in a transparent, accountable, and fair manner.

Budget debates and approval processes also provide an opportunity to advocate for youth-sensitive and inclusive budget allocations. Parliamentarians can inquire into the effectiveness of programmes and policies, including from a youth perspective, and their alignment with and contribution to National Development Plans and National Action Plans.

While many countries have introduced gender-sensitive budgeting, youth-sensitive budgeting seems still in its infancy. OECD defines youth-sensitive budgeting as a process to *“integrate a clear youth perspective within the overall context of the budget process, through the use of special processes and analytical tools, with a view to promoting youth-responsive policies”*.¹⁵⁵

As many countries do have experiences with conducting “child-sensitive budgeting” and “gender-sensitive budgeting”, these practices could inspire governments, parliaments and youth organizations to introduce youth-sensitive budgeting as a powerful tool to ensure that governments address the needs and interests of young people in revenue and expenditure policies and decisions.



INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO YOUTH AND GENDER BUDGETING

The Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Youth Affairs,¹⁵⁶ established in 2008, is an advocacy platform within the Parliament that aims to meaningfully represent youth issues through legislation, budget appropriations, and oversight. One of its contributions is the “Youth Budget Prioritization – the Way to Go” document¹⁵⁷ a budget analysis paper highlighting the need for prioritizing youth concerns in budget allocations.

In addition to this, the Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+)¹⁵⁸ offers an innovative approach to evaluating the impact of policies and programs on various social groups. GBA+ goes beyond merely assessing biological (sex) and socio-cultural (gender) differences and considers intersecting identity factors such as age, race, ethnicity, religion, and mental or physical disability, ensuring a more comprehensive and inclusive analysis.

155 <https://www.oecd.org/gov/youth-stocktaking-report.pdf>

156 <https://www.facebook.com/upfya/>

157 http://upfya.or.ug/wp-content/files/UPFYA_Budget_Paper_.pdf

158 <https://women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/gender-based-analysis-plus.html>

Participatory budgeting involves efforts where there is a conscious effort to involve different stakeholders and beneficiaries in the allocation of funding, including the plans and activities intended with the money and at times even the implementation of these. This practice is particularly impactful locally, enabling young people to engage directly in political participation. Budget advocacy, on the other hand, involves both budget analysis, the development of concrete proposals on allocations, and the argumentation of the impacts and implications of such spending, as well as strategic advocacy and political engagement for such proposals to be addressed to and taken up by relevant stakeholders.

Both these practices have great potential for direct and lasting impact; however, each also requires excellent technical and topical knowledge. It also requires a great level of trust in young people's ability to know where and how funding should be spent, a trust often not granted by political leaders.

While both participatory budgeting and budget advocacy efforts are by no means new strategies, both, when it comes to youth, peace and security, still suffer from misplaced assumptions that they go far and beyond the knowledge and skills of young people. Hence, more efforts should be put into documenting and promoting positive examples of where and how such initiatives have been undertaken, as well as supporting young people to gain further the abilities needed to get involved if and where allowed to do so.

THE UN YOUTH ASSEMBLY AND THE KOSOVO ROADMAP ON YOUTH, PEACE, AND SECURITY

In June 2017, the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) organized the first UN Youth Assembly, 'Advancing Youth, Peace and Security in Kosovo Together'. It brought together over 140 young people to exchange ideas, share concerns and develop joint solutions and recommendations to the UN, international organizations and Kosovo institutions on issues of Youth, Peace and Security.

One notable outcome was the 'Kosovo Roadmap on Youth, Peace and Security'. Among its recommendations was the inclusion of youth participation in budgeting processes at both municipal and central government levels. By implementing this recommendation, young people were provided with opportunities to directly contribute concrete proposals for enhancing their communities.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ <https://unmik.unmissions.org/kosovo-roadmap-youth-peace-and-security> and <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/coming-together-breaking-barriers-meet-next-generation-of-changemakers-kosovo>

Spotlight on 3 Case Studies/ Promising Practices

Promoting Meaningful Youth Political Participation in Mexico

The “American Convention on Human Rights” (Convención Americana sobre Derechos Humanos), the “Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Youth” (Convención Iberoamericana de Derechos de los Jóvenes), the “Political Constitution of the United Mexican States” (Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos) the General Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents (Ley General de los Derechos de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes) – among others-recognize the rights of young people to participate in politics and obligates the State to encourage youth participation.

Mexico has made considerable strides in creating youth policies and strengthening public institutions to foster meaningful engagement with young people. However, several challenges persist that hinder the ability of youth to participate in decision-making processes fully. Poverty amongst youth, violence, corruption, historically adult-centric¹⁶⁰ generational stereotypes, and youth distrust in formal political processes are still hindering the political participation of young people at national and local levels. Young women and indigenous and migrant youth in Mexico face additional barriers to participating in politics.

With an estimated 30.7 million young people (24.6 percent of the total population), young people – and in particular poor youth, young women, indigenous and migrant youth – remain largely excluded from formal political processes at all levels. In 2018, only 50.21 percent of young people (18 to 29 years old) voted. Young men and women remain underrepresented in the National Parliament. In the lower Chamber, 5.20 percent of parliamentarians are younger than 30, 28.60 percent are under 40 years old, and 44.80 percent are under 45 years old. In the Upper Chamber, 1.96 percent are younger than 30, 14.71 percent are younger than 40, and 29.41 percent younger than 45.

Grassroots movements at the local level

Women’s action in a community in Chiapas with 1500 inhabitants proved that change often comes from bottom-up and small-scale initiatives. In 2020, 200 women gathered to act against gender-based violence in their community. Together, they drafted a Commitment to end violence against women in their community. With their actions, they attracted the attention of the local and state governments and became a source of inspiration for many other indigenous women in the country.

¹⁶⁰ The tendency to customarily view the adult perspective as superior to the youngster’s perspective.

Analyzing youth political participation for designing new strategies to make political processes more inclusive.

To better understand the engagement of citizens in public affairs, the Mexican Secretariat for Home Affairs (SEGOB) and the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) developed – under the National Development Plan, the National Survey on Political Culture and Citizenship Practices (ENCUP),¹⁶¹ which was conducted in 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012. The Surveys collected detailed age-disaggregated information on citizens’ views, attitudes, and practices. Similarly, in 2020, INEGI collaborated with the National Electoral Institute (INE) to carry out the National Survey of Civic Culture. To measure SDG 16.7.2, “Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group”. The results from the Survey are used to design strategies to promote participation and constructive interaction with authorities, citizens and institutions.

To collect information on youth challenges and ideas to make policies and actions responsive to youth needs, the INE organizes an accessible consultation mechanism for youth and children between 3 and 17 years old. In the last consultation, they were able to participate online, but acknowledging that online participation is not evident for many young Mexicans, the INE also installed boxes throughout the country where young people can put in their ideas and proposals to develop policies and actions to respond to their needs.¹⁶²

Furthermore, in Mexico City, the Electoral Institute of Mexico City is reaching out to children and adolescents between 6 and 17 years old to understand their concerns better and receive proposals to address the needs of children and youth in the city.¹⁶³



Photo: Office of the UN Youth Envoy / Joel Sheakoski

161 <https://en.www.inegi.org.mx/app/biblioteca/ficha.html?upc=702825001736>

162 <https://www.ine.mx/cultura-civica/consulta-infantil-juvenil/>

163 <https://www.iecm.mx/consulta-para-ninas-ninos-y-adolescentes-2019/>



Civic education

Voto Informado (informed vote)¹⁶⁴ is an initiative from the National Autonomous University, in partnership with the INE, academics, and civil society organizations, to promote citizen participation and informed voting, providing relevant information and permanent training to citizens. With more than detailed information about 20,000 candidates, Voto Informado became a popular consultation tool, supporting young people to make an informed vote.

Acknowledging that voter turnout amongst youth was low, the Institute for electoral and citizen's participation in the State of Guerrero established a Youth Secretariat and a youth focus group to reflect on strategies to increase youth participation. Moreover, in 2020, a series of workshops brought together young people, civil society organizations, public institutions, and private sectors to reflect on creating a more enabling environment for youth political participation in the State of Guerrero.

#JuventudActúaMX¹⁶⁵ – a project of the INE – promotes and accompanies youth participation in public affairs in their community, municipality, or state through advocacy on public policies.

Youth Political Participation in the Philippines – A Tale of Challenges and Opportunities

The Philippines is considered the oldest democracy in Southeast Asia. Built on the foundations of the People Power Revolution of 1986, it can boast of a rich and influential civil society movement, including many youth organizations.

However, in recent times, there have been several challenges to democratic governance, and the Philippines has also suffered from some of the longest-running armed conflicts in the world.¹⁶⁶

Formalized youth political participation in the Philippines

Recent national statistics indicate that 30 percent of the household population in the Philippines are 15-30 years old.¹⁶⁷ If these young people decide they want to become politically active they face a range of great opportunities, but also some substantial obstacles.

The Philippines can boast of an array of different institutionalized structures to ensure the political participation of young people. Arguably, the principal one is the National Youth Commission (NYC), established in 1995 and set up as the 'policy-making coordinating body of all youth-related institutions, programmes, projects and activities of the government'.¹⁶⁸

164 <https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/encuci/2020/>

165 <https://www.ine.mx/juventudactuamx-2-0/>

166 <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/01/10/philippine-politics-under-duterte-midterm-assessment-pub-78091>, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/philippines>, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25999&LangID=E#:~:text=Fabian%20Salvioli%2C%20Special%20Rapporteur%20on,of%20non%2Drecurrence%3B%20Mr.>

167 Updated Philippine Youth Development Plan (PYDP) – National Youth Commission (nyc.gov.ph)

168 <https://nyc.gov.ph/vision-mission-corevalues/>

Another, the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK), was created in 1991 and set up as a platform to allow for the direct participation of young people at the local level. In 1992, young SK leaders were elected in nearly 42,00 barangays. Initially, the age bracket for participation was from 15-17 years-old, but in 2015 this was changed to 18-24.¹⁶⁹

A more recent body is the Bangsamoro Youth Commission (BYC). Set up as part of the Bangsamoro transitional process, it 'is the primary policy-making and coordinating body of the Bangsamoro Government in all matters affecting the youth'.¹⁷⁰

UNDP in the Philippines has been working closely with the BYC, among others, through a training-of-trainer for BYC and its partners on human-centered design/organizing hackathons and co-designing an Ideation Impact Challenge.

Finally, there are various other government bodies, such as the National Anti-Poverty Commission, that have dedicated seats for youth representatives as part of their composition.

While the existence of these different bodies and positions is undoubtedly positive, they each also come with their share of challenges and complications. Particularly when it comes to the SKs, it seems they can be highly effective if and when the youth elected is politically affiliated with the local chief executive; however, many that are not end up underfunded and unsupported. This has affected the number of young people running for SK positions in recent times.

Broader youth initiatives

More broadly speaking, the Philippines is home to a wide range of youth organizations, movements and networks, including many dedicated to peacebuilding and conflict prevention. So much so that in international fora and platforms, examples of Filipino youth initiatives are often highlighted as positive examples.

While such recognition comes with great benefits, it has also, at times, meant that those youth initiatives that are less successful are overshadowed by and find it challenging to get support for their needs due to the international accolades of their more successful colleagues.

A relatively new trend has been the focus of the security sector on youth. Through workshops, camps and other initiatives, the security sector is training, consulting, and engaging with youth.

To some extent, this can be seen as a positive development, particularly when consulting youth on peace and security issues, including security sector reform. However, it has also been noted that such engagement is often crafted around



Photo: UNDP Eurasia / Mackenzie Knowles-Coursin

169 <https://nyc.gov.ph/sangguniangkabataan/>

170 <https://byc.bangsamoro.gov.ph/>

challenging security narratives, especially the war on drugs and anti-insurgency strategies. In some instances, specifically in cases where youth might have been less inclined to follow the same agenda as the security sector, it has led to a clampdown on youth initiatives or individuals.

Peace processes

The Philippines has seen a number of peace processes and negotiations. The inclusion of youth in these has been highly dependent on the status of these negotiations and the perceptions the negotiating parties had of the potential benefit of youth involvement.

With the most recent negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, youth were especially involved ‘around the room’. While there were some young people ‘in the room’, they were there in different roles and not specifically to represent young people.

Still, given the long history of youth peace activism and youth organizations maximizing channels of communication with members of the peace panels on both sides, they were able to play a significant role in determining the outcome of the negotiations.¹⁷¹

This became particularly evident when the Mamasapano incident happened in 2015, on the eve of passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law in Congress, which nearly jeopardized the entire peace process. Youth organizations, such as GenPeace, were among the first to acknowledge the impact public sentiment would have on the situation and organized dialogues with local communities both within Mindanao and the rest of the country to address the public’s questions over the sincerity of the peace process and to continue to call for peace.

The National Action Plan

On 30 August 2022, the Philippines launched the Philippine National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security. The development process was led by the Office of the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process (OPAPP), now called the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation, and Unity (OPAPRU). Early on, a multi-stakeholder group – including a range of different government agencies, civil society groups, and academe – was set up to coordinate the process. At the same time, main drafting responsibilities lay with the NYC and the National Association of Parliamentarians.

A series of youth consultations took place, including for the Bangsamoro Action Plan, which was being drafted simultaneously. And youth were invited to contribute to the drafting directly. The creation of the NAP should put the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda firmly on the map in the Philippines. However, given that some deemed the process to be overtly government-led, various key youth and peace organizations refused to be part of the NAP.¹⁷²

As with many structures, processes, and initiatives around the political participation of youth in the Philippines, there are both positive and challenging sides to the NAP. For youth themselves,

171 https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2018-04/11.%20CFR_Philippines%20-%20Young%20People%20and%20their%20Role%20in%20Peace%20Negotiations_Michael%20Frank%20A.%20Alar_0.pdf

172 <https://peace.gov.ph/napyyps/>



as well as youth organizations supporting or representing them, it has meant they have had to choose between joining and attempting to make changes from within or to observe and monitor the challenges from outside. A difficult choice to make, and one in which there were no easy or correct answers.

Somalia: Creating Space for Youth Political Participation in a Clan-Based Society Dominated by Elders

With the installment of a new federal government in 2012, Somalia has been inching towards stability, including a peaceful transition of power after indirect elections in 2017. However, the authorities still face challenges establishing a peaceful and inclusive society. After decades of conflict, Somalia seeks to reconcile international standards for democratic governance with traditional clan-based governance. At the same time, Somalia – highly affected by extreme drought – needs to respond to climate change and severe drought and will need to formulate responses to a migration crisis in the region.

60 percent of the population of Somalia is under 25. Young people have never seen a stable political situation in the country and were raised in a society where youth were largely excluded from social, political, and economic life. While many of Somalia’s youth desire direct democratic elections, the current political decision-making process largely excludes them from political participation. It denies them their right to participate in a one-person-one-vote direct election at the Federal, State, and District levels. Furthermore, security concerns remain a severe challenge for political engagement.¹⁷³

In this complex political landscape, where young people are victims of conflicts but also are eager to be a part of the constructive efforts to rebuild the nation, Youth, Peace and Security efforts are aligned with attempts to foster inclusive political participation and inclusion.

Co-organized by the Y-peer network and Maan Somalia, the **Somali launch of the Amman “Declaration on Youth, Peace, and Security** was the first national follow-up event to the Global Forum on Youth Peace and Security in 2015.¹⁷⁴ The event highlighted the positive roles and leadership that Somali youth play in preventing and resolving conflict, violence, and extremism, which was reflected in the **Somali Youth for Peace Pact**.

Somalia organized national **youth conferences from 2015 until 2020**, bringing together young people from across the country to discuss how young men and women can play an active role in Somalia’s peace and security agenda. Somalia launched its first National Youth Policy during the

173 The report “Youth Participation in Parliaments and Peace and Security A contribution from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) to the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security” reveals that young political leaders are working in fear: young people are afraid to engage directly with youth organizations on peace and security issues, fearing attacks by the Al-Shabaab militia group; young politicians are taking various security measures, such as not announcing meetings publicly and not asking members to include names in meeting records. https://www.ipu.org/sites/default/files/documents/tp_youth_participation_in_parliaments_and_peace_and_security_ipu.pdf

174 <https://www.youth4peace.info/node/61>

Somali National Youth Conference in 2017.¹⁷⁵ Building upon the previous National Youth Policy, a new national youth policy has been developed for 2022-2024.

In the divided city of Galkayo (sectioned along a north/south axis) in the north-central part of Somalia, known for various tribal conflicts, young people in the city have stepped up and decided to break the circle of violence. With support from the UN, **the Joint Galkayo Youth Committee** was established, bringing together young men and women from north and south Galkayo to formulate responses to the needs of young people in the city jointly.

The Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA), in collaboration with UNFPA and UNSOM and together with local CSOs (including youth-led-organizations) are organizing a series of forums in each Federal Member State (FMS) of Somalia to discuss ways of **promoting youth electoral participation**. The purpose of the initiative is to contribute to a greater understanding, increased coordination and improved way of working to increase youth electoral participation among relevant stakeholders, including government institutions, CSOs, youth-led organizations and international actors.¹⁷⁶

In 2018, UN-Habitat and UNFPA,¹⁷⁷ in coordination with the Federal Government of Somalia Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministers of Youth from the Federal Member States of Jubaland and South-West, launched the **Youth Political Empowerment Project**. Through intergenerational dialogues, awareness sessions, media campaigns, and leadership training, the project contributed to a significant increase in youth political participation in the South-West and Jubaland State



Photo: UN ESCAP

¹⁷⁵ The National Youth Policy benefited from technical advice provided by a specific task force created under the UN Inter-Agency Working Group on Youth. <https://somalia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA%20Somalia%20National%20Youth%20Policy%20Eng%20fa.pdf>

¹⁷⁶ The findings from the forums will be summarized in a report providing practical ideas and a suggested way forward deriving from the discussions between youth and other relevant stakeholders for policymakers and reflections on “best practices” among the organizations working to promote youth participation in Somalia.

¹⁷⁷ Supported by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund as part of the Youth Promotion Initiative.



Parliament.¹⁷⁸ The increase of young people in State Parliaments in Somalia is vital for influencing policy dialogues. However – to ensure that youth voices are heard in decision-making processes – continued efforts will be needed to build bridges between elders and young people and between the State Parliaments and Youth organizations.

During the political crisis in Somalia in 2021, UNSOM, UNFPA and the “Bringing Unity, Integrity and Legitimacy to Democracy” (BUILD)” initiative organized a youth political dialogue to highlight young people’s role in identifying solutions and advocacy skills training for young political aspirants through outreach to political parties.

The international community partners with various state institutions and civil society organizations to support Somalia to become more stable, safe, and inclusive. In the last decade, multiple organizations have been conducting initiatives to strengthen the political participation of young people. Recognizing that young people play a critical role in rebuilding the country, **youth is increasingly gaining prominence in peacebuilding and sustainable development initiatives.** To increase impact, organizations are reflecting on strengthening cohesion between various initiatives and the development of common strategies to support processes, creating a more enabling environment for youth.

Often excluded from traditional media outlets, Somali youth are **increasingly using social media platforms to debate** various issues in society. In the future, the creation of a culture of online debating and activism might lead to influencing policies and create more space for youth political participation.

¹⁷⁸ In the South-West State parliament, a total of 43 young people (25 and 36 years old) were elected to the Southwest state parliament, marking a historical 45% youth representation out of 95 possible seats in parliament. In Jubaland State Parliament, 15 young people were elected.

Recommendations for Enhancing Youth Political Participation

Youth political participation is instrumental to building sustainable peace, but much work is needed to gain broad support and recognition and to take relevant action. The following recommendations should be considered and prioritized:

1. Safety and Security of Youth in Civic Spaces

- Develop comprehensive policies to ensure the safety and security of young people as they claim their civic space and engage politically. This involves protecting youth from harassment and violations and providing a secure environment for their political activities in all forms, from online discourse to physical protests.

2. Countering the Trend of Shrinking Civic Spaces

- Recognize and actively work against the global trend of shrinking civic spaces, mainly how it affects young people. Efforts should include expanding civic space for youth, ensuring they are informed of their rights and the risks involved in political participation, and integrating civic education into youth programming.

3. Accountability for Repressive Actions

- Establish mechanisms for holding authorities accountable for any disproportionate and repressive actions taken against young people exercising their rights to expression and assembly. This includes reviewing and amending policies and procedures to prevent such incidents and promoting the reform of models that guide authorities' responses to ensure they are conducive to a safe civic environment for youth.

4. Guidance in Political Sensitivities

- Provide concrete and specific support for young people in navigating the political sensitivities associated with the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda. Offer tools and resources to guarantee safety from physical, digital, and mental health threats while also educating on human rights protections.

5. Youth Mainstreaming and Support for Marginalized Groups

- Advance both the mainstreaming of youth issues and the provision of special assistance for the most marginalized among the youth, ensuring their voices are heard and their political participation is facilitated. This includes addressing the specific needs and barriers faced by young women, Indigenous youth, LGBTIQ+ youth, those with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged youth, among others.



6. Research, Data Collection, and Learning

- Encourage further research and improved data collection methodologies to support the YPS Agenda more effectively. This includes identifying trends, challenges, opportunities, and potential allies for promoting youth political participation. Specific research on different forms of political engagement is also essential, ranging from participation in parliaments and electoral processes to involvement in political parties and the legislative process.

7. Sustainable Funding Models

- Ensure the political participation of youth is sustainably funded, moving away from ad-hoc or short-term project financing. Funds should be allocated in a way that does not disadvantage grassroots efforts, which often lack sophisticated grant-writing capabilities.

8. Inclusive Decision-Making in Partnerships

- Make informed and inclusive decisions regarding partnerships and organizational inclusions in projects and programs. Ensure that language barriers do not exclude potential contributors and that there is a diversity of individuals and organizations that mirrors the diversity of youth themselves.

9. Differentiating Youth Representation

- Take special care to distinguish between youth who represent their views and those who are representatives speaking on behalf of youth. While experience and knowledge are important, it is crucial that youth are provided the opportunity for direct participation and are not merely represented by others.

10. Bridging the Digital Divide

- Acknowledge the advantages of online programs while also recognizing the digital divide. Monitor and support those who might be excluded due to lack of access to digital technologies to ensure inclusive participation.

11. Whole-of-Society Approach

- Promote a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to fully realize youth political participation. This requires not only targeting youth but also prioritizing engagement with those who hold the power to grant access to political platforms and opportunities for meaningful dialogue.

12. Maintaining Focus on Youth Priorities

- Keep the focus on the primary objectives of political participation, ensuring that the enthusiasm for the YPS Agenda does not overpower the ability to listen to and prioritize what young people identify as their own needs and goals. The YPS Agenda should be a means to support the meaningful participation of youth in peace and security, not an end in itself.

Conclusion

Efforts to boost the political participation of young people and those advocating for the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda frequently appear to operate as two separate areas of expertise. Consequently, projects often overlook the connection between these two realms, failing to establish links that could enhance their effectiveness. However, as underscored by United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250, the political participation of young people is crucial for their direct and meaningful contribution to establishing enduring peace. This Guide aims to highlight and bridge this connection, bringing the two fields into closer alignment.

The absence of a universally agreed-upon definition of youth, coupled with challenges in collecting age-specific data, often complicates research, policy development, and progress monitoring. To gain a deeper understanding of how young people are involved in political processes and in the civic sphere, and to better support their increased participation, enhanced collaboration is essential. This collaboration should involve youth organizations, governments, development partners, and other stakeholders, all working together to address these challenges and facilitate greater political engagement among young people.

Fostering youth political participation to build safe and peaceful societies is not just a responsibility of those countries suffering from war, armed conflict or fragility; rather, advancing youth involvement in the pursuit of peace is a global agenda that warrants appropriate resources and attention. Particularly today, when democracies worldwide face various challenges, from closing civic space, including for youth, to the erosion of trust in political institutions and the increased polarization of our societies, we cannot afford to leave young people behind.

Investing in youth political participation is essential. We are witnessing the largest generation of young people in history, with an estimated 1.8 billion individuals, or approximately 23.7 percent of the global population, aged between 10 and 24 years. Despite their numbers, these young people face numerous obstacles and are among the most impacted by contemporary challenges. Prioritizing their political engagement is not just beneficial but essential for addressing the issues of our time.

Young people are not remaining on the sidelines in these struggles. They are actively stepping forward, raising their voices, and leveraging their energy, knowledge, and unconventional thinking to effect change. By creating opportunities for them to participate meaningfully, we enable young people to contribute their innovative ideas and solutions to combat climate change, foster inclusivity in our societies, and build enduring peace.

But they cannot do this alone. They need support in several ways: by being provided with genuine opportunities for engagement, being allowed to represent themselves, being given the resources and time to implement projects and bring their creative ideas to fruition, and most importantly, being taken seriously. The political participation of young people holds the potential for tremendous impact, but it necessitates robust partnerships with a diverse array of stakeholders. This includes parliaments, local governments, UN agencies, grassroots civil society organizations, the media, and the families and communities of the young people themselves. By working together, we can help young people thrive.



Photo: UNDP / Getty



Annexes

International and Regional Normative and Policy Frameworks to Enhance Youth Participation

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948)¹⁷⁹	Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights codifies the right to take part in the government (directly or through freely chosen representatives) and specifies that the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government (expressed in periodic and genuine elections).
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1966)¹⁸⁰	Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) codifies the right to participate in public affairs. In 1996, the UN Human Rights Committee elaborated on this article further and took a broad interpretation of the right to participate in public affairs. ¹⁸¹
Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979)¹⁸²	Young women are particularly vulnerable to political exclusion. Therefore, it is vital to also look at specific conventions to eliminate discrimination against women. CEDAW highlights the need to take action to guarantee women and men have equal rights to be politically engaged.
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989)¹⁸³	The UNCRC is a legally binding international agreement setting out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of every child, regardless of their race, religion or abilities. Article 12 codifies the right of children to express their views freely.

179 <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

180 <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%20999/volume-999-i-14668-english.pdf>

181 Human Rights Committee, General Comment 25 (57), General Comments under article 40, paragraph 4, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Adopted by the Committee at its 1510th meeting, U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7 (1996). <https://www.equalrightstrust.org/ertdocumentbank/general%20comment%2025.pdf>

182 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2016/12/cedaw-for-youth>

183 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>



Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)¹⁸⁴	<p>The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is a comprehensive global policy framework and blueprint to realize gender equality and the human rights of women and girls everywhere. One of its strategic objectives (E.4) is the promotion of women’s contribution to fostering a culture of peace. It further formulated actions to be taken by Governments, international and regional intergovernmental institutions and non-governmental organizations to promote peaceful conflict resolution and peace, reconciliation and tolerance through education, training, community actions and youth exchange programmes, in particular for young women.</p>
The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) (1996)¹⁸⁵	<p>The World Programme of Action for Youth provides a policy framework and practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the situation of young people. To foster youth participation in decision-making processes, the document formulates “Full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and decision-making” as a priority area. It includes several proposals for actions for the year 2000 and beyond.</p>
UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/58/133, Policies and Programmes Involving Youth (2003)¹⁸⁶	<p>The General Assembly Resolution recognizes in Articles 4 and 5 the importance of the full and effective participation of young people and youth organizations at the local, national, regional, and international level in promoting and implementing the World Programme of Action and in evaluating the progress achieved and the obstacles encountered in its implementation. It also recognizes the need to support activities that have been set up by young people and youth organizations, bearing in mind that girls, boys, young women and young men have the same rights but different needs and strengths, and are active agents in decision-making processes and positive change and development in society.</p>
Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (2004)¹⁸⁷	<p>As displaced young people are still too often denied the right of political participation, it is important to look at specific frameworks that are addressing the political rights of Internally Displaced (young) People.</p> <p>The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement highlights that internally displaced persons continue to enjoy the right to political participation on the same basis as their non-displaced compatriots. Being displaced is not a sufficient or reasonable cause for denying or restricting the exercise of the right to vote.</p>

184 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/01/beijing-declaration>

185 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/world-programme-of-action-for-youth.html>

186 <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/509202?ln=en>

187 <https://www.unhcr.org/43ce1cff2.pdf>



Iberoamerican Convention on the Rights of Youth (2005)¹⁸⁸	The Convention lays out specific rights for young people between 15-24 years old and recognises them as strategic actors in development. The right of young people to participate in politics is codified in Articles 18 and 21.
African Union Commission, African Youth Charter (2006)¹⁸⁹	The African Youth Charter specifies the rights, duties and freedoms of African youth and their constructive engagement in decision-making processes and the developmental aspirations of the continent. Article 11 of the AYC provides for youth participation in all spheres of society through active involvement in decision-making bodies and processes, the equal access of young men and women in decision-making, priority attention to marginalized youth, and the provision of technical and financial support to build the institutional capacity of youth organizations. Article 17 highlights the important role of youth in peace and security, through the strengthening of the capacity of young people and youth-led bodies in peacebuilding and conflict prevention; use of education among others to promote a culture of peace and tolerance among youth; and mobilize youth for post-conflict reconstruction, rehabilitation, reconciliation and development of affected areas.
122nd Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Youth Resolution (2010)¹⁹⁰	The IPU Youth Resolution is a call to action to include more young people in political decision-making. The Resolution led also to the creation of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians. ¹⁹¹
Declaration of Paramaribo on the Future of Youth in the Caribbean Community (2010)¹⁹²	The Declaration reinforces the importance of regional integration in advancing the interests of youth and the importance of the interests of youth to economic resilience and economic integration at the national and regional levels. It affirms the right of adolescents and youth to participate in decision-making on matters in which they have an interest and that affect them, towards improved standards of living at national and regional levels.
United Nations General Assembly Resolution 70/127. Policies and Programmes Involving Youth (2015)¹⁹³	The United Nations General Assembly Resolution highlights the importance of involving youth in the work of the United Nations at the national, regional and international levels, in all matters of concern to them, including in the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth and of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

188 [http://www.unicef.org/lac/IberoAmerican_Convention_on_the_Rights_of_Youth\(1\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/lac/IberoAmerican_Convention_on_the_Rights_of_Youth(1).pdf)

189 http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/african_youth_charter_2006.pdf

190 <http://archive.ipu.org/conf-e/122/Res-3.htm>

191 <https://www.ipu.org/about-ipu/structure-and-governance/governing-council/forum-young-parliamentarians>

192 <https://caricom.org/declaration-of-paramaribo-on-the-future-of-youth-in-the-caribbean-community/>

193 <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/820773?ln=en>



Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security (2015)¹⁹⁴	The United Nations Security Council Resolution recognizes that “young people play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security and are Urging Member States to consider ways to give youth a greater voice in decision-making at the local, national, regional and international levels.”
General Assembly Resolution Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015)¹⁹⁵	The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were set up in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly and are intended to be achieved by the year 2030. The Sustainable Development Goals are 17 interlinked global goals designed to be a “blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.” While all goals are interlinked and of importance to foster youth inclusive decision-making processes to achieve peaceful and sustainable societies, one Goal – Goal 16 and its targets – is of particular importance when measuring progress on the inclusion of young people in decision-making processes. Goal 16. <i>“Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”.</i>
Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security (2015)¹⁹⁶	Adopted, after a consultation involving 10,000 young people engaged in peace and security issues from around the world. The Declaration highlights four key areas where the international community should partner with young people: 1. Participation and leadership in peace and security issues; 2. Preventing violence and building peace; 3. Promoting gender equality and young people’s socio-economic empowerment.
Security Council Resolution 2419 (2018)¹⁹⁷	Recognizing the positive role young people can play in negotiating and implementing peace agreements and conflict prevention, the resolution urges stakeholders to take young people’s views into account and facilitate their equal and full participation in peace and decision-making processes at all levels.
European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027 (2018)¹⁹⁸	The EU Youth Strategy is the framework for EU youth policy cooperation for 2019-2027. It fosters youth participation in democratic life. It also supports social and civic engagement and aims to ensure that all young people have the necessary resources to take part in society.

194 [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250\(2015\)&referer=/english/&Lang=E](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250(2015)&referer=/english/&Lang=E)

195 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

196 <https://www.youth4peace.info/node/49>

197 [https://www.youth4peace.info/unscr2419#:~:text=Resolution%202419%20\(2018\)%20is%20the,peace%20agreements%20and%20conflict%20prevention](https://www.youth4peace.info/unscr2419#:~:text=Resolution%202419%20(2018)%20is%20the,peace%20agreements%20and%20conflict%20prevention)

198 https://europa.eu/youth/strategy_en



<p>European Youth Forum, Resolution on Combating Shrinking Space with Expanding Opportunities for Youth Organizations, National Youth Councils and International Non-Governmental Youth Organizations (2019)¹⁹⁹</p>	<p>The Resolution addresses tendencies that are undermining the strength and positions of the free democratic civil society youth sector. Perceiving an active and independent youth civil society sector as a fundamental basis to build just and even opportunities for youth to have their voices raised, heard and involved in decision-making processes and policies, the European Youth Forum and its member organizations are <i>“Urging immediate actions from youth organizations, national governments and European institutions to protect and expand civic space”</i>.</p>
<p>Security Council Resolution 2535 (2020)²⁰⁰</p>	<p>The UN SC Resolution underscores the critical role of youth in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. Calls for increased engagement in the implementation of UNSC resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020), to institutionalize the agenda and develop guidance on the protection of young people. The resolution introduces regular reporting on youth, peace and security and requests the Secretary-General to submit a biennial report to the Security Council.</p>
<p>Report of the Secretary-General on Youth, Peace and Security (S/2020/167)²⁰¹</p>	<p>The report provides an analysis of the five pillars of Resolution 2250: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, disengagement and reintegration as well as the institutionalization of the youth, peace and security agenda and recommendations to how member states, the Security Council, the UN and regional organizations must invest in the youth, peace and security.</p>
<p>African Union, Continental Framework for Youth, Peace and Security (2020)²⁰²</p> <p>10-Year Implementation Plan for the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) 2020-2029²⁰³</p>	<p>The Continental Framework for Youth, Peace and Security provides a framework to facilitate the meaningful engagement and participation of African youth in all spectrums of peace and security at national, regional and continental levels. It envisions the mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues including gender, capacity development, communication, inclusivity and knowledge management and upscaling of the contributions of youth to peace and security in Africa.</p>

199 <https://www.youthforum.org/resolution-combating-shrinking-space-expanding-opportunities-youth-organizations-national-youth>
 200 <https://www.youth4peace.info/UNSCR2535#:~:text=United%20Nations%20Security%20Council%20resolution,unanimously%20adopted%2014%20July%202020.&text=Furthermore%2C%20the%20resolution%20introduces%20regular,report%20to%20the%20Security%20Council>
 201 <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/167>
 202 <https://au.int/en/documents/20200821/continental-framework-youth-peace-and-security>
 203 <https://au.int/en/documents/20200821/10-year-implementation-plan-yps-2020-2029>



General Assembly Resolution on “Strengthening the Role of the United Nations in the Promotion of Democratization and Enhancing Periodic and Genuine Elections” (2021)

The General Assembly Resolution recognizes the importance of increasing the participation of youth throughout the electoral cycle. It calls upon all Member States to consider ways to increase the representation of all youth in decision-making at all levels in local, national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms, to promote the constructive political engagement of youth and to consider, explore and promote new avenues for the full, effective, structured and sustained participation of youth and youth-led organizations in relevant decision-making processes.

We are in this Together: Operationalizing a Five-Year Strategic Action Plan for Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes’, Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security (2022).²⁰⁴

The action plan aims to a) establish and strengthen political and institutional commitments to achieve the full, effective, and meaningful participation of young people in peace processes at global, regional, and national levels; b) develop youth-sensitive and gender-responsive capacity strengthening resources and knowledge tools to amplify and strengthen youth engagement in peace processes; c) develop a youth-led community of practice and collaborative partnerships to coordinate, implement, monitor, and report on the progress of the strategy; d) mobilize sustainable resources and financing to realize that peace processes are shaped by and supportive of young people’s meaningful participation, contributing to more inclusive and peaceful societies.

204 <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/YPS-five-year-strategic-action-plan.pdf>



Resources

Platforms

ACE Electoral Knowledge Network²⁰⁵ is the world's largest online community and repository of electoral knowledge. It provides comprehensive information and specialized advice on any aspect of electoral processes. The objective of the network is to foster the integrity of elections and to promote credible, sustainable, professional, and inclusive electoral processes throughout the globe.

AGORA²⁰⁶ is the leading global knowledge platform on parliamentary development. Its goals are to centralize and share knowledge on parliamentary development and develop and showcase high-quality resources in order to provide technical support to parliaments and relevant information to the community of practice and academia.

CIVICUS,²⁰⁷ the global civil society alliance, constitutes an influential network of organizations at the local, national, regional, and international levels, and spans the spectrum of civil society. CIVICUS seeks to amplify the voices and opinions of ordinary people. It recognizes that for effective and sustainable civic participation to occur, citizens must enjoy rights of free association and be able to engage all sectors of society. Furthermore, it is tracking civic space.

The **Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies**²⁰⁸ is a coordinating platform for UN Member States, private sector, civil society, and UN Agencies to promote and strengthen evidence-based reporting, monitoring and measurement of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16).

International IDEA's Political Finance Database²⁰⁹ provides answers to fundamental questions on political finance within four broad categories: a) Bans and Limits on Private Income, b) Public Funding, c) Regulations on Spending d) Reporting, Oversight and Sanctions. Users can search the comprehensive database by country, region, or question and customize and download the data.

The **Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), PARLINE Database**²¹⁰ **on National Parliaments** contains data provided directly by national parliaments on their structure, composition, working methods and activities.

Established in 2007, the **International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics)**²¹¹ is a joint project of International IDEA, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). The platform acts as a one-stop shop for experts in the area of women's political participation, as well as a platform that fosters exchange, dialogue and knowledge creation for all who are engaged in promoting women's political participation. One of the focus areas of the platform is YOUTH.

205 <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/es/esd/esd03/default>

206 <https://www.agora-parl.org/>

207 <https://monitor.civicus.org/>

208 <https://www.un-globalalliance.org/>

209 <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/political-finance-database>

210 <https://www.ipu.org/parline-e/parlinesearch.asp>

211 <https://www.iknowpolitics.org/en/focus-areas/6068>



Youth4peace Global Knowledge Portal²¹² – initiated through the multi-stakeholder partnership between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), Search for Common Ground (SfCG) and the United Network of Young Peacebuilders – promotes and supports the implementation of UN Security Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security.

The **Youth Progress Index**²¹³ of the European Youth Forum is one of the first instruments developed to give the full story of what life is like for a young person today, independent of economic indicators. It brings together reliable, relevant data to give each country a score on how well different countries meet basic human needs, foundations of wellbeing, and opportunity.

SALTO Participation and Information Pool²¹⁴ is a platform providing youth workers, youth leaders and educators with online tools to foster young people’s critical thinking and media literacy to increase quality of youth participation.

212 <https://www.youth4peace.info/>

213 <https://www.Youthpolicy.org>

214 <https://participationpool.eu/>

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