A comparative analysis on **National Youth Policies**

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Executive Summary

With the youth population of the world at an all-time high, the role of young people in nation-building and fostering sustainable development has gained prominence. Leveraging the potential of the youth as agents of change, entrepreneurs, and innovators has become a central topic discussed by policymakers. This is connected to the increasing impact of young people in implementing transformational ideas and solutions, while also significantly contributing to socio-economic development, both nationally and internationally. With their ability to voice concerns, fight for justice, and drive change, young people can become key drivers of political stability and good governance. Despite these prospects, young people are often viewed as inexperienced, disruptive, or lacking the required skills to meaningfully participate in decision-making processes. Several structural challenges limit the active participation of young people in democratic affairs, including politics, elections, and civic engagement. These challenges include:

- **Adult-centric institutions.** Current modes of youth participation are often determined from an adult-centric perspective, where elders frequently minimise the value of youth contributions while expecting them to navigate systems designed solely by and for adults, and only when adults deem it indispensable or beneficial.
- **Unfavourable political context.** Nepotism, age restrictions, cultural marginalisation, artificial bureaucracy, and financial limitations to enter politics are the main political barriers to youth participation.
- **Political repression.** In authoritarian regimes, dissent and alternative viewpoints are often suppressed, making it difficult for youth to voice their concerns, needs, and ideas. Young people might be tokenized by the authorities to create an illusion of openness and progress.
- **Lack of quality civic education.** Young people in many developing countries lack the required skills to actively participate in policy processes and public affairs. This is largely due to insufficient funding in the educational system and inadequate opportunities for young people to gain practical skills and socio-political experience.
- **Organisational and institutional challenges.** Despite the aspirational goal of some governments to increase youth participation, their efforts often do not yield the expected results. Common issues surrounding the implementation of youth policies include insufficient allocation of resources, limited technical capacity, a lack of political incentives, and unclear ownership.

Despite their unique barriers and fault lines, some countries are making conscious efforts and significant progress in integrating young people into public affairs. These countries are not only developing youth-centred policies but are also putting young people at the centre of their national prosperity and development. This study focuses on ten countries – Australia, Costa Rica, Georgia, Kenya, Liberia, Malta, Morocco, Nepal, Philippines, and Solomon Islands – exploring their youth-focused policies and programmes as well as their implementation patterns. This scoping study focuses on existing good practices in the sphere of youth political and civic participation, with a view to subsequently recommend the replication and amplification of these practices in participating countries of the Summit for Democracy.

This study explores both primary and secondary sources of data. On secondary sources of data, the study conducts comprehensive reviews of relevant literature and reports – including journal articles, policy documents, government reports, and opinion editorials. The scoping study also consults primary sources of data, conducting key informant interviews for three groups of participants in all case countries. These include youth representatives, policymakers, and civil society actors. In analysing the data gathered, this study uses thematic and content models of analyses, grouping findings into key dominant themes.

After examining the case countries, the scoping study identified key findings on the basis of concrete examples where government-initiated youth initiatives appeared to be significant in improving the participation of young people in democratic practices. The lessons learnt and key recommendations are listed below.

I. Youth ecosystem:

By bringing together government bodies, youth groups, civil society, educational institutions, and businesses, governments can establish a youth ecosystem that addresses multifaceted challenges and promotes long-term, comprehensive solutions. Several case studies were successful in building a space that brings together young people and other stakeholders to jointly advance a youth-oriented developmental agenda.

1. Clear roles and responsibilities: Define specific roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder within the youth ecosystem to ensure a clear understanding of the scope of their contributions.
2. Coordination mechanisms: Create well-resourced coordination mechanisms that facilitate communication, collaboration, and the sharing of materials among stakeholders.
3. Inclusive engagement: Recognise that systemic and institutional inequalities will persist if not addressed intentionally.

II. Technology for improved accessibility of youth initiatives:

The transformative potential of technology is a tool for engaging youth and bridging information gaps. Case countries use the disruptive power of information and technology to meaningfully engage young people in public affairs, leveraging digital platforms to consult youth and communicate their policies and programmes. Young people in these countries are using social media as a space to advocate for socio-political issues, while also using it as a platform to create awareness.

1. Tools for digital advocacy: Create digital tools that facilitate youth advocacy, including digital platforms, social media engagement tools, and interactive educational content.
2. Two-way feedback mechanism: Establish digital two-way feedback mechanisms to encourage communication with youth.
3. Traditional methods of youth engagement: Continue to engage with youth in offline spaces to ensure the inclusion of less digitally-connected youth.

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III. Trusting in youth abilities to drive solutions:

Young people possess great potential to drive change and shape successful initiatives. Case countries acknowledge the unique abilities of youth, value their contributions to nation building, and encourage them to meaningfully participate in public affairs. Believing in the innovative solutions that young people offer and providing the necessary resources to support their solutions is a key lesson stemming from the analyses of the case countries.

1. Youth representation bodies: Establish representative youth structures that are transparent, institutionally mandated, resourced, self-organised, inclusive, and adjusted to the local context.
2. Capacity building for government staff: Provide training programmes and workshops for government staff to enhance their understanding of youth engagement, communication, and effective collaboration.
3. Resources for youth-led projects: Allocate dedicated financial and non-financial resources specifically for youth-led projects to ensure successful execution of initiatives.

IV. Youth engagement as a strategy for promoting peace and security:

Case countries meaningfully integrate young people into public affairs to give them a sense of belonging to the system, bestowing on them the responsibility to promote national youth development and stability.

1. Quality education and empowerment of young people: Empower youth with quality education and transferable skills to maintain peace and security.
2. Institutionalising youth inclusion in public affairs: Put in place constitutional provisions and policies that erase the structural barriers limiting the participation of young people in politics, elections, and civic activities.
3. Promoting the human rights of young people: Commit to promoting and protecting the human rights of young people, including freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

V. Building the capacity of young people:

Case countries are integrating civic education into school curriculums, while also providing opportunities that expose young people to civil service by implementing initiatives such as paid internships, training sessions, and mentorship programmes.

1. Civic education and mentorship programmes: Invest in quality civic education, training programmes, simulation events, and bootcamps that will build the technical and leadership skills of young people.
2. Financing youth-led initiatives and programmes: Provide financial support to youth-led initiatives to build leadership and management skills through experiential learning.
3. Partnerships for youth development: Prioritise multi-stakeholder partnerships to improve youth participation in national development efforts.

A recurring observation emerging from the findings is that every case study country has its own distinct approach to advancing the involvement of young people in public affairs. While most countries had established youth representation bodies in various shapes and forms, only some governments opted to implement affirmative action within their representative structures. Several case study countries have undertaken significant efforts to enhance the capabilities of young people, and some have decided to foster youth leadership by providing financial support to youth-led projects and initiatives. It became evident that a single perfect solution or fixed path guaranteeing improved youth participation does not exist. Instead, actions must be tailored to the local context and realities and directly address the needs and priorities of young citizens.

Introduction

With the world's youth population at an all-time high, the role of young people in nation-building and fostering sustainable development has gained prominence. Despite the age-long pessimistic views about the apathy of young people to public affairs and lack of interest in civic life, this demographic population is now driving positive socio-political and economic changes at both national and international levels.

From expressing political views to promoting human rights, from establishing start-ups to implementing innovative solutions, from actively participating in electoral processes to holding policy makers accountable – young people are significantly contributing to public policies and civic engagement. Young people played a crucial role in influencing the government's decision to reduce the legal voting age from 18 to 16 years old in Malta.[1] At the international level, young people are at the forefront of driving international cooperation and co-shaping the global development agenda, including the UN Agenda 2030[2]. The European Commission's Vice President, Dubravka Šuica, recently remarked that "we need the vision, engagement, and participation of all young people to build a greener, more inclusive, fair, and digital future"[3].

Young people still face enormous structural challenges that limit their participation in public affairs. Some of these challenges include constitutional limitations, symbolic implementation of youth-focused policies, lack of quality civic education, limited leadership and technical skills, and political instability. In some countries, young people are viewed as inexperienced, disruptive, and lacking the required skills to meaningfully participate in public affairs. Additionally, some countries have failed to invest in building the capacity of young people and have overlooked their potential to contribute to the national and international development agenda. This gesture not only overlooks the potential of young people to drive developmental priorities but also their growing efforts in advancing several socio-political and economic issues.

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1 Maria Pace, "Reactions: Malta becomes second EU state to grant 16-year-olds vote," Malta Today, 2023, https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/85059/reactions_malta_becomes_second_eu_state_to_grant_16yearolds_vote.
2 United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.*, Resolution A/RES/70/1, adopted September 25, 2015.
3 "Remarks by Commission Vice-President Šuica at the UN ECOSOC Youth Forum: Ministerial Roundtable | EEAS," The Diplomatic Service of the European Union | EEAS, April 25, 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/remarks-commission-vice-president-šuica-un-ecosoc-youth-forum-ministerial_en.

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International and regional youth policy frameworks

Since the adoption of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, the international community has experienced an increasing wave of policy frameworks advancing youth inclusion in politics and civic engagement[4]. These policies acknowledge the importance of youth inclusion in public affairs and their indispensable roles in promoting national and international socio-economic and political development. This is evident in several global and regional frameworks that emphasise the need to integrate young people into the policy process. Some of these frameworks include the European Union (EU) Charter on Youth and Democracy, the African Youth Charter, the UN Youth Strategy, and the recent EU Youth Action Plan on External Actions. The EU Youth Action Plan presents a political framework to meaningfully engage young people in EU external actions, adopting three major strategies; *engage, empower, and connect*[5]. Article 11 of the African Youth Charter stresses the importance of young people actively participating in politics and civic life, while Article 12 requires all member states to develop and implement comprehensive and coherent national youth policies[6]. The UN Security Council Resolution 2250 also recognises that

"young people play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security"[7].

This also aligns with Article 3 of the 1967 International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, which mandates state parties to ensure equal rights for men and women to enjoy all forms of civil and political rights[8]. All of these frameworks underscore the rights of young people to express themselves as well as participate and influence policy processes.

Relevance of youth participation

With a total population of 1.8 billion, young people between the ages of 15–29 years old account for 24% of the global population[9]. This figure signals a huge potential for national and international development if young people are successfully integrated into public affairs. Specifically, young people have the potential to drive meaningful public policies and protect existing democratic processes, using their skills to hold policymakers accountable, drive transparency, improve civic engagement, advocate for a better society, and promote social cohesion[10].

Ideally, meaningful youth engagement in civic and political processes would lead to better policy outcomes on socio-political and economic issues. Integrating youth into public affairs not only strengthens political processes but also provides them with necessary skills – including problem-solving, negotiation, and communication skills – to advance national and international development agendas. In addition, youth participation in decision-making processes will provide them with the necessary leadership skills and experience to take on future political positions. With adequate investment in education and a conducive environment, young people can advance democratic processes and be a part of building a present and future that works for everyone. This can include challenging unfair resource distribution, human rights abuses, socio-economic discrimination, and other forms of injustice[11]. Providing young people with technical skills will drive solution-driven policies, while also fostering intergenerational partnerships for national and international prosperity. The youth represent the voice for sustaining democracy and good governance. This is why the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, remarked that "the best hope [to address these] global challenges is with the new generations, we need to make sure that we are able to strongly invest in those new generations"[12].

4 United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, General Assembly Resolution 44/25, adopted November 20, 1989.
5 "Youth Action Plan (YAP) in EU external action 2022 – 2027," press release no. JOIN(2022) 53, October 4, 2022, https://international-partnerships. ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Joint%20Communication%20-%20Youth%20Action%20Plan%20in%20EU%20external%20action%202022%20–%202027. pdf.
6African Union. *African Youth Charter*, Treaty 7789, adopted July 2, 2006.
7 United Nations. *Security Council Resolution on youth, peace and security*, Resolution 2250, adopted March 18, 2016.
8 United Nations General Assembly. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, Treaty Series vol. 999, adopted December 16, 1966.
9 United Nations, *World Population Prospects 2019: Highlights* (New York: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2019).
10 Generation Unlimited, *Young people's participation and civic engagement* (2020), https://www.generationunlimited.org/media/3021/file/Action%20 Guide%205:%20Young%20people's%20participation%20and%20civic%20engagement.pdf.
11 Ibid.
12 "Secretary-General, Addressing Cairo University, Encourages Students to Lead in Building Future of Egypt, 'Wonderful Region' at Large | UN Press," UN Press, accessed August 31, 2023, https://press.un.org/en/2017/sgsm18439.doc.htm.

Young people, in all their diversity, want to and have the right to be involved in decisions that affect them. Excluding young people from governance structures, even passively, has repercussions. Failure to meaningfully include youth in policy processes and institutions has resulted in heightened frustration and resentment among young political activists in many countries, leading to escalation of conflict dynamics and slowing down democratisation processes[13]. It is becoming increasingly important for policymakers to find ways to promote youth engagement through established mechanisms while also incorporating non-traditional forms of political involvement.

Forms of youth participation

Contemporary youth inclusion in public affairs occurs in both traditional and non-traditional settings. Traditionally, integrating young people into political processes automatically connotes them participating in electoral processes, holding elective political positions, or being card-carrying members of political parties[14]. While interest in conventional forms of political participation is declining in some parts of the world, young people in certain countries are actively participating in elections and finding their voices in campaigning for the candidates of their choice. Young people accounted for 39.65% of the total number of registered voters in Nigeria's 2023 general elections, making them the highest demographic group that enrolled for the election[15]. In Armenia and Ethiopia, individuals under 40 years old account for over half of all members of their respective parliaments[16]. Nevertheless, on average, youth involvement in traditional political and civic activities is lower compared to more senior generations[17].

Young people are now gravitating to other forms of political participation – such as advocating for good governance, campaigning against human rights abuses, and using online platforms to participate in decision-making processes. With the emergence of technology, young people are increasingly using social media to engage politically and speak against injustices. A good example was the significant role of social media in the Arab Spring in 2011, where activists used the platform to advance their protests[18]. This is also evident in the popular #BlackLivesMatter campaign – a socio-political movement that leverages X (formerly Twitter) to highlight racial discrimination, incidents of police brutality, and racially motivated violent conflicts against Black people. Given the heightened access to information and increased importance of digital communities, countries have started to develop strategies that embrace non-conventional youth participation, often leveraging new technologies. Some countries are developing youth-focused national policies, encouraging the engagement of young people through public consultations, youth parliamentary and representative groups, local youth councils, and participatory budgeting programmes, among others[19]. This is evident in Sierra Leone's 2020–2025 National Youth Policy, which focuses on empowering young people in the country, while also defining their significant roles in the country's growth and development[20]. At the regional level, the African Youth Volunteer programme of the African Union also provides the opportunity for young Africans to participate in promoting human development in the continent. These instances reveal the growing relevance of young people in public affairs in both traditional and non-traditional settings.

13 *Enhancing Youth Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2015).
14 Marcin Kaim, "Rethinking Modes of Political Participation," *Democratic Theory* 8, no. 1 (June 1, 2021), https://doi.org/10.3167/dt.2021.080104.
15 Qosim Suleiman, "2023 Polls: Youth population tops age distribution chart as INEC presents list of 93.4 registered voters," Premium Times Nigeria, January 11, 2023, https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/575140-2023-polls-youth-population-tops-age-distribution-chart-as-inec-presents-list-of-93-4-registered-voters.html.
16 Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Data on age: By country," Parline: the IPU's Open Data Platform, accessed August 31, 2023, https://data.ipu.org/age-brackets?sort=desc&order=%%2040%20or%20under.
17 Aaron Azelton, Bret Barrowman, and Lisa Reppell, *Raising Their Voices: How effective are pro-youth laws and policies?* (National Democratic Institute, 2019).
18 Gadi Wolfsfeld, Elad Segev, and Tamir Sheafer, "Social Media and the Arab Spring," *International Journal of Press/Politics* 18, no. 2 (January 16, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161212471716.
19 *Government at a Glance 2021* (OECD, 2021), Youth representation in politics, https://doi.org/10.1787/1c258f55-en.
20 Sierra Leone, Ministry of Youth Affairs. *National Youth Policy*, adopted December 1, 2020.

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Obstacles to youth participation

Adult-centric institutions

Despite their willingness to make their voices heard, there are still huge systemic barriers limiting the involvement of young people in public affairs. Policymakers have, consciously or inadvertently, created an unconducive environment for young people to actively participate in public affairs. Current modes of youth participation are often determined from an adult-centric perspective, where elders frequently minimise the value of youth contributions while expecting them to navigate systems designed solely by and for adults, and only when adults deem it indispensable or beneficial. This creates a paradox where the same institutions that try to encourage traditional youth participation serve as barriers to their involvement. For instance, young people often cannot run for political offices due to age restrictions. This is the case for Micronesia and Nigeria, where the minimum age of eligibility for national parliaments is 30 years old[21]. Few governments have managed to create a conducive environment where youth voices are valued and their priorities and needs are truly considered, which is essential for fostering effective youth leadership and creating collaborative youth-adult partnerships.

Unfavourable political context

Beyond age restrictions, young people are also facing the barriers of artificial bureaucracy as well as the financial constraints that come with public affairs, especially the huge financial burden of running a campaign. The "old style politics", coupled with nepotism, impede the participation of all groups that are not connected to the country's political elites, including the youth. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, established leaders from dominant ethnic-based parties are continuously seeking to preserve their authority while simultaneously, they obstruct all attempts to shift the national discourse and foster unity among different groups[22].

Political repression

Another barrier to youth participation in politics is the growing number of repressive governments. In non-democratic societies, the idea of youth participation is significantly challenged. The limitation of freedom of speech and expression severely restricts the ability of young people to participate in decision-making processes. In authoritarian regimes, dissent and alternative viewpoints are often suppressed, making it difficult for youth to voice their concerns, needs, and ideas. Youth might be tokenized by the authorities to create an illusion of openness and progress. In these states, youth participation may be elusive, as the restrictive nature of the political environment hampers the meaningful exchange of ideas and limits the scope for youth to influence policy and governance. A number of countries – including Uganda, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – once banned the use of social media platforms for political reasons, while some denied young peoples' rights to peaceful protest. These repressive actions drive the apathy of young people towards public affairs, rather than inclusion.

Lack of quality civic education

Lack of adequate investment in building the skills and capacity of young people is also a significant limitation. Young people in many developing countries lack the required skills to actively participate in policy processes and public affairs. This is largely due to insufficient funding in the education system and inadequate opportunities for young people to gain practical skills and socio-political experience. With 73 million youth unemployed globally as of 2022, many young people are more focused on economic survival and charting a career path for themselves[23]. With all these barriers, young people find non-conventional ways to voice their concerns or become disengaged and leave public affairs to the hands of politicians from older generations. This situation feeds into the apathy narrative, therefore reinforcing the negative perception of youth inclusion in politics and public affairs.

21 IPU Parline, "IPU Comparative Data on Minimum Age of Eligibility",. https://data.ipu.org/compare?field=chamber%3A%3Afield_min_age_member_parl&structure=any__lower_chamber#map.
22 Martina Fischer, *Peacebuilding and Civil Society in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ten Years after Dayton*. Münster: Lit Verlag, 2006 441-470s. https://berghof-foundation.org/files/publications/daytone_Conclusion.pdf
23 Sukti Dasgupta, *Global employment trends for youth 2022; investing in transforming futures for young people*. International Labour Organization (ILO) - Geneva, 2022. https://doi.org/10.54394/QSMU1809

Organisational and institutional challenges

Despite the aspirational goal of some governments to increase youth participation, their efforts often do not yield the expected results. From the perspective of governments, the greatest challenge lies in policy implementation. Common issues surrounding the implementation of youth policies include insufficient allocation of resources, limited technical capacity, and a lack of political incentives and ownership[24]. Furthermore, because of limited evidence on the effectiveness of various mechanisms promoting youth participation, the actual outcomes often remain in the realm of speculation.

Given youth disenchantment with traditional ways of political participation, governments need to develop additional mechanisms to ensure their participation in democratic processes. Despite various barriers and fault lines, some countries are making conscious efforts and significant progress in integrating young people into public affairs. These countries are not only developing youth-centred policies but also putting young people at the centre of their national prosperity and development.

The next section explores the methodology used for the purpose of this scoping study. The following section of this paper analyses ten countries across the world that are making exemplary efforts to promote youth inclusion in democratic practices. The final section will present some key lessons learnt from the focus countries that are deemed useful for other countries looking to significantly integrate young people into their public affairs.

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24 Azelton Aaron, Bret Barrowman, and Lisa Reppell. *Raising Their Voices: How effective are pro-youth laws and policies?* Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening, n.d.
https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Bringing%20Youth%20In%20Final.pdf

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Methodology

Country selection

The purpose of this scoping study is to select ten case countries on a global scale with exemplary practices in youth political participation, considering contextual information and their unique opportunities and challenges, with a focus on countries participating in the second Summit for Democracy. We followed a systematic process of analysis and assessment to answer the following question: which countries' government-initiated youth initiatives appear to be significant in improving the participation of young people in democratic practices?

The initial selection was based on the 2020 Global Youth Development Index (YDI)[25]. The YDI is a composite index that measures the level of development of young people in 181 countries around the world. Specifically, countries with the highest scores in the Political and Civic Participation category were identified. Many African and European countries ranked particularly high, so to ensure a broader representation of regions, three to five countries from each continent were selected. Political rights and civil liberties are at least partially respected in selected case countries, as identified by having a rating of "hybrid regime", "flawed democracy", or "full democracy" on the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2020.

To assess the level of government action and policy in improving youth participation in democratic practices an initial desk review was conducted. We assessed whether government-initiated actions or policies were implemented with the aim of enhancing youth participation in three key areas: representation in elected office and government administration, voting rights and participation in elections, and presence in civil society and media. As the study is oriented towards producing recommendations for policy makers, countries where youth participation

was primarily driven by historical reasons or temporary bottom-up movements were excluded from consideration. Countries with insufficient data in English, Spanish, or French, and with no official documentation on government websites were excluded from the final selection. Cases were chosen to encompass several contexts, aiming to include diverse population sizes, geographical characteristics, and cultural diversity. For instance, Malta was selected over other European countries to analyse youth policies from the perspective of a developed island country. This methodology enabled us to identify ten countries with promising practices in youth political participation that will serve as case studies for this scoping study. The ten focus countries are Australia, Costa Rica, Georgia, Kenya, Liberia, Malta, Morocco, Nepal, Philippines, and Solomon Islands.

It is worthwhile to highlight the countries selected do not necessarily have high rates of youth political participation in all the key areas under consideration. Rather, the study focuses on countries where governments have implemented initiatives aimed at increasing youth engagement in their respective political and socio-economic contexts, despite the challenges they face. It is also worth noting some

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25 The Commonwealth, "Youth Development Index", https://youth-development-index.thecommonwealth.org/

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selected countries have some democratic deficits, however, they still fit comfortably into the selection criteria of this study.

Interview methodology

Given the qualitative nature of this scoping study, it consults both primary and secondary sources of data. For primary data, a key informant interview is used to gather thick and quality data from stakeholders relevant to the objectives of this study. Specifically, this study interviews youth representatives, policymakers, and civil society actors – 27 individuals in total were interviewed, with the purpose of obtaining context-specific information on youth participation in public affairs in the case countries. The interviews were conducted in either English, Spanish, or French using a structured approach, with a set of stakeholder-specific questions sent to participants prior to the interview for adequate preparation. Interview questions can be found in Annex 1. The interviews were conducted through online meeting platforms, and the participants consented to using the information they provided for the purpose of this study. Names of interview participants who did not explicitly provide consent to reveal their identity were replaced with aliases. All interview recordings were transcribed using transcription software, and transcription notes were further analysed using content and thematic methods, coding the data gathered into thematic information.

Conceptual clarifications and approaches

This section provides an overview of key terminologies and concepts pertinent to the study, thereby laying the foundation for a comprehensive understanding of the scope and context of the research.

Definition of youth

In the context of this study, the terms "youth" and "young people" are used interchangeably to refer to individuals within a specific age range that encompasses the transitional phase between childhood and adulthood. The European Commission defines "young people" as individuals aged between 15 and 29 years old[26]. However, individual case countries analysed often adopt their own specific definitions of "youth" or "young people" that can deviate from the EU standard. These local definitions can vary based on the cultural, social, and contextual factors inherent to each country. For the purposes of this scoping study, a local youth definition will be used for each of the case countries.

Concept of youth participation

While the concept of youth participation has been promoted globally as a way to foster democracy, sustainable development, and social inclusion, the idea of involving young people in decision making and community activities has been present in various cultures across the world. This study understands youth participation as a means of enabling young people to find their voice and unlocking their agency in shaping their present and future. However, concrete methods and approaches to youth participation might vary significantly depending on the context. To understand the forms of engagement in a given country, this scoping study attempts to analyse the cultural and social context shaping the local understanding of youth participation.

Dimensions of youth participation

When assessing the level of youth participation, this study examines the multifaceted roles and influences of youth within three key domains: political affairs, elections, and civil society/media engagement. The 'youth in political affairs' dimension focuses on the representation of youth within elected offices and government administrations. This study analyses

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26 "Youth: Information on Data," EuroStat,, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/youth/information-data.

the extent to which young individuals are involved in decision-making processes, governance, policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring, aiming to assess the inclusivity of political systems. The 'youth in elections' dimension explores youth involvement in electoral processes, encompassing both the exercise of voting rights and active participation in elections. The scoping study analyses factors influencing youth voter turnout and assesses the significance of youth voices in shaping electoral outcomes. The 'youth in civil society and media' dimension examines the role of youth in civil society movements, advocacy initiatives, and media platforms. This study analyses how young people use civil society channels and media outlets to express their opinions, advocate for social change, and influence the public discourse.

Intersectional perspective

This study considers gender and intersectionality with class and ethnicity. These factors can significantly influence young people's experiences, barriers, and opportunities for participation in public affairs. Gender norms and stereotypes can impact the types of roles and activities young people are encouraged to participate in. Cultural norms and systemic discrimination can affect the level of support and opportunities available to young people from different ethnic backgrounds. Socioeconomic class can impact young people's access to resources, education, and opportunities. The intersectional perspective allows us to consider all of these factors and how they interact. This holistic approach helps us better understand the unique challenges faced by diverse groups of young people. Whenever sufficient data is available, cases are analysed from the intersectional perspective to provide a full picture of youth participation and political inclusion.

Limitations

Several limitations were encountered during this study. Regarding the country selection methodology, relying on a single index to identify countries may overlook important factors contributing to youth political participation. While the Global Youth Development Index is a comprehensive tool for measuring youth development across different domains, relying solely on it may be limiting. For instance, a country may rank low on the Index but have innovative and effective youth participation initiatives. To address this limitation, this study considered countries that ranked lower in the Index, but their good practices were referenced in other sources. The exclusion of countries where official documentation could not be found may limit the diversity of the final selection as some countries may have strong youth participation practices but may not have a robust online presence or government documentation.

Several limitations were also encountered during the desk research. First, the unavailability of age- and gender-disaggregated data sometimes did not allow a full intersectional analysis of case study countries. Additionally, the absence of key policy documents outlining the design and structure of governmental programmes and initiatives posed an additional challenge in several case countries. These missing documents could have provided valuable context and understanding and made it necessary to rely on partial information. Another potential limitation stems from the difficulty in accessing and verifying information in languages other than English, Spanish, and French. This language barrier was particularly relevant for Nepal, Georgia, Morocco (with respect to Arabic documentation), and Philippines (in the case of Tagalog materials).

Regarding the interview stage, limitations arose due to the lack of response to our interview invitations from government entities responsible for youth affairs, such as youth ministries and departments or youth divisions. This limited the ability to gather firsthand insights and perspectives from these key stakeholders, who are usually responsible for the formulation and implementation of national youth policies. Despite these limitations, the quality of this study is not undermined, and it can provide valuable insights from the selected case countries in advancing youth participation in public affairs.

Case
countries

Australia

Australia is a liberal democratic country located on the continent of Australasia. As a former British colony, Australia is a prominent member of the Commonwealth of Nations and a responsible member of several intergovernmental organisations. With a total population of over 25 million people, the country has a vibrant youth population that significantly contributes to its socio-political and economic stability. The official definition of youth in Australia is people within the ages of 15 – 24 years old, and they constitute 12% of the country's total population, while also making up 14% of the country's workforce[27] [28]. With voting compulsory for all adults in Australia, young people above 18 years old are mandated to enrol and participate in elections. Beyond investing in quality education and skills for young people, Australia is effectively integrating them into its public affairs, specifically in the areas of politics, elections, and civic engagement.

Understanding youth-focused policies and initiatives

Australia's Youth Policy Framework: The first National Youth Policy was published in 2010 as the official national policy framework on youth-related issues, outlining the key strategies of the Australian government for youth development in the country[29]. The recent national youth policy framework, published in 2021, was largely in response to the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth development and well-being in the country. The 2021 Youth Policy Framework eloquently articulates five strategic objectives that the Australian government is looking to advance. Specifically, objectives 2, 3, and 4 stress the priorities of the government on youth development and fostering increased participation in public affairs; including

"capturing the voice of young people on policies that affect them; listening and responding to young people on the issues that matter to them; outlining the services and programmes available to support young people"[30].

These objectives not only stress the government's commitment to youth development but also reiterate its pledge to consult and integrate the voices of young people on policies that affect their well-being. Additionally, the policy framework stresses the government's commitment to address the impact of COVID-19 on young people, focusing on education, job creation, capacity building, and increased civic engagement. Despite the government's financial and non-financial commitments to implementing its youth policy, there are concerns about poor youth integration into politics, especially those above 16 years old[31]. The policy framework also outlines the implementation strategies, such as cross-sectoral partnerships across government agencies, intergovernmental organisations, and private enterprises.

Youth representation in political parties: Political parties are major players in implementing the Australian government's policies and programmes to integrate young people into politics, elections, and civic engagement. As a multi-party democratic country, various political parties in Australia have a youth wing that allows young people to meaningfully participate in their internal processes. The Australian

27 Youth Action, "Youth Employment Report (2022)," Youth Action, 2022, https://youthaction.org.au/youth-employment-report-2022/#:~:text=The%20new%20Bearing%20the%20Brunt,losses%20during%20the%20pandemic%20lockdowns.

28 Australia Institute for Health and Welfare, "Australia's youth," June 25, 2021, https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-youth/contents/demographics.

29 Australian Government, *National Strategy for Young Australians* (Australian Government, 2010), https://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Australia_2010_National_Youth_Strategy.pdf.

30 Australian Government, *Australia's Youth Policy Framework* (Australian Government, 2021), https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2021-08/apo-nid314287.pdf.

31 Interview with Ms. Rachel Wesley, a Program Officer with Make It 16

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Greens Party's youth wing is called "Australian Young Greens", the Australian Labor Party's youth wing is called "Australian Young Labor", and the Australian Liberal Party's youth wing is called "Young Liberals", among others[32]. These youth wings advance the voices of young people in the operations of political parties, including candidate nominations, setting party agendas, and advocating for youth priorities. It is important to stress that these youth wings largely advance the ideological leanings of their political parties. For instance, the Young Greens are concerned about advancing the Greens' four pillars: ecological sustainability, social justice, grassroots democracy, and peace and non-violence[33]. Participating in political parties also gives young people opportunities to understand the country's political processes, while also giving them the opportunity to run for elective positions. However, Bethany, from Make it 16 in Australia, argued that youth-oriented policies are yet to be advanced in many political parties[34].

Youth Advisory Groups: The Youth Advisory Groups (YAG) are an initiative of the Australian government to meaningfully integrate young people into the country's policy processes, especially on issues that directly affect the youth and their future. As outlined in objective 2 of the Australian Youth Policy Framework, the YAGs provide a platform for young people to contribute to and influence policy processes. Under the guidance of the Office for Youth in the Department of Education, young people between 16–25 years old are selected to work in the Youth Advisory Groups with the primary purpose of advancing the voices of young people on key socio-political and economic issues. There are five youth advisory groups that work with the government, and they focus on five core thematic areas: First Nations, mental health and suicide prevention, promotion of STEM, climate change and COP28, and safe and supported (which focuses on supporting young people)[35]. The selection of members of youth advisory groups is organised by the Office for Youth through an open call for application process, which is made through the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) webpage.

YAG members are compensated to recognise their contribution to the country's public affairs[36]. In general, the YAGs allow the Australian youth to influence the country's governance processes and policies.

Youth Steering Committee: Launched in 2022, the Youth Steering Committee is an initiative of Australia's Office for Youth, where selected young people between 13–24 years old work with the Minister for Youth to "co-design the new youth engagement model" and support "national consultations with young people"[37]. The steering committee performs advisory roles to the government, advising the Minister for Youth on government policies and programmes and their impacts on Australian youth. The current steering committee consists of 15 young people selected from every state and territory in Australia, and it considers the country's diverse populations, including LGBTQI+ and indigenous communities. While it is too early to adequately evaluate the committee's impacts, it is worth noting that setting up this committee signifies the government's efforts in meaningfully integrating young people into the country's policy processes.

32 Australian Electoral Commission, "Register of Political Parties," AEC, https://www.aec.gov.au/parties_and_representatives/party_registration/Registered_parties/.
33 The Greens, "The Four Pillars," The Greens, https://greens.org.au/about/four-pillars.
34 Interview Bethany Ware from Make it 16, Australia
35 Office for Youth, "Youth Advisory Groups," Australian Government, https://www.youth.gov.au/youth-advisory-groups#:~:text=The%20Office%20for%20Youth%20runs,a%20specific%20area%20of%20focus.
36 Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, "Australian Government Youth Advisory Groups," AYAC, https://www.ayac.org.au/advisory-groups#:~:text=Will%20the%20advisory%20group%20members,meeting%20of%20each%20advisory%20group.
37 Office for Youth, "Youth Steering Committee," Australian Government, https://www.youth.gov.au/youth-advisory-groups#:~:text=The%20Office%20for%20Youth%20runs,a%20specific%20area%20of%20focus.

Policy Implementation

Periodic Engagement with MPs and Government Officials: In early 2023, the Australian Office for Youth announced a nationwide consultation with young people between 12–25 years old, which is largely to drive the government engagement strategy[38]. This is among several strategies adopted by the Australian government to advance youth participation in public affairs in the country, in line with the Youth Policy Framework. Members of Parliament (MPs) at both national and state levels periodically engage young people to understand their concerns and viewpoints on several socio-political issues in the country. Through the Youth Parliament programme organised by The Y in partnership with local governments, young people are able to simulate parliamentary debates and propose bills that are subsequently shared with MPs[39]. This is a common practice in several states in Australia, including Canberra and Queensland. This process allows young people to better understand the political system and channel their concerns to their representatives. However, Ms. Rachel Wesley, a program officer at Make It 16, argues that this engagement is still largely tokenistic, as they focus on young people in top schools or city centres, while youth in rural areas usually do not access some of these opportunities[40].

Compulsory voting: The Australian Commonwealth Electoral Act mandates that all eligible voters in Australia vote, an implementation strategy to meaningfully integrate young people into the national political processes. Voting is compulsory for any individual above 18 years old in the country. With the compulsory voting policy, participating is a duty and not a right – highlighting the importance of voting[41]. The electoral act makes provision for an adequate penalty for anyone who refuses to vote. This explains why Australia has the highest number of young voters in the world, with an enrolment rate of 89.5% as of March 2023, despite setting a target of 87%[42]. In 2019, the country recorded an all-time high voting enrolment rate of 96.8%, signalling an increasing participation of young people in Australian politics and public affairs[43]. Increasing the involvement of young people in voting exercises made it possible for youth to ask questions from political leaders, seek transparency and accountability, and advance social issues, such as environmental protection and human rights promotion.

Strategic Partnerships for Youth Inclusion in Public Affairs: Meaningful partnership is at the heart of improving the participation of young people in public affairs, and this is eloquently outlined in Australia's Youth Policy framework[44]. As the major agency focusing on youth issues, the Office for Youth partners with other government ministries and agencies on topical issues that affect young people, with the aim of building their capacity, addressing their concerns, and advancing their rights. Additionally, the government partners with youth-led organisations – such as the recent partnership with the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC), to advance the voice of young people in the country. Another notable partnership is the collaboration between The Y[45] and the Australian local and state governments to organise an annual Youth Parliament programme – a

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38 Ministers of the Education Portfolio, "A fresh approach to engaging young people," Ministers' Media Center, June 7, 2023, https://ministers.education.gov.au/aly/fresh-approach-engaging-young-people.

39 The Y, "The Parliament," https://ymca.org.au/what-we-do/empowering-young-people/youth-parliament/.

40 Interview with Ms. Rachel Wesley

41 Federal Register of Legislation, "Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918," Federal Register of Legislation, March 27, 2023, https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2023C00067.

42 Australian Electoral Commission, "National Youth Enrolment Rate," AEC, July 24, 2023, https://www.aec.gov.au/Enrolling_to_vote/Enrolment_stats/performance/national-youth.htm.

43 Naaman Zhou, "High number of young voters create record enrolment rate of 96.8% for election," The Guardian, April 23, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/apr/23/high-number-of-young-voters-create-record-enrolment-rate-of-968-for-election.

44 Australian Government, "Australia's Youth Policy Framework," 2021, https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2021-08/apo-nid314287.pdf.

45 The Y is a global youth movement that supports youth engagement in the policy process. Read more at: https://ymca.org.au/about-us/7477-2/

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simulation programme that allows approximately 400 young people to re-enact parliamentary proceedings, including formulating, debating, and voting on bills[46]. This programme educates young people (within the ages of 16–25 years old) on parliamentary processes, while also deepening their understanding of several socio-political issues. The government partners with tertiary institutions, UN agencies, and INGOs to advance youth-focused programmes. These programmes include the Model UN and the UN Youth Australia, however, some programmes have been criticised for poor inclusiveness, especially for young people in rural areas or those that did not attend top schools[47]. Despite that, these joint programmes and partnerships expose young people to socio-political issues while also building their capacity to contribute to Australia's development agenda.

Financial Investment in Youth Development: Another significant approach taken by the Australian government in advancing youth participation in public affairs is investing in key youth-focused initiatives in the country. The Australian government at both the federal and state levels invest adequate funds to advance youth development. The government spent over AUD$1.1million for the Youth Action Project Grant Scheme, which was largely to support community-based projects that will improve the well-being of young people[48]. This was also in addition to AUD$900,000 for the Youth Advocacy Support Grants Scheme, awarded across eight youth-led organisations in the country, for advancing youth voices and encouraging greater youth participation in public affairs[49]. As highlighted in the Youth Development Framework, these financial initiatives further help young people to effectively engage in public affairs and key socio-political issues, such as climate change and promoting the rights of minority groups.

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46 The Y, "The Parliament," https://ymca.org.au/what-we-do/empowering-young-people/youth-parliament/.
47 Interview with Bethany Ware
48 Australian Government, "Australia's Youth Policy Framework," 2021, https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2021-08/apo-nid314287.pdf.
49 Department for Health and Age Care, "Grants to strengthen youth advocacy across Australia," Australian Government, December 14, 2020, https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/senator-the-hon-richard-colbeck/media/grants-to-strengthen-youth-advocacy-across-australia#:~:text="The%20Youth%20Advocacy%20Support%20Grant,that%20affect%20or%20concern%20them.

Key successes

Increasing Youth Participation in Public Affairs: With the compulsory voting initiative, the Australian government can effectively integrate young people (above 18 years old) into the country's electoral system, mandating them to enrol and vote in national and local elections. This is perhaps one of the most notable successes of Australia's youth-focused programmes and initiatives, evident in the 96.8% enrolment rate of young people to vote in 2019 and the 90.3% youth enrolment rate as of the end of June 2023[50]. Beyond voting, youth engagement in political parties is increasingly providing them with a platform to advance their political ideologies, while also giving them the opportunity to run for political offices. This is evidenced by the number of young people elected as MPs in the country as of 2020, including 10 senators and 13 MPs who were born between 1981 and 1996[51]. However, it is imperative to know that young people are still grossly underrepresented in Australian politics, especially as political office holders. The Youth Advisory Groups, Youth Steering Committee, and Support Grants are increasingly giving young people the opportunity to contribute to national discourse and integrate their voices into government policies, with up to eight youth-led organisations benefiting from the government's AUD$900,000 Youth Advocacy Grant Scheme[52].

Increasing Youth-led Initiatives: Like other countries, young people in Australia are taking up initiatives to influence the government's policies on several socio-political and economic issues. Make It 16 is a youth-led, nonpartisan campaign advocating for the reduction of the official voting age to 16[53]. There are also youth-led organisations dedicated to other issues, such as climate change, LGBTQI+ rights, protection of the rights of indigenous people, promotion of mental health, youth skills and employability, among others. These youth-led organisations are growing in numbers and are making a significant impact on the country.

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50 Australian Electoral Commission, "National Youth Enrolment Rate," AEC, July 24, 2023, https://www.aec.gov.au/Enrolling_to_vote/Enrolment_stats/performance/national-youth.htm.
51 Bretton Mason, "As Australia's parliament returns, meet the youngest MPs doing things differently," SBS News, January 27, 2020, https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/as-australias-parliament-returns-meet-the-youngest-mps-doing-things-differently/u5etr8hai.
52 Department for Health and Age Care, "Grants to strengthen youth advocacy across Australia," Australian Government, December 14, 2020, https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/senator-the-hon-richard-colbeck/media/grants-to-strengthen-youth-advocacy-across-australia#:~:text="The%20Youth%20Advocacy%20Support%20Grant,that%20affect%20or%20concern%20them.
53 Make It 16, "Led by young people," https://www.makeit16.au/aboutthecampaign.

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Costa Rica

Costa Rica stands as a testament to democratic stability, being one of the longest continuous presidential democracies in the Western Hemisphere. The country has upheld unrestricted and transparent elections, with its Supreme Electoral Tribunal serving as a global model for election organisation and management[54]. Political stability and a strong social contract have contributed to Costa Rica's low poverty rates, making it one of the leaders in Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of poverty reduction and stable growth. The current government is criticised for threatening the rights of women and LGBTQI+ people, which can hinder progress in this field.

Costa Rica has a predominantly young population and the largest youth population in the nation's history. Four out of every ten individuals are young people[55]. Following the trend observed in most old democracies, it is evident that Costa Rican youth have become disengaged from traditional forms of political participation, such as voting or joining political parties. During the 2014 elections, youth between 18 and 35 years old, accounting for almost a third of the registered voters, had a lower average participation rate (64%) than the overall population (68%)[56]. However, they show increased involvement in alternative forms of political activism compared with older generations. In 2014 young people were twice as likely to participate in public town halls or citizen meetings as non-youths (15.1% compared to 7.4%). A similar proportion exists for organising activities during the campaign period (10.9% compared to 5.9%)[57].

Understanding youth-focused policies and initiatives

National Youth System: To facilitate youth engagement, Costa Rica has established various youth structures and institutions. The Vice Ministry of Youth is the political entity of the youth system and leads institutional efforts in this field. It is responsible for the design of youth policy in coordination with the National Youth System, with the objective of developing an integral policy fostering the full incorporation of young people in national development[58]. It supports and works alongside its operational arm, the National Council on Public Policy for the Young Person (National Youth Council). The National Youth Council is responsible for the elaboration and execution of youth policy. Specifically, it coordinates the actions of all public and private institutions, fosters the participation of young people in policymaking processes, and encourages research in youth-related areas[59]. The Board of Directors comprises representatives from six ministries and three young representatives of the National Youth Advisory Network. The National Youth Advisory Network is the third component of the Costa Rican Youth System. It is composed of youth from public and private schools, registered community development associations, Cantonal Youth Committees, public and private universities, political parties, ethnic groups, non-governmental organisations, and other specialised civil society organisations. Its purpose is to facilitate effective youth participation in the formulation and implementation of policies that affect them[60]. Every stakeholder group has a specific number of seats in a collegial and representative body, the National Youth Advisory Network Assembly[61]. The

54 Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2022 Country Report — Costa Rica* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022).
55 The Costa Rica Government, *Política Pública de la Persona Joven 2020-2024* (San Jose: Viceministerio de Juventud, 2020).
56 Ilka Treminio Sánchez and Adrián Pignataro López, "Jóvenes y democracia: Comportamiento electoral y actitudes políticas en Costa Rica," *Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones* 20 (2015).
57 Ibid.
58 Costa Rica, National Assembly. *Creación del Ministerio de Cultura, Juventud y Deportes,* Law 4788, adopted July 5, 1971.
59 Costa Rica, National Assembly. *Ley General de la Persona Joven*, Law 8261, adopted May 20, 2002, https://pridena.ucr.ac.cr/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Ley-8261-Ley-General-de-la-Persona-Joven.pdf.
60 *Ley General de la Persona Joven.*
61 The division of 126 seats is as follows: one representative from each Cantonal Youth Committee; one representative from each Public University; three representatives from private universities; two representatives from para-university institutions; twenty representatives from political parties represented in the Legislative Assembly; five representatives from ethnic groups; five representatives from non-governmental organisations; two representatives from development associations; two representatives from associations or foundations composed of persons with disabilities.

Cantonal Youth Committees are the final element of the system. They are municipal participation mechanisms made up of young people from the canton who represent diverse groups, including youth organisations, schools, the municipality, and faith-based organisations. Its function is to design and execute local or national projects contributing to the implementation of the national youth policy[62]. The projects are financed from the National Youth Council budget and each Cantonal Youth Committee has a designated representative at the National Youth Advisory Network Assembly.

Legal and Policy Framework: The General Law of Youth defines young people as individuals aged 12 to 35 years old. Recognising the importance of youth participation in decision-making processes, the law states that young people have

"the right to participate in, formulate, and implement policies that enable them to engage in decision-making processes at various levels and sectors of national life, especially in critical areas essential for their human development."[63]

Since 2013, the country has been updating its youth policy at 5-year intervals as an outcome of an extensive consultation process. Through 44 workshops and an online consultation, 2240 young people with diverse backgrounds were consulted for the design of the 2020–2024 Youth Policy. Ten workshops specifically focused on gathering inputs from indigenous youth. Due to the wide definition of youth, the policy categorises young people into three age-based categories: 12–17 years old, 18–25 years old, and 25–35 years old. It introduces a new strategy with four key objectives: enhancing awareness on the dimensions of cultural diversity and identity that will contribute to the strengthening of participatory democracy, expanding access to goods and services through programmes that promote

active participation in social life and environmental action, increasing participation opportunities in the economy, and increasing access and participation of young people in decision-making processes.[64] Youth participation has become an overarching concept entwined with all key policy objectives.

The achievement of all objectives of the 2020–2024 Youth Policy is measured by concrete indicators. The growing role of new technologies in shaping political discourse was acknowledged and consequently the policy proposes strengthening youth self-organisation to increase informed participation through diverse channels. It also expresses support for new forms of political engagement, such as cause-oriented groups and activities, for instance, those focused on climate change or human rights. It is worthwhile to note that the National Youth Policy does not identify any particular projects or initiatives. Instead, it sets a general course of action grounded in evidence and outlines the roles and duties of those engaged in the youth sector, particularly the four bodies forming the National Youth System.

62 *Ley General de la Persona Joven.*
63 *Ley General de la Persona Joven.*
64 The Costa Rica Government, *Política Pública de la Persona Joven 2020-2024* (San Jose: Viceministerio de Juventud, 2020).

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Youth Mainstreaming: The unique feature of the Costa Rican youth system is its high interconnectedness and the significant level of participation of diverse youth stakeholders. Costa Rica has been proactive in providing civic education and raising political awareness by organising simulations, forums, and workshops. Every year, the mandate of the Cantonal Youth Committees is renewed. The Committees have been the key government initiative focused on youth citizenship, aiming to develop political skills and facilitating management of community-led projects. In 2021, 81 youth projects were submitted by the Cantonal Youth Committees and approved by the National Youth Council. Considering that Costa Rica was divided into 83 cantons at that time, this suggests a high level of youth engagement in the work of the Committees. Costa Rica is actively fostering youth participation at the international level by co-hosting events focused on youth at the second Summit for Democracy and participating in the Youth Democracy Cohort, a platform to take meaningful action towards implementing Summit for Democracy commitments on youth political and civic engagement through resources, expertise, research, activities, and achievements.

There are several multi-stakeholder projects, aiming to integrate youth priorities and perspectives in all their diversity, in line with the first objective of the Youth Policy 2020-2024. The Civic Centers for Peace are an inter-institutional strategy of local intervention for the prevention of violence and the promotion of social inclusion, implemented by the central government in partnership with municipalities and civil society organisations across the country. As Ms. Natalia Camacho Monge, from the National Youth Council, stressed, special facilities were introduced in the seven Civic Centers for Peace to encourage the participation of youth with disabilities[65]. To encourage youth involvement, youth fora are organised as part of Center's activities. Costa Rica swiftly responds to the changing needs of the youth. In the post-pandemic context, they developed programmes focused on mental health in collaboration with the Ministry of Health. Since 2020, in partnership with other ministries, NGOs, and UN agencies, they have also led a project focused on occupational health.

National Youth Advisory Network Assembly: The National Youth Advisory Network Assembly meetings are held at least three times per year. While its main objective is to discuss and approve youth policy[66], the Assembly is active in thematic areas that are not solely youth-related. These include, but are not limited to, commissions for education, human rights, public policy, projects, and the economy. Ms. Kristel Ward Hudson, the Viceminister of Youth, explained that the young people forming the Assembly "reviewed which laws should be modified in favour of the youth and which policies should be more linked to youth"[67]. The structure and legal framework facilitate youth engagement in the work of the government.

Persisting adult-centrism: According to Ms. Camacho Monge, one of the obstacles to meaningful youth participation in Costa Rica is the underestimation of youth potential[68]. From her perspective, this is more of a cultural issue in Costa Rica resulting in reluctance to shift the power to young people. This fear is often accompanied by an underestimation of the transformative power youth can have on a social and cultural level, which decreases opportunities for meaningful participation. Another challenge lies in aligning the institutional pace and adult-centric system with youth demands and expectations. While young people call for fast and concrete actions, the institutional response might take months or years. This can further alienate youth from the political processes in place.

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65 The Costa Rica Government, *Política Pública de la Persona Joven 2020-2024* (San Jose: Viceministerio de Juventud, 2020).
66 *Ley General de la Persona Joven.*
67 Interview with the Viceministry of Youth.
68 Ibid.

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Key successes

Achieving meaningful outcomes of youth initiatives: In terms of inclusivity and meaningful participation, the National Youth Advisory Network Assembly can be viewed as one of the most successful youth initiatives in Costa Rica. Comprising representatives from diverse youth groups, this assembly plays a pivotal role in influencing decision-making processes and yielding concrete outcomes and changes. The Assembly successfully influenced the Ministry of Labour to adjust its programmes to be more inclusive of various youth groups[69]. It has the power to elect delegates to the National Youth Council and approve the three-year Youth Policy, which the Council must follow[70]. However, it should be noted that addressing complex issues requires an adequate level of preparation. To further increase the effectiveness and meaningfulness of youth participation within the Assembly, capacity building sessions should be prioritised.

Introducing inclusive approaches: Costa Rica has taken steps to encourage the participation of marginalised and underrepresented groups, such as indigenous youth, in recent years. The structure of the National Youth Advisory Network Assembly exemplifies the National Youth System's commitment to inclusivity by introducing specific quotas for various youth groups, with five out of 128 seats reserved for ethnic minorities. Another example is the invitation of indigenous young people to represent Costa Rica at the Summit for Democracy. Although the participation of marginalised communities has been rather symbolic so far, it is viewed as the first step towards a more inclusive society. Marina Valdez, a youth activist, argues that "there are still gaps at the institutional and state level". She adds that participation is particularly challenging for marginalised groups:

> "if we see it from an intersectional approach, it will also go through the issue of gender, the issue of class, racism, ableism, and it is very difficult to be integrated in (...) all the public processes that the Costa Rican system has."

Consequently, youth groups and civil society stakeholders are demanding more concrete actions to follow.

Building strong multi-stakeholder partnerships: Another good practice is close collaboration between government structures, youth groups, the UN system, and civil society[71]. Interestingly, the partnership approach is not specifically mentioned as a means of policy implementation in official documents. However, the high level of multi-stakeholder cooperation was evident during the interviews. Youth sector actors have been joining their efforts to facilitate the participation of a greater number of diverse young people. Stakeholders tend to cooperate on logistics in the context of organising youth events or workshops in remote areas, where access is difficult[72]. This participative approach facilitates the successful implementation of the youth policy by ensuring that all actors work towards a shared goal, with the National Youth System taking the lead for most of the youth-related programmes and activities.

Achieving a conducive environment for youth leadership: The overall environment in Costa Rica is conducive to youth leadership and participation. For example, participation in volunteer organisations by

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69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Interview with Marina Valdez, a youth activist
72 Interview with Pablo Cortez, Director for Youth affairs in an INGO

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young people aged between 18 and 35 years in Costa Rica increased in 2013 and 2018 compared with 2007[73]. According to data from three national youth surveys, a participation rate of 44.3% was observed in 2007, 52.5% in 2013, and 55.9% in 2018 in one of the following types of organisations: religious, sports/recreational, ecological, student-related, community-based, municipal, artistic/cultural, labour unions, political parties (membership), or social welfare organisations. There is clear evidence of a significant growth in the participation of young women in these organisations, from 18.2% in 2007 to 25.1% in 2013, and a slight increase to 25.7% in 2018[74]. This conducive environment stems from mainstreaming youth priorities across diverse institutions, levels, and sectors. Government-driven mechanisms such as Cantonal Youth Committees empower the younger generation to voice their opinions. The education system, including multiple training opportunities, simulations, and consultations, builds leadership skills and develops civic engagement. Strong support for youth-led initiatives and cooperation with NGOs further boosts their active involvement in shaping the country's youth space. This integrated approach fosters vibrant youth leadership and cultivates a dynamic and inclusive society. As such, it is not surprising that Costa Rica also has a relatively high youth proportion in the Legislative Assembly, with one-third of all deputies being below 40 years old[75].

73 Jorge E. Segura Arias, *Tendencias de participación de las personas jóvenes en los gobiernos municipales, Costa Rica 2010-2016* (Revista del Consejo de la Persona Joven, 2019).
74 Ibid
75 InterParliamentary Union, *Youth participation in national parliaments years of empowering youth in parliament 10* (IPU, 2021).

Georgia

Georgia is situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia and has witnessed several transformations in its political system in recent decades. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgia experienced a tumultuous period of territorial disputes, weak rule of law, economic decline, bribery, and corruption. In 2003, social discontent resulted in massive anti-government demonstrations triggered by electoral fraud and manipulation. The "Rose Revolution" was led by youth who peacefully demanded a transition to democracy.[76] The protests paved the way for democratic reforms introduced by the newly elected president, Mikhail Saakashvili. The new government was able to make significant changes at the institutional level and drastically improve the socio-economic conditions of Georgians. The young reformers managed to curb informality and restructure the police, which resulted in reduced corruption and modernised institutions. After a series of political scandals and crises, the parliamentary elections of 2012 brought an important shift of power.

Georgia witnessed another transformation under the Georgian Dream coalition ruling. Following its rise to power, the party managed to consolidate control over all branches of the state. Allegations of "state capture" emerged, as the Georgian Dream repeatedly resorted to the violent dispersal of opposition-led demonstrations[77]. These actions led to further polarisation of the political environment, making it challenging to find viable options to address the country's deep-rooted problems. The fragile democracy has been continuously threatened by high income inequality and informal governance. Almost every third young Georgian is not in employment, education or training (NEET)[78]. The socio-economic challenges faced by Georgia were compounded by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic's impact was felt across various sectors of society, affecting livelihoods, health, and education.

The declining youth population in Georgia[79], representing only 19% of the total population[80], faced unique challenges in this context. The relatively small size of the youth demographics limits their leverage in elections. Beyond periodic urban youth activism such as protests, evidence suggests traditional youth political and civic engagement in Georgia is relatively low[81]. Many young people clearly display disinterest and suspicion towards politics and politicians. They are more inclined to sign offline and online petitions but were twice as likely as the older generation to abstain in elections.

Understanding youth-focused policies and initiatives

Legal and policy framework: The legal framework for youth policy in Georgia is formed by an assortment of legal documents. These encompass the Law on State Support for Children's and Youth Unions from 1999 and the Law on the Protection of Minors from 2001. At the core of the youth policy, the pivotal document is the National Youth Policy Document 2014. The youth policy sought to provide a comprehensive framework for promoting the political, social, and economic inclusion of young people in Georgian society. It aims to create an environment conducive to youth empowerment and participation, addressing the barriers that hinder young people from engaging actively in public life. In order to carry out priorities, the Youth Policy obliges the government to develop an action plan with specified timeframes, formulating appropriate measures, and identifying agencies responsible for implementation. The action plan has not been made publicly available, making it impossible to assess the level of progress or determine whether it was indeed formulated.

76 Dov Lynch, "The Rose Revolution and After," *Why Georgia Matters*, European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) (2006).
77 Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2022 Country Report — Georgia* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022).
78 Geostat, *Labour Force Survey* (The National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2017).
79 The definition of youth in the Georgian National Youth Policy Document is 14-29 years of age.
80 Rati Cheishvili and Nina Gogoladze, *YOUTH INDEX Report - Georgia* (UNPFA, 2020).
81 Sopho Omanadze, Nino Gachechiladze, and Ana Lebanidze, *Generation in Transition: Youth Study 2016 - Georgia* (Tbilisi: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2017).

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National Youth Policy Concept 2020–2030: In July 2020, the Parliament of Georgia adopted a new Georgian National Youth Policy Concept 2020–2030 to "effectively manage and coordinate the Youth Policy at the central and municipal levels" to address pressing challenges faced by youth[82]. The Concept identifies five priority areas for Georgia's youth policy between 2020 and 2030, including active participation of young people in public life and democratic processes, promoting youth development and realisation of their potential, health and well-being of young people, economic empowerment of young people, and improving the management of the national youth policy at the central and municipal levels[83]. The Concept reveals deficiencies in the implementation of the National Youth Policy Document 2014 and suggests solutions to improve its management at the national and municipal levels.

Institutional framework: At the local level, municipal governments in Georgia have the overall authority to plan, manage, and implement youth policy. At the national level, until 2017, the Ministry of Youth and Sports oversaw the execution of the youth policy. Following government restructuring and the dissolution of the Ministry, the coordination of youth policy implementation shifted to the Ministry of Education and Science by the end of 2017[84]. This arrangement made provision for a dedicated Youth Affairs Department within the Ministry. They are responsible for initiatives such as aiding youth entry into the job market, formulating legislation pertinent to youth, supporting students' self-governance, assisting youth with special needs, fostering civil society engagement, facilitating participation in international programmes, and endorsing non-formal education. In 2019, Georgia's government decided to restructure the youth system and established a dedicated Youth Agency, merging the previously mentioned entities with other bodies responsible for certain youth initiatives, such as the Children and Youth National Centre and Children and Youth Development Foundation[85]. The Youth Agency operates as an executive body overseen by the Prime Minister's Office and holds responsibility for youth policy implementation. Consequently, the

Youth Agency became responsible for the horizontal and vertical coordination of the Concept 2020–2030 implementation, development of a strategy action plan, and creation of relevant youth programmes and initiatives.

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82 Georgia, Parliament. *Georgian National Youth Policy Concept for 2020 – 2030*, Resolution, adopted July 17, 2020.
83 Ibid.
84 Max Fras, Mateusz Jezowski, and Andriy Pavlovych, *Youth Policy in Eastern Partnership countries and the Russian Federation* (Warsaw: Foundation for the Development of the Education System., n.d.).
85 Ibid.

Policy Implementation 💬

Limited opportunities for youth engagement: There is little evidence the Youth Policy 2014 or the Youth Policy Concept 2020-2030 have been implemented in a meaningful way. The Youth Agency has implemented a few projects in partnership with international organisations, such as the Skills for Success project funded by the European Union, and the development of a website with information on youth-focused activities. Opportunities for meaningful participation in decision-making processes at the municipal or national level are scarce, and participatory mechanisms such as youth councils at the municipal level or government-led youth consultations are exceptions.

Neither the Youth Agency nor municipalities are taking the lead in youth policy implementation. They are mostly reactive to the expectations and requirements of international donors, rather than proactive and focused on addressing youth needs and aspirations. The action plan for the implementation of the Concept 2020–2030 is lacking. When formulating local action plans, municipalities do not base them on evidence and lack a clear objective[86]. Rather than aiming for specific outcomes, these plans often revolve around organising tokenistic activities. Despite youth participation being a key policy priority, evidence suggests no concrete actions have been taken in recent years to improve it. Nino Kapanadze, a youth worker in an INGO, noted "generally participation is something obligatory from the European Union, but there is not much political will and understanding of the importance of participation on all the levels of governance"[87].

Political manipulation of youth participation: Findings from interviews and desk research suggest the government does not encourage meaningful youth participation and instead uses youth participation as a tool for political propaganda. Youth party wings operate as a patronage mechanism in which positions in youth wings and party lists are kept for the most loyal political supporters[88]. Davit Doneriani, the president of a youth-led organisation Young Generation, stressed that the means of participation are particularly limited for youth organisations that are not connected to the ruling party camp[89]. Furthermore, peaceful youth gatherings have been frequently disrupted by the police. According to the interviews, there have been situations where family members employed within the government administration were fired when their relatives participated in demonstrations. The political environment in Georgia is deeply divided, and it appears that whenever young people participate it is more for symbolic reasons than actual influence. The perception that the government is threatened by the youth is widespread across the population[90].

These findings raise important questions about the state of democratic values, civil liberties, and the overall health of political participation in Georgia. Instances of denying the right to peaceful protests and group gatherings reinforced the notion that the government has sought to limit youth political participation. Understanding this context can help better grasp why there is a high level of distrust towards politicians and politics among the Georgian youth.

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86 Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, *Youth Policy Implementation at the Local Level: Imereti and Tbilisi* (Tbilisi: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2020).
87 Interview with Nino Kapanadze, a youth worker
88 Aaron Azelton, Bret Barrowman, and Lisa Reppell, *Raising Their Voices: How effective are pro-youth laws and policies?* (National Democratic Institute, 2019).
89 Interview with Davit Doneriani, President of Young Generation
90 "Giorgi Vashadze: Georgian Dream declared the youth as the main enemy of the country, because they will never accept Russia," მთავარი გვერდი | საინფორმაციო სააგენტო "ინტერპრესნიუსი," accessed August 31, 2023, https://www.interpressnews.ge/en/article/126543-giorgi-vashadze-georgian-dream-declared-the-youth-as-the-main-enemy-of-the-country-because-they-will-never-accept-russia/.

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Key successes

Historic success of high youth participation: To find best practices in youth engagement, it is necessary to go back to the early 2000s, when Georgia experienced a notable period of success in enhancing traditional youth political participation. In 2003, President Mikheil Saakashvili's recruitment of a team of young officials into the government resulted in a wave of positive reforms. This key group of young politicians played a crucial role in delivering significant reforms, contributing to a sense of optimism and engagement among the youth. One notable achievement was the highest recorded voter turnout of nearly 88% in the 2004 elections[91], following a remarkable level of youth engagement during the campaign period.

Symbolic effect of youth policies: Since the 2000s, Georgia has faced several crises that challenged the continuity of this positive trend. The narrative that the government sought to limit youth political actions and expression hindered progress in improving youth political participation. Despite introducing youth participatory mechanisms on paper, the actual implementation faced obstacles due to the lack of political will. Consequently, the formulation of youth policy can be regarded as a symbolic gesture. It is important to note that, regardless of any concrete impact on youth engagement, the mere existence of such a policy sends a signal to both youth groups and international organisations that the government is committed to addressing youth-related concerns. Despite the prevailing sentiment of mistrust between youth groups and the government, the symbolic nature of youth policy continues to have an impact as it influences the perceptions of young people regarding their potential to shape decision-making processes. Urban youth activism, including recent protests, indicates a strong willingness among young people to engage politically. There has been an increase in the representation of young members of parliament in recent years, with half of Georgian parliamentary members being younger than 45 years old in 2021, showing a rise from 2017 by 12.8 percentage points[92]. Even though it opted for a relatively low-profile approach, the Youth Agency is an implementing partner on INGO-led programmes fostering youth participation and has successfully facilitated INGOs' involvement in government policy making[93]. Despite implementation challenges and a hostile political environment, these findings suggest that government initiatives continue to deliver some levels of impact.

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91 "IFES Election Guide | Country Profile: Georgia," IFES Election Guide, accessed August 31, 2023, https://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/81/.
92 InterParliamentary Union, *Youth participation in national parliaments years of empowering youth in parliament 10* (IPU, 2021).
93 Interview with Nino Kapanadze, a youth worker

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Kenya

Kenya is a democratic country located in the eastern part of Africa, sharing a coastline with the Indian Ocean. The country gained independence in 1963 and embraced a multiparty system. Kenya is a multi-ethnic country endowed with an enviable topography and landscape. With a total population of over 53 million people, the East African country has an active youth population, which plays a significant role in its socio-political and economic stability. Youth currently account for 75% of Kenya's population, while also making up 55% of the country's labour force[94]. While young people are historically active in Kenya's public affairs, the country recorded a 5.27% drop in the number of young voters in its 2022 general elections compared with the 2017 elections. Many analysts blamed this unusual drop on economic hardship and widespread corruption in the country's governance system. Additionally, the country experienced a nationwide youth protest over the increasing cost of living in 2023. Despite the obvious political and economic instability in the country, young people remain an important stakeholder in Kenya.

Understanding youth-focused policies and initiatives

The Kenya Youth Development Policy (KYDP): The Kenya Youth Development Policy (KYDP) is the official policy document that outlines government plans regarding youth issues. The first Kenya National Youth Policy was adopted in 2006, followed by the current Kenya Youth Development Policy, which was adopted in 2019. The current KYDP draws ideas from over 12 national policy frameworks and more than 5 international policy frameworks, such as the African Union (AU) Youth Charter, the UN Youth Strategy, and the AU Agenda 2063. The primary objective of the KYDP is to address "issues affecting the youth, notably employment creation, health, education, sports, and recreation, environment, art and culture, partnership, and empowerment"[95]. The KYDP also presents the government's plans to meaningfully integrate youth into public affairs in Kenya, while also empowering them to significantly contribute to the country's development agenda. In particular, the 2019 KYDP presents 14 strategic priorities of the Kenyan government regarding youth development in the country[96]. More importantly, it outlines the significant roles of young people in achieving Kenya Vision 2030[97], the country's long-term development plan, as well as additional developmental priorities.

Constitutional affirmative action: One of the most important legislative frameworks regarding Kenya's efforts to meaningfully integrate youth into politics, the Kenyan 2010 Constitution provides a legal framework that supports increased youth participation in politics. It provides quotas for youth representation in elective positions, both at the federal and county levels. Specifically, Articles 55(a) and 55(b) read as follows: "the State shall take measures, including affirmative action programmes, to ensure that the youth – (a) access relevant education and training; (b) have opportunities to associate, be represented and participate in political, social, economic and other spheres of life"[98]. The Kenyan affirmative action framework mandates 12 parliamentary seats should be reserved for representatives nominated by political parties to represent special interests, including youth and persons with disabilities (PWD). Affirmative action also prioritised the inclusion of women in politics, noting that "not more than two-thirds of the members of elective or appointive bodies should be of the same gender"[99].

94 Victor Abuso, "Kenya: How will the low number of young voters play out in August?," June 23, 2022, https://www.theafricareport.com/216515/kenya-2022-elections-how-will-the-low-number-of-young-registered-voters-play-out/.
95 Republic of Kenya, "Kenya Youth Development Policy, 2019," 2019, https://youth.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Kenya-Youth-Development-Policy-2019-Popular-version.pdf.
96 Ibid
97 Kenya Vision 2030 represents a set of socio-economic and political aspirations and development priorities that the Kenyan government seeks to achieve by 2030. Read more at: https://nairobi.aics.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Kenya-Vision-2030.pdf
98 Republic of Kenya, "Constitution of Kenya, 2010," http://kenyalaw.org/lex/actview.xql?actid=Const2010.
99 The Carter Center, "Youth and Women's Consultations on Political Participation Findings and Recommendations," 2018, https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/democracy/kenya-youth-and-women-political-participation-report.pdf.

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Devolution of Governance: In a bid to bring governance closer to the people at the grassroots, the Kenyan 2010 Constitution mandates devolution of governance to counties, leading to the creation of 47 counties' governance structures, including county assemblies and county ministries. This constitutional provision opens up opportunities for young people to access political positions at the local level and aligns with objectives 2 and 8 of the Kenyan Youth Development Policy, which focus on "transformative leadership and representation" and "active youth engagement"[100]. For instance, as of 2022, the youth constitute 19% of parliamentarians in the county assemblies – 281 men and 24 women out of 1450 elected members[101]. Kennedy Kimeu, the Prevention Coordinator at Awareness Against Human Trafficking (HAART) Kenya, further affirmed that the devolution significantly increased youth inclusion in Kenyan politics, especially at the county level. However, he also mentioned that

"many youth political appointments are somewhat tokenistic, as these youth usually do the bidding of the older politicians and do not necessarily represent the youth voices"[102].

Political parties as drivers of youth inclusion into politics: In implementing the Article 55(b) affirmative action of the Kenyan constitution, political parties serve as an avenue for the youth to meaningfully participate in political affairs, particularly by holding elective positions. As highlighted in the Political Parties Act 2011, only political parties can give young people the legitimacy to participate or contest in elections, as well as receive funding support for the purposes of campaigning[103]. Specifically, it is only through political parties that youth can be nominated to contest for elective positions at both national and county levels. As of 2022, young people comprise 35% of the total membership of political parties in Kenya, significantly increasing their participation in politics, either through holding elective positions or influencing political parties' choice of candidates. Political parties are also integrating youth candidacy into their plans by reducing the fee for the candidacy form. Despite this development, findings still reveal that nomination from political parties is not solely based on merit, and often, it is dependent on affiliation with older politicians. This is the reason why Kimeu noted that "we have several beautiful and well-articulated policy documents in Kenya, the only problem is implementation"[104].

Funding Support and Opportunities for Youth-led Initiatives: To implement its youth development policies, the Kenyan government is also providing funded and non-funded opportunities for young people. This implementation approach aligns with objectives 7 and 9 of the KYDP[105]. The Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) programme aims to allow enterprises and initiatives run by youth, women, and PWDs to participate in government procurement opportunities. AGPO mandates a legal requirement for young people to access 30% of government procurement, providing opportunities for youth-owned businesses to thrive[106]. The Youth Enterprise Development Fund is another funding scheme to support youth-led innovations and social enterprises, helping them meaningfully contribute to the country's economic growth, while also supporting the government's development agenda, including green innovations. Official figures reveal that more than 1 million youth have benefitted from this programme . Despite the criticisms surrounding the funding programmes,[107] they represent the efforts of the government to promote objectives 3, 7, and 9 of the KYDP.

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102 Interview with Kennedy Kimeu, Prevention Coordinator, Haart Kenya
103 Kenya. *The Political Parties Act, 2011*, Act, *Kenya Law Reports*, 2011. http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/PoliticalPartiesAct.pdf
104 Interview with Kennedy Kimeu
105 Kenya Youth Development Policy, Ibid
106 The National Treasury and Economic Planning, "Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO)," https://www.treasury.go.ke/agpo/.
107 Alice Waithera, "Over 1 million benefit from Youth Enterprise Fund," The Star, February 3, 2021, https://www.the-star.co.ke/counties/central/2021-02-03-over-1-million-benefit-from-youth-enterprise-fund/.

Key successes

Increasing Youth Participation in Public Affairs: Despite the clear socio-economic challenges in Kenya, young people are becoming more aware of the need to engage in public affairs. In politics, the KYDP and governance devolution have increasingly paved the way for young people to join political parties and hold elective positions at both national and county levels. With these policies and programmes, Kenyan youth are joining political parties and disrupting governance, especially at the county level. Young people constitute 6.5% of the Kenyan 12th parliament, both at the senate and the national assembly, and 19% at the county assemblies.[108] However, young people's participation in elections remains relatively low in the country. Despite this voting apathy, young people in Kenya are still driving several civic engagements, including promoting issues of human rights, calling for accountability, and addressing climate change, among others. In general, the Kenyan Constitution and the NYP have created a fertile environment for young people to meaningfully engage in public affairs.

Increasing Number of Youth-led Organisations: Another significant success from Kenya's youth-focused policies and programmes is that many young people are seeing the need to contribute to the government's development agenda – such as Kenya Vision 2030, and the Big 4 Agenda. Thus, young people are setting up small businesses, non-profit organisations, research firms, and pressure groups. With a focus on several thematic areas, young people are at the forefront of holding the government accountable on issues of good governance, climate change, human rights, and corruption, among others. Young people are forging strong partnerships with intergovernmental organisations and UN agencies to address local issues in the country. With the AGPO and the Youth Enterprise Development Fund, youth have access to funding support from the government to run their small-scale businesses, further encouraging many young people to come up with innovative ideas. However, Hannah, an aspiring youth politician in Kenya, noted that "many youth-led initiatives are largely motivated by the day-to-day challenges of young Kenyans and not really government policies"[109].

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108 Beverline Ongaro, "Beyond Polemics and Political Obscurity to Meaningful Political Participation by the Kenyan Youth," International Commission of Jurists, May 7, 2022, https://icj-kenya.org/news/beyond-polemics-and-political-obscurity-to-meaningful-political-participation-by-the-kenyan-youth/
109 Interview with Hannah, a youth political aspirant in Kenya

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Civic Engagement

Liberia

Liberia is one of the growing democracies in the West Africa sub-region, with a total population of over 5.1 million people. After going through a series of civil wars in the 1990s, the country regained political stability in 2003 and held its first post-conflict general election in 2005. With its smooth power transition in 2017, Liberia received rare accolades from local and international observers for conducting its first free, fair, and peaceful elections in seven decades, signalling the country's growing democracy and political stability. The country also has a vibrant civil society space, with non-governmental organisations (NGO) and international NGOs (INGO) contributing to several developmental reforms. The country has an active youth population, with young people between 15–35 years old accounting for 70% of the country's total population[110]. Young people in Liberia are significantly contributing to the country's political stability through advancing accountability, peace and security, and human rights.

Understanding youth-focused policies and initiatives

Young people are important stakeholders in the socio-political growth and development of Liberia. This demographic population represents one of the most significant players in the country's public affairs, including politics, elections, and civic engagement. This is evident in the significant role of the Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY) in driving Civic Voters' Education (CVE) ahead of the country's presidential election in October 2023. FLY visited counties and local communities to sensitise Liberian youth and the entire populace on the need to exercise their civic rights in the forthcoming election. The Liberian government has instituted several policy initiatives and programmes to advance youth integration into the public policy processes in Liberia.

National Youth Policy (2019–2023): The National Youth Policy (NYP) is the official document that outlines the goals, objectives, and priority areas of the government for promoting youth development in Liberia. The first National Youth Policy was published in 2001, and a revised version was published in 2012 to cover action plans for another five years (2012–2017).[111] The latest NYP in Liberia was published in 2019 and is titled 'The National Youth Policy and Action Plan 2019–2023'. The latest national youth policy highlights the government's priority areas regarding youth development, which also reflects the needs and realities of young people

in Liberia. In developing the latest version of the NYP, youth groups and international organisations, such as United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), and World Bank, were consulted to ensure that the policy document reflected the voices and concerns of the Liberian youth[112]. The Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS) is the government institution responsible for implementing the NYP in Liberia. The ministry collaborates with other government agencies and youth groups to advance the objectives and priorities outlined in the NYP – coordinating and monitoring youth-led initiatives and facilitating skills training.

The primary objective of the NYP is to improve youth participation in decisions vis-à-vis policymaking processes in Liberia. With this central goal in sight, the NYP presents 13 priority areas the government seeks to address regarding youth inclusion in policymaking processes – including youth education and training, employment, and empowerment. It is worth highlighting that the NYP is the central policy document driving Liberia's government programmes and initiatives concerning young people in the country. The government allocates funds annually to relevant institutions – such as the Ministry of Youth and Sports – to advance youth development

110 Federation of Liberian Youth, "Statement on the announcement of the 2023 Census report." February 22, 2023. https://medium.com/@flyonline/statement-on-the-announcement-of-the-2023-census-report-ee0ceb602e38

111 Federation of Liberian Youth, "The Revised National Youth Policy (2012 - 2017)." September 18, 2012. https://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Liberia_2012_Revised_Youth_Policy_Presentation.pdf.

112 Reagan Lebbie, "MYS Launches National Youth Policy, Action Plan 2019-2023," October 29, 2019, https://www.faapa.info/blog/mys-launches-national-youth-policy-action-plan-2019-2023-2/.

and participation in public affairs in the country. Over USD$3.4million was allocated to the Ministry of Youth and Sports in the 2020/2021 fiscal budget to advance youth-focused development initiatives, including vocational training and support for youth advocacy, among others[113].

It is also worth noting that one of the major priorities of the Liberian government is to actively engage young people in advancing peace and social cohesion in the country. This is largely due to the devastating roles played by young people in the country's civil wars, where government forces and rebel groups recruited young people in their political battles, including over 20,000 children who were recruited as child soldiers[114]. Thus, supporting youth development and implementing the NYP is an effort to promote sustainable peace and stability in the country. This is evident in the efforts of the Federation of Liberian Youth – one of the government-funded youth groups – advancing peace in the country through its recently facilitated Buutuo Declaration, where it brings together youth leaders across various political parties to commit to peace and unity in Buutuo, Nimba county, in the country[115].

Federation of Liberian Youth: The Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY) is the umbrella body of youth-led organisations in Liberia. Established by an Act of Legislation in 1974, the FLY is a statutory body mandated and recognised by the government to advance the voices and concerns of the Liberian youth[116]. While FLY existed before the first NYP, its objectives align with the government priorities for advancing youth development and participation in public affairs.

Over the years, FLY has played a significant role in transforming Liberian society, through promoting youth development, demanding accountability and transparency, and constructively engaging the government on behalf of the Liberian youth[117]. FLY is playing a pivotal role in promoting political stability and peace and security in Liberia, recently launching its national youth agenda called 'Up to Us', which presents a three-year strategic plan of the government-funded youth body to advance youth

agency in the country[118]. FLY also established an Inter-Party Youth Council with the primary objective of promoting peace and improving coordination between young people and political parties. Ahead of the 2023 presidential election, FLY implemented a nationwide initiative tagged 'The Youth Agenda' – which aims to identify the top ten concerns and priorities of young people in the election. This team uses surveys, focus group discussions, and town meetings to collate youth ideas and opinions across the country. With the youth population accounting for 50% of the total number of registered voters, FLY and all youth-led organisations in Liberia believe they have a significant role to play in ensuring free, fair, and peaceful 2023 elections. FLY receives financial and non-financial support from the government, including annual budgetary allocation and logistical support for youth-led projects. Another notable trend in FLY's activities is the use of social media, where the group leverages Facebook to engage young people and other relevant stakeholders.

President's Young Professionals Programme: This programme was established in 2009 during the administration of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. The President's Young Professionals Programme (PYPP) is an initiative of the Liberian government that trains and mentors young Liberian university graduates in the country. As a two-year public service fellowship programme, the PYPP places selected candidates in relevant government roles with the purpose of giving young graduates the opportunity to hone their skills and gain relevant on-the-job experience. The PYPP empowers the youth and provides them with the rare opportunity to participate in the country's public policy processes. The programme is highly competitive and has received some criticisms for its low selection rate. According to Abraham Varney from BudgIT, "since the programme was established in 2009, it has yet to produce up to 1000 beneficiaries. The programme focuses only on graduates, automatically disqualifying other vibrant young people who are doing excellent work in local communities"[119]. Overall, despite the small number of beneficiaries, the programme has been successful in integrating Liberian youth into the national public policy space.

113 Republic of Liberia, *National Budget Fiscal Year 2020/2021*, June 2020, https://www.cabri-sbo.org/uploads/bia/Liberia_2021_Approval_External_BudgetProposal_MinFin_CEN-SADECOWAS_English.pdf
114 UNHCR, "Child Soldiers Global Report 2001 - Liberia," https://www.refworld.org/docid/498805e813.html#:~:text=The%20UN%20has%20estimated%20that,Liberia's%20seven-year%20civil%20war.
115 Francis Boayue, "Liberia: Political Parties Youth Leaders Affix Signatures to Buutuo Declaration, Commits Peaceful, Democracy, and Non-Violence Elections," August 7, 2023, https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/liberia-political-parties-youth-leaders-affix-signatures-to-buutuo-declaration-commits-peaceful-democracy-and-non-violence-elections/.
116 Front Page Africa, "Liberia: Federation of Liberia Youths (FLY) General Assembly Independent Ad-Hoc Elections Commission 2022 Guidelines," October 20, 2022, https://allafrica.com/stories/202210210181.html.
117 Ibid
118 David Yates, "Liberia: FLY Launches "Up to Us" National Youth Agenda," February 23, 2023, https://www.liberianobserver.com/liberia-fly-launches-us-national-youth-agenda.
119 Interview with Abraham Varney, Country Lead at BudgIT Liberia

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Financial commitment to youth-led initiatives: In implementing some of the above policy initiatives, the Liberian government has made financial commitments in several ways. The Ministry of Youth was allocated over USD$3.4million in the country's 2020/2021 national budget, which was mainly to promote youth development in Liberia. FLY was allocated a total amount of USD$150,000 in the country's 2013/2014 national budget, which was largely to facilitate the country's youth-led initiatives[120]. Despite priding itself as a nonpartisan and nongovernmental organisation, commentators believe FLY is a pro-government organisation. Varney argues "FLY and other government-funded youth organisations usually do not have the guts to criticise government activities, even when they are wrong"[121]. The PYPP also receives increased funding and technical support from the government, as well as international organisations, such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Hess Foundation, Mulago, Big Win Philanthropy, and others. The Liberian government is also using PYPP as a platform to integrate young people into the country's civil service and public affairs by providing them with hands-on training across the government's ministries and agencies, as well as gaining meaningful mentorship experience[122].

Driving partnership with youth-led initiatives and INGOs: Another major finding is the increasing partnership between government agencies and youth-led initiatives in driving youth participation in Liberia's public affairs. The Liberian Ministry of Youth and Sports partners with young people to advance youth-focused solutions. This is evident in the significant role played by FLY and other youth-led organisations in drawing up the 2012 and 2019 national youth policies. Beyond government-led agencies, youth-led organisations are also partnering with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and international organisations to advance youth participation in public affairs – including elections, civic engagement, and politics. For instance, FLY is currently partnering with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) to advance inclusive and peaceful elections in Liberia.

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120 YouthPolicy, "Liberia: Definition of Youth," April 28, 2014, https://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/liberia/.
121 Interview with Abraham Varney, Country Lead at BudgIT Liberia
122 President's Young Professional Program, "The PYPP Model," https://www.pyppliberia.com/model.

Key successes

Increasing youth participation in public affairs: One of the most significant successes in post-civil war Liberia, the efforts of the government in advancing youth inclusion into public affairs has seen a significant increase in the participation of young people in politics, elections, and civic engagements. This is even more important with the role played by young people in the devastating civil wars and political stability in the country. Interestingly, the Liberian youth are now at the forefront of advocating for free, fair, and peaceful elections. While Liberia is yet to have a young person elected as political officer or parliamentarian, the country has progressed immensely in getting young people to show interest in politics, through voting, vying for elective positions, and holding leaders accountable. Despite all this, Varney still believes it is not enough, noting that "in practice, young people are still not given the room to take up political positions, even though the constitution permits youth above 25 years to do so". He also noted "young people's growing interest in politics is not only because of their [government] initiatives, rather it is because young people are tired of the country's socio-economic situations. There is so much youth unemployment and poor education. So, the youth's interest in politics is because we want to ask questions and challenge the system"[123].

Increasing number of youth-led organisations and initiatives: Liberia is experiencing an increasing number of youth-led organisations and initiatives. This is a notable success because it highlights the significant impact of youth-focused policies and programmes. The government has reduced bureaucratic bottlenecks that hinder young people from incorporating their social enterprise. Interestingly, Liberia is now experiencing an increasing number of youth-led initiatives focusing on several developmental issues including elections, accountability, climate change and environmental protection, and quality education.

Youth as Peacebuilders: A notable success in Liberian public affairs, young people who used to be known as menaces to the country are now drivers of peace and stability. Ahead of the 2023 general elections young people, with the support of FLY, advocated for peaceful elections. Beyond campaigning for free, fair, and peaceful elections, FLY also coordinated the signing of a peace pact tagged the "Buutuo Declaration". The Buutuo Declaration was signed by youth leaders in major political parties in early 2023, encouraging young people to shun violence and promote peaceful conduct in Liberia's 2023 general elections[124]. The Buutuo Declaration has a historical significance, as it was signed in the Buutuo area of Nimba County in Liberia – the location where the devastating civil war started 34 years ago. Coordinated by FLY, this declaration signals the increasing role of young people in promoting peace in the country, which is one of the priorities of the government outlined in the NYP.

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123 Interview with Abhram Varney
124 Francis Boayue, "Liberia: Political Parties Youth Leaders Affix Signatures to Buutuo Declaration, Commits Peaceful, Democracy, and Non-Violence Elections," August 7, 2023, https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/liberia-political-parties-youth-leaders-affix-signatures-to-buutuo-declaration-commits-peaceful-democracy-and-non-violence-elections/

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Malta

Malta is a small island country located in the Central Mediterranean with a total population of over 519,000 people[125]. Malta is a multi-party state with only two dominant political parties – the Labour Party and the Nationalist Party[126]. As of 2021, the youth population in Malta stands at 113,085 – representing 21.77% of the country's total population. Malta has a vibrant youth population, who work significantly and contribute to the country's socio-political and economic growth. This is largely due to the country's investment in the education of its youth population – from pre-primary school to the tertiary level[127]. The Maltese educational system is focused on building young people's technical capacity to advance the country's economic and development aspirations. Through several policy initiatives and programmes Malta is advancing youth participation in its political and civic engagement, making them a key stakeholder in driving the country's developmental priorities.

Understanding youth-focused policies and initiatives

Young people are important stakeholders in Malta's political, economic, and social development. This demographic population does not only represent the active citizenry in the country, but it is also one of the most significant players in Maltese public affairs, including politics, elections, and civic engagement. This informed the reason why the CEO of Malta's National Youth Agency (also known as Agenzija Zghazagh), Ms. Miriam Teuma, stressed that the Maltese government engage the youth as a key player in its development agenda and systematically integrated them into the country's public affairs[128]. The Maltese government and its agencies have implemented several policy programmes and initiatives, as well as constitutional reforms, creating a pathway for improving youth participation in the country's public affairs.

National Youth Policy: The National Youth Policy is the official and overarching policy framework of the Maltese government that outlines the country's priorities in engaging its young population between the ages of 13 and 30 years old. Since the development of its first National Youth Policy in 1993, Malta has had five consecutive National Youth Policies, which is due to the government's commitment to ensure that the youth policies reflect the national priorities and the reality of its young

population[129]. The new National Youth Policy was adopted in 2021 after a series of consultations with young people across Malta, reflecting the changing socio-political landscape in Malta and Europe. The policy document is titled "National Youth Policy – Towards 2030 – Reaching out to, working with, and supporting young people" and it focuses on advancing youth-focused policies in Malta. Building on the successes of previous National Youth Policies in Malta, this policy framework presents eight strategic goals and action plans that seek to advance youth voices and proactively integrate them into the socio-political and economic priorities of the country.

The Ministry for Inclusion and Voluntary Sector is primarily in charge of implementing the National Youth Policy (NYP) in Malta, while the National Youth Agency (Agenzija Zghazagh) is responsible for strategic planning and day-to-day matters[130]. Established in 2010, Agenzija Zghazagh has the constitutional mandate to implement and coordinate the NYP, while also advancing the interests of young people through enhancing political and civic engagements[131]. Agenzija Zghazagh has 10 key functions, including developing programmes and initiatives that empower young people and facilitate the registration of youth-led organisations, among

127 European Union, "Malta: Education and Training Monitor 2021," European Union, https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2021/en/malta.html.
128 Interview with Ms. Miriam Teuma, the CEO of Agenzija Zghazagh (the Maltese National Youth Agency)
129 Agenzija Zghazagh, "National Youth Policy," https://youth.gov.mt/national-youth-policy/.
130 The Maltese Government, *National Youth Policy (2021 -2030)* (2021), https://online.fliphtml5.com/rqmms/wbuk/#p=1.
131 A enzija g a ag , "Our Agency," https://youth.gov.mt/our-agency/.

others. The agency is responsible for promoting, coordinating, and facilitating cross-sectoral initiatives that promote youth inclusion in Malta's public affairs. Agenzija Zghazagh is also in charge of monitoring the progress of National Youth Politics through its annual reports. To further identify the progress made thus far, a comprehensive mid-term review of the policy and its implementation will be conducted by 2025/2026. This review will also ensure that the policy will remain relevant and responsive to the needs and aspirations of young people and that any proposed amendments or additions will be incorporated as part of the policy.

Vote 16 Legislation: In 2018, the Maltese parliament unanimously voted to reduce the voting age to 16 years. This law allows young people aged between 16 and 18 years old to now participate in national and European parliamentary elections, and in referendums[132]. With this legislation, Malta became the second European country to reduce the age of the voting population to 16 years old. Under this law, young people cannot be elected as mayors until they turn 18 years old[133]. This legislation has not only increased the participation of young people in national and European elections but also improved their relevance in national and regional political stability and development priorities. This landmark legislation was only possible due to the relentless efforts of young people in the country, specifically "The Vote 16 Committee" – a committee of young persons across different political parties and different non-partisan youth groups that campaigned vigorously for the Vote 16 agenda[134]. Agenzija Zghazagh also played a significant role in the Vote 16, consistently providing platforms for young people to have their voices heard, as well as publishing periodic papers that unpack youth's position demands[135].

The Degree Plus Initiative: This is an initiative of the University of Malta in partnership with the Bank of Valletta and supported by Agenzija Zghazagh, where young graduates and undergraduates are encouraged to engage in extracurricular activities that will enhance their personal growth and development[136]. The initiative is designed to encourage young people to engage in civic activities, such as volunteering work and entrepreneurship, which help build the necessary skills for personal growth and development. The Degree Plus initiative helps young people become assets to the country's development and regional stability and enhances their ability to obtain highly skilled and well-paying jobs.

Simulation programmes: Funded by the Maltese government, the National Youth Council organises simulation programmes that introduce young people to the activities of the Maltese parliament as well as the EU parliament. The simulation programmes help students understand the activities and processes of these parliaments and improve their knowledge and technical ability to constructively debate public affairs issues. The National Youth Parliament is an annual programme that allows young people to simulate the activities of the Maltese parliament by researching and debating key socio-political and economic issues[137]. The Malta University recently hosted the Debating Union in 2022, where students participated in European Union Council simulation events. Unlike the civic education programme, the simulation initiatives provide students with practical experience.

132 DW, "Malta grants 16-year-olds right to vote," June 3, 2018, https://www.dw.com/en/malta-lowers-voting-age-to-16-with-unanimous-backing-from-parliament/a-42838643.
133 Times Malta, "16-year-olds granted the vote in national elections," March 5, 2018, https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/16-year-olds-granted-the-vote-in-national-elections.672453
134 Keith Micallef, "Vote 16 campaign still alive," Times Malta, August 3, 2014, https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/Vote-16-campaign-still-alive.530471.
135 A enzija g a ag , *Democratic Participation: Listening to the voices of young people* (2014), https://youth.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Democratic_Participation_Make_Your_Choice_Through_The_Ballot_Box-compressed.pdf?80b578&80b578.
136 University of Malta, "DegreePlus," https://www.um.edu.mt/study/degreeplus/#:~:text=DegreePlus,%20an%20initiative%20of%20the,academic%20and%20non-academic%20horizons.
137 Camilia Halli, "The National Youth Parliament 2022," Citizens Lab, September 27, 2022, https://citizenslab.org.mt/events/the-national-youth-parliament-2022/.

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Policy Implementation

Resource Support for Young People: In implementing the policy framework and the initiatives mentioned above, the Maltese government – through its agencies and ministries – provides financial and non-financial support for young people who are actively involved in the country's public affairs. This funding is to support young people's initiatives relevant to the country's overall growth. There is also non-funding support from the government, such as facility donation and technical support. Ms. Teuma of Agenzija Zghazagh, hinted that "we usually provide opportunities for young people that are working on civic projects and relevant advocacy. We also help young people's programmes by providing them with venues, trainers, scholarships, and so on"[138]. Mr. Matteo Clinton, from Young European Federalists (JEF) Malta, also acknowledged government support for the youth, however, he noted that "there is huge bureaucracy and red tape before young people can access these funds"[139]. He also stressed "there are funding opportunities from the European Union that are dedicated for youth projects, and we have also benefited from a few".

Civic Education in School Curriculum: As highlighted in Strategic Goals 4 and 5 of the National Youth Policy, the Maltese government is using formal education to drive youth inclusion into the country's public affairs. From primary to tertiary education levels, students are taught the fundamental values of civic engagement and the need for active participation in politics, elections, and civic life. This civic education programme helps young people understand their significant roles in nation building and regional stability. However, Mr. Matteo hinted that quality civic education should improve in Malta.[140]

Registration and Documentation of Youth-led Organisations: To improve young people's participation in civic engagement, the Agenzija Zghazagh provides registration and documentation support for young people who seek to set up civil society organisations. With proper documentation and registrations with Agenzija Zghazagh, young people can access financial and non-financial support from the government and EU. This gives youth-led organisations the legitimacy to actively engage government officials, private institutions, and intergovernmental organisations on issues relevant to Malta's public affairs.

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138 Interview with Ms. Miriam Teuma, the CEO of Agenzija Zghazagh (the Maltese National Youth Agency)
139 Interview with Matteo Clinton, a former member of JEF, Malta
140 Interview with Matteo Clinton, a former member of JEF, Malta

Key successes

Increasing Young Voters in Malta: Vote 16 legislation provides opportunities for young people to be a part of political processes and allows them to participate in political decisions that will directly and indirectly affect their lives and future. The law has significantly improved young people's participation in elections, which is evident in the youth accounting for 72.7% of the 2019 local council and European parliamentary elections. Young people are contesting for political positions at local and national levels, and this is evident in the 2022 general elections in Malta, when 18-year-old Borg Bonello was elected to the Maltese parliament through gender quotas, making her the youngest MP in Malta[141]. It is also worth noting that the Vote 16 law has increased young people's interest in socio-political issues, such as the promotion of human rights, social inclusion of LGBTQI+ people, environmental protection, and geopolitical dynamics. With this law, young people are increasingly being integrated into public affairs issues in Malta.

Increasing efforts to improve the National Youth Policy: Since its first National Youth Policy in 1993, Malta has reviewed its youth policy document on five occasions; 1993, 1999, 2004, 2010, and 2021[142]. A cursory review of these national youth policies shows that each new policy builds on the success of the previous once. As mentioned by the Parliamentary Secretary for Sport, Recreation, and Voluntary Organisations, Dr Clifton Grima, who noted the 2021 National Youth Policy "is a policy that builds on the successes of the past five years, while focusing on the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead"[143]. This means that the Maltese government pays adequate attention to the changing priorities of young people.

Increasing Youth-led Organisations in Malta: Another success is the increasing number of youth-led civil society organisations in Malta. Ms. Teuma, of Agenzija Zghazagh, noted that the agency is now seeing "increasing registration of youth-led civil society organisations in Malta"[144]. Our respondents argued that the growth in youth-led organisations is a result of several factors including effective civic education, the need for young people to speak up, and the growth of social media. Social issues, such as climate change and LGBTQI+ issues, are driving young people to set up civic organisations that are focused on advancing these causes.

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141 Karl Azzopardi, "PN candidate Eve Borg Bonello becomes youngest MP in Malta's history," Malta Today, April 12, 2022, https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/election-2022/116236/pn_candidate_eve_borg_bonello_becomes_youngest_mp_in_maltas_history.

142 Agenzija Zghazagh, "National Youth Policy (1993 - 2015)," Agenzija Zghazagh, https://youth.gov.mt/national-youth-policy-1993-2015/#:~:text=In%201993,%20the%20newly%20established,in%20the%20light%20of%20changing.

143 The Maltese Government, *National Youth Policy (2021 -2030)* (2021), https://online.fliphtml5.com/rqmms/wbuk/#p=1

144 Interview with Ms. Miriam Teuma

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Morocco

The political and socio-economic context of Morocco has been shaped by the hopes that arose following the Arab uprisings over a decade ago. However, most of the planned reforms are yet to be introduced. The persistent issues of limited separation of powers and corruption have a profound impact on the rule of law and undermine the principles of good governance. The judicial system has been exploited to punish political opponents, activists, and critics. Alarming incidents, such as the detention of journalists and human rights activists, have threatened civil liberties and freedom of expression.[145] Morocco faces numerous socio-economic challenges, with social inequalities persisting between different classes and urban-rural areas. One of the pressing issues is unemployment, especially among the youth, which has resulted in their marginalisation.

The growth of the youth population, coupled with their economic and political marginalisation and their pivotal role in social movements, has brought youth issues to the forefront of public concern[146]. Young people have become a central element of State discourse since the 2000s and a priority issue for King Mohammed VI, who called for a better representation of youth in public affairs in several speeches[147]. In Morocco, the king's support is a crucial factor in bringing a topic to the political agenda.

While Moroccan youth express their views on social media, or sometimes by organising demonstrations, only 1% of them are members of political parties or trade unions[148]. During an interview, Benissa, a youth activist, highlighted the significant involvement of young people in non-conventional forms of political participation. He also admitted that youth engagement in formal politics is still lacking, despite some progress made on this front. The experiences of marginalisation that young people face in Morocco, coupled with distrust in political institutions, create barriers and disincentives to more traditional ways of political participation.

Understanding youth-focused policies and initiatives

Legal framework: The 2011 Moroccan Constitution and subsequent organic laws establish a legal and institutional framework that introduces several forms of citizen participation in public affairs. The Constitution contains specific provisions on the political involvement of young people:

"It is the responsibility of public authorities to take all appropriate measures to extend and generalise the participation of youth in society, economics, culture and politics of the country".

It also calls for the creation of various consultative bodies, including the Consultative Council of Youth and Associative Action, and the principle of consulting civil society in developing, implementing, and evaluating public policies, allowing citizens to formulate legislative motions and petitions.

Parliamentary youth quota: In 2011, the parliament passed an electoral law, which, among other reforms, introduced a youth quota in the Moroccan House of Representatives. Rather than being a result of an organised social movement or a top-down inclusivity reform, its adoption was a consequence of several interplaying factors, with young party activists playing a key role in the process[149]. The

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145 Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2022 Country Report — Morocco* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022).
146 Marta Garcia de Paredes and Thierry Desrues, "Unravelling the adoption of youth quotas in African hybrid regimes: evidence from Morocco," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 59, no. 1 (March 2021), https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022278x20000646.
147 Including in 2003, in 2011, 2017, and 2018
148 "Participation politique des jeunes au Maroc," Libération, February 18, 2020, https://www.libe.ma/Participation-politique-des-jeunes-au-Maroc_a115751.html.
149 The socio-political background of the adoption of youth quotas in Morocco is described in detail in Marta Garcia de Paredes and Thierry Desrues, "Unravelling the adoption of youth quotas in African hybrid regimes: evidence from Morocco," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 59, no. 1 (March 2021), https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022278x20000646.

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adoption of the gender quota paved the way for youth claims, and the generational conflict between the old and young generations of party activists encouraged the establishment of a multi-partisan youth coalition that led the adoption negotiations. Finally, the spread of youth-friendly narratives and the emergence of new spaces for youth participation facilitated the negotiation process. As a result, the new electoral law introduced a youth quota providing 30 reserved seats for candidates under 40 years old in the Moroccan Parliament. Initially, the quota was reserved exclusively for male candidates. In 2016, it started to cover female candidates.

Youth strategy and programmes: The Ministry of Youth, Culture, and Communication (and its predecessor the Ministry of Youth and Sport) is responsible for developing and implementing government policy in the area of youth. To provide guidance for public policies and steer the intervention of all stakeholders in the realm of youth policies, Morocco's National Youth Strategy 2015–2030 has been developed. It was internationally praised as "an example of a comprehensive plan and strategy, including concrete action plans, preliminary indicators of implementation outcomes, and an extensive M&E plan"[150]. In 2018, another document was developed, the New National Initiative for Moroccan Youth, notably by a different institution – the Economic, Social, and Environmental Council (CESE). The CESE is a constitutional institution that performs advisory functions on economic and social public policies by applying a participatory and consultative approach. Both the National Youth Strategy and the New National Initiative prioritised youth participation in public affairs and civic life. Furthermore, government websites mention a number of initiatives promoting youth engagement, such as Youth Houses and Child Parliament, and fostering economic inclusion, such as 'Forsa' and 'Awrach' programmes. However, information on the design, structure, and actual implementation of these initiatives is limited.

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150 ACE, "Youth and Elections," ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, 2018, https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/yt/onePage.

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Policy Implementation

Words over actions: Despite the establishment of a legal framework and the spread of youth-friendly narratives, there has been a notable discrepancy between the laws adopted, the discourse, and the actual implementation of these mechanisms. Moroccan civil society was not adequately informed about the legal changes introduced, leading to most petitions being rejected due to procedural irregularities[151]. Although the plans to establish the Consultative Council of Youth were referred to in several policy documents, it remains inactive[152]. Morocco's National Youth Strategy 2015–2030 was discontinued; and the recommendations of the New National Initiative for Moroccan Youth from 2018 do not seem to be actioned upon from the institutional perspective. The situation is mostly due to frequent personnel changes in the Ministry of Youth resulting in a lack of continuity[153]. Preparations for the Council of Youth seem to be underway, but there are concerns whether this body will represent the full diversity of youth voices, following the recommendations of civil society and grassroots organisations, or rather become co-opted by political parties or other vested interests[154].

Parliamentary youth quota: The introduction of a youth quota in the Moroccan parliament was a significant step towards increasing youth representation. In Morocco, the quota almost doubled the presence of youth deputies in the lower house, increasing from 12% in 2007 to 22% in 2011[155]. Despite controversies regarding the level of political nepotism on the youth electoral list, Moroccan activists see youth quota as a helpful instrument to encourage young people's engagement in politics. According to Hassan, the co-founder of a youth-led initiative encouraging young Moroccans to vote, entering the political arena without affirmative action is extremely difficult for a young person without influential connections or a powerful family background. Despite the strong opposition of youth groups[156], the youth quota was abolished for the 2021 elections.

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151 Hajar Bennani, Amine Mahdoud, and Maryem Saddiqui, *POUR UNE PARTICIPATION EFFECTIVE DES JEUNES DANS LA VIE PUBLIQUE AU MAROC:La nécessaire opérationnalisation des mécanismes de la démocratie participative* (Rabat Social Studies Institute, 2021).
152 Including, now discontinued, Morocco's National Youth Strategy 2015-2030; and The New National Initiative for Moroccan Youth from 2018.
153 Interview with Ahmed, a former director within the Ministry of Youth and Sports
154 Interview with Hassan, a youth activist
155 Marta Garcia de Paredes and Thierry Desrues, "Unravelling the adoption of youth quotas in African hybrid regimes: evidence from Morocco," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 59, no. 1 (March 2021), https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022278x20000646.
156 "Elections législatives : Un mouvement de jeunesse pour une liste nationale dédiée aux jeunes", Aujourd'hui le Maroc, August 25, 2011, https://aujourdhui.ma/societe/elections-legislatives-un-mouvement-de-jeunesse-pour-une-liste-nationale-dediee-aux-jeunes-78795.

Key successes

Improved youth participation in politics: There are few public programmes specifically tailored for youth, and existing programmes lack relevant indicators to assess their impact on the political, social, and cultural aspects of young people's lives. However, Morocco's efforts to improve youth political participation have seen some successes. Specifically, young Moroccans interviewed shared the perception that youth participation and interest in politics have improved over recent years[157], even though significant progress is still needed. Several independent surveys confirm Moroccan youth's interest in politics, mostly expressed in non-traditional ways[158].

Effective communication with youth: The efforts of the government to educate and communicate effectively with the youth are commendable, despite being poorly coordinated and inconsistent. Several public officials have utilised social media and new technologies to connect with young people, address their concerns, present and explain key initiatives undertaken by the government. Furthermore, some institutions and actors actively advocate for and support youth engagement. According to Hassan, the Economic, Social and Environmental Council is an institution "which takes a step towards youth, which studies youth-related policies, and which responds dynamically to youth issues"[159]. The openness and willingness to connect with the young generation might stem from the institution's autonomy and structure, which are relatively unaffected by the influence of political elites' vested interests.

Building political consciousness from an early age: Among successful programmes in terms of political and civic education, the Child Parliament was mentioned. According to Benissa, early exposure to democratic processes is essential for the development of political and civic awareness:

"I find it very effective because we are creating a generation from scratch. From the beginning, we are giving them the tools and political consciousness. Most of the youth that I met, who were part of [the Child Parliament], are now working on social change or working on political change wanting to improve democracy in Morocco"[160].

Affirmative action: The temporary introduction of the quota increased youth representation in parliament. Interestingly, the system of reserved seats for youth in parliament is employed in only four countries around the world[161] and evidence suggests that youth quotas help increase youth representation[162]. Until now, there has been a noticeable decrease in the average age of parliament members and the government in Morocco. For instance, the average age of ministers in 2021 was 54.8 years old[163], decreasing from 58 years old in 2019[164], and 57.2 years old in 2017[165]. This is a positive step towards better representation and acknowledgment of the aspirations of young people in Moroccan public affairs.

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157 Interviews with Hassan and Benissa
158 For example, Olivier DEAU and David Goeury, "¿Podemos hablar de una generación "20 de febrero"? Preguntando a la juventud urbana marroquí: identidad política y participación.," *Revista de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos*, no. 26 (June 25, 2019), https://doi.org/10.15366/reim2019.26.002. or Saloua Zerhouni, *Explaining Youth Participation and Non-Participation in Morocco* (Mohammed V University in Rabat, 2017).
159 Interview with Hassan, a youth activist
160 Interview with Benissa, a youth activist
161 Five more states use the system of legislated candidate quotas
162 InterParliamentary Union, *Youth participation in national parliaments years of empowering youth in parliament 10* (IPU, 2021).
163 Hassan Benadad, "Gouvernement: voici la moyenne d'âge des nouveaux ministres," Le 360 Français, October 8, 2021, https://fr.le360.ma/politique/gouvernement-voici-la-moyenne-dage-des-nouveaux-ministres-247123/.
164 "Nouveau gouvernement. L'Exécutif le plus réduit depuis Abdallah Ibrahim," LesEco.ma, October 11, 2019, https://leseco.ma/maroc/nouveau-gouvernement-l-executif-le-plus-reduit-depuis-abdallah-ibrahim.html.
165 "57.2 ans, moyenne d'âge du gouvernement Tebboune!," Echorouk, May 27, 2017, https://www.echoroukonline.com/57-2-ans-moyenne-dage-du-gouvernement-tebboune.

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Nepal

Nepal is located in South Asia with a total population of over 30 million people. With a long history of a monarchy, Nepal officially became a democratic republic in 2008 after several years of pro-democracy movements and wars. Nepal has a growing youth population, with young people aged between 16–40 years old accounting for 40.68% of the country's total population[166]. Since its transition into a democratic country, Nepal has experienced increasing youth participation in public affairs, specifically holding political offices and advancing several socio-political issues. In particular, the Nepalese government has also made conscious efforts to integrate young people into the country's public affairs through the launch of the National Youth Policy (2072) in 2015[167].

Understanding youth-focused policies and initiatives

National Youth Policy: The National Youth Policy (NYP) outlines the government's strategies and action plans for advancing youth development and participation in public affairs. Published in 2015, the NYP is a major policy document that focuses on advancing youth priorities in Nepal[168]. With Nepal's history of civil wars and social unrest, the NYP seeks to significantly integrate young people into public affairs at all levels, further adopting it as a significant strategy to promote peace and stability in the country. Mr. Rashtra Raj, a founder of a civil society organisation in Nepal, noted that "we have experienced a cycle of civil wars and revolution in the past. Therefore, embracing democracy and integrating all groups, including the youth, is an important step to our country's stability"[169]. The NYP presents 15 major strategic objectives of the Nepalese government in promoting youth development in the country[170]. Some of these objectives include quality education, youth empowerment and leadership opportunities, employment, meaningful participation in public affairs, and youth participation in sustainable peace and conflict resolution. Additionally, the NYP outlines the relevant institutional bodies that will implement the youth policies, such as the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the National Youth Council, and the provincial governments. The policy document further outlines

the significant role of NGOs and INGOs in achieving the key priorities of the Nepalese government regarding youth development. The NYP notes the possible funding sources to implement youth-focused policy programmes including budgetary allocation to government ministries and agencies, as well as grants from international bodies and the private sector.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports is primarily responsible for the implementation of the NYP. The ministry also monitors and evaluates the country's progress in driving young people's participation in the country's public affairs. The ministry works with the National Youth Council (NYC) to promote active youth engagement in the country's socio-political and economic affairs. As a recognised government agency that represents the youth, NYC is at the centre of driving youth-focused initiatives, such as organising youth events, coordinating Model UN events, conferences, tech bootcamps, and training workshops.

Decentralising Governance in Nepal: With the National Youth Policy in place, decentralising governance structure in provinces and local councils has given young people opportunities to engage in politics at the local level. Hon. Biraj

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166 UNFPA, "For young people, by young people," August 12, 2022, https://nepal.unfpa.org/en/news/young-people-young-people#:~:text=In%20 Nepal,%20young%20people%20account,the%20age%20group%2016-40.
167 Nepal Government, "National Youth Policy 2017 (2015)," 2015, https://www.moys.gov.np/sites/default/files/nitiheru/National%20Youth%20 Policy%202072_2.pdf.
168 Ibid
169 Interview with Mr Rashtra Raj - a founder of Non-Profit in Nepal
170 Nepal Government, *National Youth Policy 2017 (2015)*, 2015, https://www.moys.gov.np/sites/default/files/nitiheru/National%20Youth%20 Policy%202072_2.pdf.

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Bhakta Shrestha, a federal parliamentarian in Nepal, hinted during our interview that the 2015 Nepal constitution played a significant role in improving young people's participation in public affairs[171]. It featured them not as disruptive agents but as major players in fostering good governance and stability in Nepal. In particular, the 2015 Nepal constitution decentralised the country's governance structure, giving young people the rare opportunity to participate in provincial and local elections, both as voters and candidates seeking political office. This is evident in the increased participation of young people in the 2017 and 2022 general elections in Nepal. In local elections, young people contested more than 41% of the elective positions and won nearly 50% of the seats in parliamentary elections, signalling growing youth participation in the political system[172]. However, Mr Rashtra noted that "there is still very slow youth political participation at the federal level, unlike what we see at the provincial and local levels. The little progress we have experienced at the federal level is quite tokenistic"[173].

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171 Interview with Hon. Biraj Bhakta Shrestha; Member of Parliament in Nepal
172 Hari Bansh Jha, "Entry of youth in Nepalese politics: Will they bring change?," December 21, 2022, https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/entry-of-youth-in-nepalese-politics/.
173 Interview with Hon. Biraj Bhakta Shrestha; Member of Parliament in Nepal

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Policy Implementation

Advancing Effective Partnership: To advance youth participation in public affairs, the government is leveraging partnerships with youth-led organisations, civil society organisations, UN agencies, and international NGOs. As clearly outlined in objective 15 of the NYP, the Nepal government is leveraging its network of partners – both locally and internationally – to advance youth participation in public affairs in the country. Nepal's Ministry of Youth and Sport has been in partnership with the National Youth Council to advance a series of youth development programmes in Nepal, such as conferences, bootcamps, and youth-led campaigns. UN agencies and INGOs are partnering with Nepal's government institutions to promote youth inclusion in the country's public affairs. To achieve this, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has been partnering with the Nepal government to build the capacity of young people for leadership, gender inclusion, and advocacy. Additionally, the Nepalese government, in partnership with the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD), is co-leading the Youth Democracy cohort of the Summit for Democracy – a platform focused on advancing meaningful integration of young people into political and civic engagement. This international engagement further signals the Nepal government's commitment to advanced youth inclusion in public affairs.

Exploiting technology: Another notable implementation pattern in Nepal is the role of technology – specifically social media – in promoting youth participation in public affairs in the country. According to the findings, young people in Nepal are leveraging social media to advance their voices on several socio-political issues in the country, such as climate change and inclusion of minority groups. This is evident in the massive #EnoughIsEnough campaign on social media platforms, including X (formerly known as Twitter) and Facebook, in 2020. This was spearheaded by young Nepalese demanding transparency in the NPR$10billion COVID-19 budget, as well as calling out the government for mishandling the pandemic outbreak in the country[174]. Additionally, in the build up to the 2022 parliamentary elections in Nepal, the country's social media was flooded with the hashtag #NoNotAgain – a campaign advocating for young people to take up the political space and vote out the ageing politicians[175]. According to Hon. Shrestha, "many young political aspirants are using social media for their campaigns and showcasing their ideas"[176]. While this is not necessarily facilitated by the government, it has significantly increased youth engagement on topical policy issues that affect their future and increased their chances of being involved in elective positions.

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174 Diya Rijal, "Social Movement Through Social Media," June 17, 2020, https://www.globalissues.org/news/2020/06/17/26531.
175 Samik Kharel, "New forces take on Nepal old guard in November 20 national polls," Aljazeera, November 16, 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/16/new-forces-take-on-nepal-old-guard-in-november-20-national-polls.
176 Interview with Hon. Shrestha

Key successes

Increasing Participation in Elections and Political Landscape: The National Youth Policy created a policy framework for young people to thrive in Nepal. With this policy document, young people are speaking up on issues that concern their future, while also actively participating in politics and civil engagement. The 2022 general elections in Nepal signal an increasing participation of young people in politics. Youth accounted for 41% of the total elected representatives in the country's 2022 local elections[177]. Beyond elections, Nepal is also experiencing young people being vocal on political issues, using democratic instruments rather than resorting to violent conflicts. However, it is imperative to note that youth participation in politics is still relatively low, especially at the federal level, where there are still very little opportunities available for young people to actively get involved in the political space[178].

Increasing Youth-led Advocacy and Initiatives: Nepal is experiencing a growing landscape of youth-led initiatives that seek to promote several socio-political and economic issues. With the presence of UN agencies and other multilateral organisations, such as the UNFPA, young people in Nepal are gaining financial and technical support for their initiatives and ideas. According to Hon Shrestha, "we are experiencing technological innovations in several areas here in Nepal. Thanks to our youth and support from the government and international organisations"[179].

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177 Republica, "Youths constitute 41 percent of the total elected representatives in local level polls," Republica, July 27, 2022, https://myrepublica. nagariknetwork.com/news/youths-constitute-41-percent-of-the-total-elected-representatives-in-local-level-polls/.
178 Hari Bansh Jha, "Entry of youth in Nepalese politics: Will they bring change?," December 21, 2022, https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/entry-of-youth-in-nepalese-politics/.
179 Interview with Hon. Biraj Bhakta Shrestha; Member of Parliament in Nepal

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Philippines

Democracy in the Philippines has transformed into what some observers describe as an authoritarian political system. Since mid-2016, human rights and civil liberties have significantly deteriorated, while corruption remains endemic in the country[180]. Freedom of speech and assembly have been repeatedly hindered, and opposition groups have faced harassment and violence. Attempts at political reforms have proven unsuccessful, with a long history of political dynasties undermining state accountability.

Despite this recent democratic backsliding, the Philippines has been one of the most dynamic economies in the Southeast Asian region with a growing middle class, decreasing poverty rates, and significant remittances inflow. A key advantage lies in the Philippines' large and youthful population, with one in three Filipinos being between 15–30 years old, contributing to a thriving labour market[181]. This demographic presents an opportunity for the nation's democratic future.

Understanding youth-focused policies and initiatives

The National Youth Commission: The Philippines has implemented several youth participation mechanisms and programmes. The National Youth Commission (NYC) plays a pivotal role in the Philippines' approach to youth affairs. Established in 1995 by the Youth in Nation-Building Act, the NYC serves as the main policymaking body on youth issues, coordinating all youth-related institutions, programmes, projects, and government activities. It is responsible for formulating national policies on youth in coordination with youth groups, conducting research, and establishing consultative mechanisms between the government and the youth sector. While it is attached to the Office of the President, the Commission is described as independent and autonomous in its functions[182]. The NYC comprises five commissioners and a chairman appointed by the President from a list of three to five nominees submitted by youth-led and youth-serving organisations. The day-to-day operations and effective implementation of the policies promulgated by the Commission are supervised by the executive director, while several government departments perform advisory functions. To ensure that the youth perspective is incorporated into the Commission's work, the law stipulates the permissible age limits of the chairman, executive director, and commissioners. Throughout their incumbency, the chairman and the executive director shall not be older than forty-five years, and the age of commissioners cannot exceed forty years. The key programmes of the NYC are outlined by the Youth in Nation-Building Act and include the National Youth Parliament, which is a two- or three-day convention of youth leaders every two years, and a National Youth Volunteer Programme, where the NYC acts as an intermediary between interested youth and civil society organisations needing volunteers. Application to both programmes is open to all interested Filipino youth.

Philippine Youth Development Plan: The NYC regularly reviews and updates the Philippine Youth Development Plan (YDP), which serves as a guiding framework for youth development programmes and policies. The most recent version, YDP 2017–2022, builds on the foundations laid by its predecessors. In the YDP 2005–2010, youth participation took on a crucial significance, prioritising active youth involvement in planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating youth-oriented programmes, as well as the integration of youth perspectives into both

180 Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2022 Country Report — The Philippines,* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022).
181 National Youth Commission, *2021 Youth Statistics Update* (Quezon City: NYC, 2022).
182 The Philippines, Congress of the Philippines. *Youth in Nation-Building Act*, RA 8044, adopted July 25, 1994.

local and national development strategies. The YDP 2012–2016, in turn, expanded the concept of participation by focusing not only on traditional forms of political participation but also on youth engagement in development and civic life. With its growing centrality across policy documents, participation evolved from a thematic element to a core principle that underpins the entire strategy of YDP 2017–2022. The main objective is to increase participation in nine areas that emerged during the consultation process. The Centres of Participation include health, education, economic empowerment, social inclusion, governance, peacebuilding, citizenship, environment, and global mobility[183]. To help realise the NYC's vision of "enabled, involved, and patriotic youth realising their aspirations anchored on integrity and compassion"[184], a set of concrete activities was presented along with monitoring metrics and a list of duty bearers at local and national levels translating the plan into action. The suggested ways to improve participation in each area are exemplified by providing a sample of past and current activities implemented by diverse actors, including local and national governments. The Youth in Action (Yo-Act) Programme, encourages youth to join training and civic activities to foster camaraderie, was mentioned under the Active Citizenship area. It is worthwhile to note that the YDP 2017–2022 also lists specific legislative changes required to achieve its objectives. The vulnerable groups that are given special attention include youth with disabilities, indigenous youth, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI+) youth. The YDP also assigned priority to the issues of violence against women and gender equality.

Sangguniang Kabataan: Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) are local youth councils in each of 42,000 barangays – the smallest government units in the Philippines. The structure was established by the Local Government Code of 1991. SK officials are elected for three-year mandates by their peers at the barangay level and are responsible for representing youth in the local government. The age of eligibility is 15–24 years old, while the age of voters ranges from 15–30 years old[185]. The SK

officials federate to higher governance levels, choosing presidents who represent the youth at the municipal and provincial government levels. Rather than an organisation, the SK is a governing body voted into office by the youth constituency. It is a platform for shaping policies and decisions taken at the local level. By granting youth power and authority similar to those held by elected officials at the barangay, municipal, or provincial levels, the SK structure promotes active youth involvement in community decision-making by addressing youth-related matters and providing youth perspectives on diverse local issues. When developing youth activities in barangays, Sangguniang Kabataan are required to follow the strategic areas outlined by the Philippine Youth Development Plan.

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185 The Philippines, Congress of the Philippines. *Local Government Code*, RA 7160, adopted October 1, 1991.

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Policy Implementation

Consistent efforts: The Philippines has been actively engaging youth since the 1990s and has put considerable effort into the implementation and monitoring of youth policies[186]. The NYC implements all the programmes outlined by the Youth in Nation-Building Act, and conducts various additional activities, such as youth-led communication campaigns, programmes focusing on facilitating internships for out-of-school youth, and more. The NYC publishes yearly youth statistics tracking the progress on youth development indicators connected to the Philippine Youth Development Plan[187]. Mid-term and final evaluations of the YDP were conducted in 2019 and 2023, respectively. These well-documented evaluation efforts, along with a regularly updated website with information on youth rights, easily accessible guidelines, and a long list of youth opportunities, form an essential source of information and a useful coordination platform for young Filipinos and stakeholders from the youth sector. The evolving trajectory of the Philippine Youth Development Plans reveal a progressive amplification of the role of participation. This direction mirrors the growing recognition of youth as active agents in shaping national progress. The heightened emphasis on participation aligns with global trends recognising the multifaceted contributions of youth and their potential to drive sustainable development.

Strengthening participation mechanisms: The SK serve as the main platforms for youth to participate in decision-making processes and address local and national issues. For years, the SK faced criticism in relation to its inefficiency, ineffectiveness, and politicisation, with some observers calling it a breeding ground for corruption[188]. Following protests of the Filipino youth and the wider population[189], the government undertook a comprehensive reform in 2015. The new law revitalised SKs with significant changes, including anti-political dynasty initiatives, financial independence, and mandatory and continued training of SK officials. According to the provisions, the SK officials were provided with 10% of the barangay budget to be able to implement programmes addressing local youth needs[190], access to training and capacity development programmes organised by the NYC, and more equal access to these opportunities. The level of attention and resources that the SK dedicates to each YPD 2017-2022 Center of Participation varies and is connected to the ground's context. Following the campaign that the Duterte administration was working on, some SKs have focused on the war against drugs and substance abuse,[191] which might indicate its susceptibility to political influence and manipulation. However, in most cases, the SK tried to leverage youth energy and the need for group activities by organising sports and games. An independent evaluation carried out by Ateneo de Manila University in 2022 indicated that the SK Reform Law has indeed strengthened meaningful youth participation. It also identified some further fine-tuning is required to ensure that the innovative reforms are fully executed, with the need to provide more training opportunities to SK officials being particularly urgent[192].

Accessibility and inclusivity issues: It is essential to acknowledge that challenges remain in the implementation of youth policies. Lack of consistent political support resulting in insufficient funding allocated to the NYC, especially for reaching youth in remote areas of the country, hinders the operationalisation and inclusivity of youth initiatives[193]. The influence of political dynasties in certain localities remains a contentious issue that requires sustained efforts to level the playing field and provide equal opportunities for all young people.

189 "Challenge to youth: Break away from rotten system," INQUIRER.net, January 30, 2016, https://opinion.inquirer.net/92443/challenge-to-youth-break-away-from-rotten-system.
190 For instance, the budget for 2023 of Maria Theresa O. Llorente is PHP 860,000, which is roughly EUR 14,000
191 Marc Anthony Torres, *Assessment of Enabling Environment for Youth Participation in Peacebuilding and Governance in Region X, XI, XIII and Mainland BARMM* (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, 2022).
192 Leon Flores et al., "Youth Political Participation and Governance in the Philippines 5 Years Since the Ratification of the SK Reform Law," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2022, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4024887.
193 Interview with the National Youth Commission

Key successes

Shifting power to youth: Despite the challenges connected to the state of the Philippines' democracy that inevitably have also penetrated the youth sector, many policy initiatives have proven successful in improving youth political participation. The establishment of financially independent SKs has empowered young leaders at the local level to implement programmes catering to the needs and issues of their peers. This autonomy and financial support have allowed them to develop truly youth-led initiatives and programmes, ensuring that youth voices are represented in governance. To use the words of Ms. Maria Theresa O. Llorente, an SK official:

> "with this kind of youth participation, you are allowing the community to know more about what are the pressing issues that our young people are experiencing, and at the same time what are the things that we can do to improve it and how we can solve this through young people's minds."[194]

Better representation of young women: It is important to mention that a larger percentage of young women are elected as SK officials compared to their adult counterparts. In the 2018 local elections, out of 41,109 elected SK Chairs, 65% were male and 35% were female. For the elections involving adults, out of the 41,914 newly elected barangay key officials, 80% were men and 20% were women[195]. Despite a persisting gender gap in political representation in both age groups, higher representation of women as SK officials can be linked with the successful implementation of the NYC's Gender and Development Policy, formulated in 2014. The policy institutionalised the mainstreaming of gender perspective in all youth programmes and policies. This progress suggests that efforts to empower young women to engage in leadership roles are yielding positive outcomes, potentially contributing to more balanced gender dynamics in future political spheres.

Young Parliamentarians: The Philippines stands out with a relatively high number of young members of parliament, with 20 out of 311 MPs below 30 years old. This has earned the country a top score in the region and a high ranking on the global stage[196]. This is especially significant considering that the minimum age of eligibility for candidacy is 25, which is above the world average. This outcome may be associated with positive results of the implementation of youth development policies, and a conducive environment for youth participation in public affairs in general. For example, many government-initiated trainings for SK officials focused on parliamentary procedures, including mandatory governance training delivered to 3190 SK officials in 2018[197].

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195 COMELEC, *Report on 2018 BSKE Sex-Disaggregated Data* (COMELEC, 2019).
196 Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Data on age: By country," Parline: the IPU's Open Data Platform, accessed August 31, 2023, https://data.ipu.org/age-brackets?sort=desc&order=%%2040%20or%20under.
197 Dennis Baguio, "Sibugay SK officials undergo governance training," May 17, 2018, https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1035587.

Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands is an archipelagic state in the Pacific region. The country is characterised by significant cultural and linguistic diversity. The country's vulnerability to natural disasters, geographic dispersion, and remoteness shape the economic and governance challenges that it faces. The Solomon Islands' economy relies on agriculture and is heavily dependent on development assistance[198]. With poor infrastructure and governance deficiencies, investments remain stifled. The youth population is disproportionately affected by limited employment and entrepreneurial opportunities as well as difficulties to access income. The Solomon Islands is a parliamentary democracy that generally upholds political rights and civil liberties[199]. Corruption remains a significant concern, though recent governments have demonstrated their commitment to combating it, which reflects a positive step towards fostering a transparent and accountable governance system.

The nation was deeply marked by a period of civil unrest between 1998 and 2003, called "The Tensions". This violence disproportionately affected young people who were both victims and combatants. Primarily triggered by ethnic conflict, the Tensions were compounded by factors such as land disputes, clashes between traditional and non-traditional authority structures, unequal access to government services, youth unemployment and limited participation, disparate development and economic opportunities, and deficient legal and justice institutions.

Youth, defined as individuals between 15 and 34 years old[200], account for 70% of the population[201]. Even though young people constitute an overwhelming majority, older generations dominate the political discourse. In addition to other factors such as youth disenchantment or political clientelism, this marginalisation can be attributed to the hierarchical structure of society in which young people occupy a subordinated position. In the Solomon Islands, there is a prevailing expectation for youth to unquestionably accept authority. As a result, they are often discouraged from expressing their ideas and suggestions to their elders[202]. The dominance of older men in political spheres has created an age gap, leading to a disconnect between youth aspirations and decisions taken at all levels of government.

Understanding youth-focused policies and initiatives

Youth Policy Framework: With the youth population only expected to grow, the government reinstated its commitment to "prioritise and address the aspirations and well-being of the youths of Solomon Islands" by introducing the National Youth Policy 2017–2030 along with the Strategic Framework for Youth Development and Empowerment[203]. The Ministry of Women, Youth, Children, and Family Affairs is responsible for design, coordination of implementation between government agencies and non-government actors, and monitoring. Building on lessons learned from previous youth policy implementations, this comprehensive plan aims to develop a more coherent approach to youth development and outlines a series of strategic action areas under six priority policy outcomes to achieve national youth development goals. Monitoring mechanisms have been implemented to track the progress of policy implementation. Specific indicators include "by 2021; at least 20% of youths (women and men) will participate in planning, consultative, and decision-making forums at national, provincial, and community levels, including in policy processes, campaigns, advocacy,

198 World Bank, *Macro Poverty Outlook: Solomon Islands* (World Bank, 2022).
199 Freedom House, "Solomon Islands: Freedom in the World 2023 Country Report | Freedom House," Freedom House, accessed August 31, 2023, https://freedomhouse.org/country/solomon-islands/freedom-world/2023.
200 Ministry of Women Youth Children and Family Affairs, *Solomon Islands National Youth Policy 2017-2030* (Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, 2017).
201 United Nations Development Programme, *Solomon Islands Youth Status Report 2018* (UNDP, 2018).
202 Shasheen Jayaweera and Kate Morioka, *Giving South Pacific youth a voice : youth development through participation* (World Bank, 2012).
203 Ministry of Women Youth Children and Family Affairs, *Solomon Islands National Youth Policy 2017-2030* (Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, 2017).

and delivering and monitoring programmes" and "by 2018; National Youth Parliament will convene annually and at least 2 Provincial Youth Assemblies are convened every 2 years"[204]. Information on the structure or design of these two initiatives is not available in the policy documents. As one of the key initiatives to improve youth participation, the policy proposes revitalising the national and provincial youth councils by strengthening their role in youth policy implementation and monitoring as well as providing adequate funding[205]. Notably, the policy focuses on gender equality and the participation of youth with disabilities.

Strategic role of multi-stakeholder partnerships: The policy framework recommends a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach to policy implementation, highlighting the importance of public-private partnerships, the role of the Church, and the need for involvement of all governance levels. It assigns concrete roles to stakeholders and makes very specific suggestions on ways to cooperate. For example, it proposes the establishment of a youth coordination committee by faith-based organisations to strengthen coordination with the government and improve monitoring and evaluation of their activities. The policy emphasised the interests of the private sector in the quality of the education system and the need for relevant technical and soft skills among youth. It announced the first public-private partnership initiative, co-hosted by the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the national government. It outlines initiatives and programmes implemented by international donors and establishes a connection between their objectives and the strategic areas of the youth policy. It specifically mentions the Ola Fou Youth Programme funded by the government of New Zealand, which aims to strengthen youth participation in community organisation and development, and the Youth@ Work programme, which has produced more than 2500 graduates since its inception in 2012. The policy primarily considers youth-led initiatives, such

as the Young Women's Parliamentary Group, aiming to raise political awareness and provide leadership training and opportunities for young women. The Young Women's Parliamentary Group was initially established in 2011 with the support of the United Nations Development Programme and has since become a sustainable and long-term initiative led by young women.

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204 Ibid.
205 They were established in 1980' but have been mostly dormant since.

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Policy Implementation

Inconsistent implementation of the Youth Policy Framework: Although conducting a full assessment poses a challenge due to the lack of data on the progress made in the Strategic Action Areas, policy implementation appears at least partially deficient. The National Youth Parliament has convened only once since 2017. The 2018 edition was a 4-day event focused on gaining practical and educational experience of the Solomon Islands parliamentary system. The event was broadcast on TV and live streamed on the Parliament's Facebook page[206]. There is no indication that the Youth Assemblies have taken place and the provincial youth councils, except the Honiara Youth Council, seem to be dormant. Nevertheless, the partnership initiative with the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry has been particularly successful, as reported in two interviews. Furthermore, international organisations implement a number of youth development programmes in partnership with the Solomon Islands government. The Youth Empowerment Project supports youth-led community projects and is implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)[207]. Although the programme is consistent with the Priority Policy Outcomes, the available project documentation did not establish a direct link between the project outcomes and the Strategic Action Areas, in contrast to the youth policy recommendations. This could suggest an insufficient coordination of youth strategy between the government and development actors.

Space for youth contributions: The implementation of strategic action areas focused on youth participation is progressing. An interview with a government employee and a volunteer youth activist, Mr. George Mae, confirmed that various spaces exist for youth to provide their inputs. In addition to participation in elections from the age of 18 years old, these include taking part in government-initiated consultations on policy issues, opportunities to get involved in the work of the Honiara City Council, and the possibility to provide inputs to the work of the Parliament[208]. However, Mae noted that the spaces were mostly occupied by a relatively small group of privileged, well-educated youth from the capital city. When engaging with communities from rural areas, young people are hesitant to express their thoughts in front of elders. Similarly, when casting a vote in elections, they are customarily expected to follow the community leader's choice.

Challenging political context: Political clientelism poses a significant obstacle in the Solomon Islands. The practice of voting for politicians based on promises of grants from the Constituency Development Fund can discourage youth from expressing dissenting opinions or challenging the status quo. Fear of losing the few benefits that their community receives can often lead to prioritising immediate gains over meaningful involvement in political matters. As George put it:

"people vote based on what sort of leader or MP is giving them this development fund. Now, when you get these young people to have a job, it will help them to have a clear conscience when it comes to voting"[209].

Consequently, in the Solomon Islands context, the financial autonomy of young people is a crucial factor for their meaningful participation in national elections and beyond.

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206 NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS, "The fourth National Youth Parliament," October 12, 2018, https://www.parliament.gov.sb/node/1239.
207 "Empowering Solomon Islands' youth to promote peace and resilience | United Nations Development Programme," UNDP, June 28, 2021, https://www.undp.org/pacific/press-releases/empowering-solomon-islands-youth-promote-peace-and-resilience.
208 Interview with George Mae, a youth activist
209 Interview with George Mae, a youth activist

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Key successes

Developing Local Models of Youth Participation: Despite these contextual challenges, some key initiatives have been successful in improving youth participation in the Solomon Islands. While respecting the central role played by the elderly, efforts have been made to create spaces where the influence of elders is minimised, enabling young voices to be heard and valued. The creation of separate roundtables for youth to share their views has been instrumental in providing a safe and encouraging environment in which they can express themselves freely. The Young Women's Parliamentary Group is a local model for the political engagement of youth. These young women viewed the older generation's approaches to secure reserved seats for women in parliament as a counterproductive and western-centric version of feminism, perceiving it as stigmatising and putting women in opposition to men[210]. Instead, they advocate for a more productive approach, focusing on community matters such as health, transportation, and culture. As Mary Sau, a youth activist, mentioned, the group hosted the third Say It Out Loud Film Festival, linking it to the topic of gender-based violence in 2019. These examples illustrate the significant influence of context on youth leadership approaches. The strategies employed by young people or policy makers are not fixed or universal; rather, they are influenced by the cultural, political, and social landscape in which they operate.

Leveraging partnerships with the private sector: The involvement of the private sector in youth policy implementation has also proven to be a valuable approach, bringing together diverse resources, expertise, and perspectives. This has resulted in more holistic and effective youth development actions, such as activities organised by the Young Entrepreneurs Council Solomon Islands[211]. The initiative, which brought together young people, the government, private sector companies, and international organisations, was successful in establishing a mentoring programme, setting up networking meetings and organising practical workshops with an aim to empower young entrepreneurs. Given the importance of youth financial autonomy in the Solomon Islands, the focus on youth entrepreneurship can bring positive outcomes in terms of increasing meaningful youth participation in public affairs and civic life.

Realistic Youth Policy Framework: The 2017–2030 youth policy was built on a thorough and frank review of the lessons learned from previous policy implementation. By analysing the shortcomings and acknowledging deficiencies, policymakers identified areas that required improvement and fine-tuned the new strategy accordingly, realistically considering institutional limitations and putting in place mechanisms to address them. This acknowledgement of potential roadblocks and constraints demonstrates maturity in policy formulation, as it sets the stage for a more effective and sustainable implementation process. It is worth noting how policymakers addressed the challenge of resource scarcity. Instead of letting limited resources hinder their aspirations, they chose to maximise impact within the resources at hand by ensuring better coordination between actors. However, relying on external actors for implementation introduces a notable challenge. While external partners can bring expertise, resources, and fresh perspectives to the table, they can also introduce complexities and potential misalignments. The coordination of efforts between internal and external actors can be intricate, requiring careful communication, clear expectations, and a shared vision. Striking the right balance between leveraging external support and maintaining control over the direction and execution of the policy is crucial in this context.

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210 Joanna Brislane, *Key Lessons For The Development of Young Women's Leadership For Gender Equality And The Elimination of Violence Against Women And Girls In Vanuatu* (CARE International In Vanuatu, 2017).
211 Young Entrepreneurs Council Solomon Islands, accessed August 31, 2023, https://www.yecsi.org.sb/.

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Lessons learnt and recommendations for policy makers

Having explored the existing youth-focused policies, programmes, and successes in case countries, this section presents some lessons learnt and recommendations that could be replicated and amplified in other countries.

Youth ecosystem

One of the key takeaways from the scoping study is the significance of developing a collaborative and interconnected youth system, rather than relying solely on isolated youth initiatives. Successful countries recognised that addressing the challenges faced by young people requires an integrated approach that involves various stakeholders from different sectors working harmoniously towards a shared goal. This approach involves partnerships among various government structures and levels, youth groups, civil society organisations, educational institutions, and businesses. In an ideal scenario, the youth ecosystem should include elements such as a holistic perspective, shared resources and expertise, policy coherence, and long-term sustainability.

The holistic perspective recognises that young people's lives are shaped by a multitude of factors such as education, employment, health, social inclusion, and political and civic engagement. This approach enables the design and implementation of comprehensive solutions that consider the multifaceted needs of youth. By bringing together various stakeholders from different sectors, a collaborative youth system can leverage the diverse resources, skills, and expertise that each partner brings to the table. All youth sector actors have unique insights and capacities that, when combined, can lead to more comprehensive solutions. When various stakeholders work together, it becomes easier to align policies across different sectors. This coherence is crucial to ensure that policies related to political and civic life, education, employment, healthcare, and social services are not contradictory but rather complement and reinforce each other to create a supportive environment for young people. Building a collaborative youth ecosystem fosters long-term sustainability rather than relying on short-term projects that might lack continuity. A system that involves multiple stakeholders can create an enduring framework for addressing youth issues and adapting to changing circumstances, including responding to evolving youth priorities. The combination of these elements enables governments to address obstacles to youth participation. The involvement of diverse stakeholder groups allows for more transparency in the youth sector, minimising the risk of political influence and manipulation. The constant flow of ideas and exchange of experiences facilitates the development of more youth-friendly and youth-centric institutions, helping to address some of the organisational and institutional limitations.

Examples of successful coordination can be observed in countries such as Costa Rica, Australia, and Liberia, where well-structured 'youth ecosystems' have been established. These ecosystems are designed to ensure that various youth bodies are not only independent and autonomous but also interconnected in their efforts. In Costa Rica, the National Youth Advisory Network Assembly, of which the Cantonal Youth Committees' delegates are part, selects youth representatives to the National Youth Council. The National Youth

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Council, in turn, approves projects submitted by the Cantonal Youth Committees. By creating channels for continuous communication and cooperation, this model not only enhances the effectiveness of youth initiatives but also promotes accountability and transparency within the system. The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) brings together youth organisations to form a powerful movement that advocates for all young people and advances transformational change in the country. As a powerful voice of the Australian youth, the AYAC proposes youth-focused policy reforms and supports the Youth Advisory Groups. In the Solomon Islands, the strong emphasis on multi-stakeholder cooperation in the national youth policy is a significant building block for establishing a fully operational youth ecosystem.

While the 'youth ecosystem' approach has proven effective, it also highlights the significant challenge of ensuring the meaningful participation of historically excluded population groups in public affairs. While the establishment of interconnected mechanisms is a step towards increased youth participation, it can inadvertently reproduce systemic and institutional inequalities if not intentionally designed to be inclusive. The lack of inclusivity within youth spaces was consistently raised in the interviews. Homogeneous youth participation not only undermines the relevance of solutions and decisions but also sidelines the perspectives of underrepresented groups. This inadvertently sustains systemic inequalities, stripping decision-making processes of a more diverse range of experiences and insights. By failing to intentionally design youth spaces to reflect the actual level of social diversity, there is a risk of alienating those who can benefit the most from inclusive participation.

Policy recommendations

Governments should prioritise the establishment of a comprehensive 'youth ecosystem' that brings together actors from diverse backgrounds and sectors. This can be achieved through the following:

1. Clear roles and responsibilities: Define specific roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder within the youth ecosystem to ensure a clear understanding of the scope of their contributions. The efforts of all actors should be oriented towards the achievement of specific youth objectives identified in consultative processes. Assigning roles based on strengths and expertise allows resources to be allocated more effectively, minimising duplication and confusion. The definitions of roles and responsibilities should be easily accessible to all key stakeholders. Online platforms, progress meetings, or a regularly updated youth development strategy are examples of tools that improve clarity and understanding of respective roles.
2. Coordination mechanisms: Create well-resourced coordination mechanisms that facilitate communication, collaboration, and the sharing of materials among stakeholders. Examples of coordination mechanisms include youth advisory boards, inter-ministerial task forces with youth representatives, and regular cross-sector meetings. The coordination mechanisms should be adequately financed and institutionally supported in order to effectively perform their functions.
3. Inclusive engagement: Recognise that social inequalities can persist if not addressed intentionally. Governments should actively work to create an inclusive environment where young people in all their diversity can participate and contribute. To address this challenge, governments should fund targeted strategies to engage historically marginalised youth populations. This could involve tailored outreach efforts, capacity-building programmes, and well-constructed affirmative action measures to ensure that the voices of underrepresented groups are heard, and their priorities are addressed within the youth ecosystem. Any opportunities requiring significant time or resource commitment should be remunerated to give youth from low socio-economic backgrounds the opportunity to participate. Thus, governments can ensure that the benefits of youth initiatives are accessible to all segments of the youth population.

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Technology for the improved accessibility of youth initiatives

Another lesson emerging from the case studies is the pivotal role of social media in increasing youth participation. Countries that have effectively harnessed the possibilities of digital platforms have experienced relatively higher levels of youth involvement, underscoring its potential as a dynamic communication tool. The use of technology can help address some of the obstacles to youth participation, including the lack of quality civic education and adult-centric institutions. Leveraging technology addresses the lack of quality civic education by providing innovative and accessible avenues for young people to engage with civic concepts, government processes, and policy issues. Governments can also transform institutions to be more youth-friendly by creating online platforms and mechanisms that amplify youth voices, foster intergenerational dialogue, and facilitate collaboration between young people and decision-makers.

Some Moroccan government officials use social media to provide weekly updates on the government's work. In this way, they established a direct line of communication between government officials and the public, including the youth. By sharing regular updates, officials bridge the information and education gap, and engage youth in public affairs in a familiar and accessible manner. Another example is in Liberia, where youth-led organisations leverage Facebook to promote their projects and advance meaningful collaboration.

With the goal of increased participation, it is imperative to find a balance between embracing the possibilities of social media and ensuring accessibility for all youth. The significant role of social media in the lives of young people offers an unprecedented avenue for interaction, outreach, and engagement. Its scalability, immediacy, and ability to create virtual communities make it an important asset in driving youth involvement in public affairs. It is crucial to acknowledge that relying solely on social media can exclude segments of the youth population with a lack of access to digital platforms, particularly those with limited internet connection or lacking digital literacy skills.

Policy recommendations

Governments should strategically leverage the power of new technology to increase youth participation. This can be achieved through the following:

1. Tools for digital advocacy: Create digital tools that facilitate youth advocacy. To ensure relevance and viability, the involvement of youth groups in development should be an absolute priority. The tools should be integrated by governments at all levels to facilitate online youth engagement in all policymaking processes. They can take various forms, including digital platforms, social media engagement tools, and interactive educational content. Online tools allow young people to raise their concerns, express opinions, build capacity, and advocate for their needs directly to decision makers. To enable youth to influence policies and programmes, these tools could facilitate the signing of digital petitions, conduct campaigns, and establish social media movements.

2. Two-way feedback mechanism: Establish digital two-way feedback mechanisms. Digital youth participation requires constant communication from both sides. Online engagement facilitates immediate feedback and reactions to proposed solutions, enabling governments to gauge public sentiment and make adjustments accordingly. Examples include virtual town halls and consultations on policy matters, and interactive feedback forms on government websites where youth can comment on proposed policies, providing qualitative insights.

3. Traditional methods of youth engagement: Continue to engage youth in offline spaces. Digital platforms should not replace traditional methods of youth engagement. While social media reaches a wide audience, supplement it with in-person consultations, workshops, and community events. This approach ensures inclusivity by accommodating both digitally-connected and less digitally-connected youth, thus encouraging a more comprehensive and representative participation.

Trusting youth abilities to drive solutions

Young people possess great potential to drive change and shape successful initiatives. Acknowledging their abilities and valuing their contributions are essential for encouraging youth leadership and meaningful participation. Believing in the innovative solutions that young people offer and providing the necessary resources to support their solutions is a key lesson stemming from the analysis of the case countries.

Youth representation bodies exist in most case study countries analysed, although they take different shapes and forms. These bodies provide young people with the opportunity to directly shape decision-making processes. In Costa Rica and the Solomon Islands, youth assemblies are present at both municipal and national levels, demonstrating the commitment of these governments to youth participation at all governance levels. In Morocco, Child Parliaments were established as a means of raising political awareness from an early age. In the Philippines, the government's response to the limited efficiency of local youth councils serves as a remarkable example of addressing challenges rather than abandoning the idea altogether or restricting the youth council's competencies. The government initiated a reform process that focused on restructuring and granting them financial independence. This reform has been seen as a needed and valuable government-led initiative. Importantly, it contributed to building positive narratives around youth leadership and the indispensability of youth participation in public affairs. In Malta, the government is very intentional about conducting continuous engagement with the young people, forging partnerships with them to promote the national development agenda, and more importantly, giving young people the opportunity to meaningfully participate in elections from the age of 16 years old. This is also the case in Australia, where the government works with the Youth Advisory Groups to integrate the voices of young people into policy processes. The Australian government is significantly addressing the barriers limiting the inclusion of young people into public affairs, including providing financial support.

Making a consistent effort to encourage youth leadership is essential. It has become evident that support for youth initiatives should not be solely dependent on the interests of the political party currently in power. Political dependency can lead to disengagement among young people, as they could perceive the available means of participation as unreliable and temporary. Political manipulation and repression are key obstacles to youth participation. To prevent youth disengagement, governments should ensure sustained and impartial support for youth-led projects, showing continuous trust in the abilities of young people.

Policy recommendations

To fully acknowledge the significant role and potential of young people in driving change, governments should treat youth as partners rather than beneficiaries of government-led initiatives. This paradigm shift can be achieved through the following:

1. Youth representation bodies: Establish representative youth structures that are transparent, institutionally mandated, well-resourced, self-organised, inclusive, and adjusted to the local context. Only by entrusting young people with responsibilities and opportunities to take charge can governments tap into their innovative ideas and diverse perspectives. This includes acknowledging the capabilities of young people and truly inviting them to decision-making tables by granting them mandates, specific duties, and budgets for the implementation of their initiatives. Youth representation bodies can take diverse forms, including local youth councils, advisory groups, and national youth parliaments.

2. Capacity building for government staff: Provide training programmes and workshops for government staff to enhance their understanding of youth engagement, and communication and collaboration skills. These programmes can cover topics such as active listening, cultural sensitivity, and youth-centred communication techniques. By equipping government employees with these skills, they can better engage with the youth and create more open and inclusive channels of communication that should be available throughout the policy cycle. At the policy design stage, governments should consult a representative number of young

people, paying particular attention to the inclusion of youth from underrepresented communities. This could involve conducting focus group discussions, surveys, town hall meetings, and/or collaborating with youth organisations. At the policy implementation stage, youth partnerships based on mutual respect and equality should be prioritised. Throughout the policy cycle, governments should establish mechanisms for continuous feedback from the youth. This could involve regular public consultations or digital platforms that allow young people to share their thoughts on policy implementation progress and provide recommendations for improvements.

3. Resources for youth-led projects: Allocate dedicated financial resources specifically for youth-led projects to ensure the successful execution of initiatives. These budgets should be shielded from the volatility of changing political interests, guaranteeing consistent financial support for initiatives that align with the nation's long-term goals. Providing these youth-led initiatives with capacity-building support and granting them a substantial degree of autonomy is crucial. This autonomy develops a sense of ownership among young people, motivating them to be proactive and accountable for the outcomes of their projects. By showing trust in youth abilities by supporting their leadership, governments can provide young people with the tools they need to effectively implement solutions.

Youth engagement as a strategy for promoting peace and security

Another lesson learnt from the case countries is the potential of young people to drive sustainable peace and stability. With the role of the youth in local conflicts and civil wars, meaningfully integrating young people into the public affairs gives them a sense of belonging to the system and motivation to protect its stability at all costs. Doing this will not only address the obstacle of political instability but also define the role of young people in advancing peace and stability, both nationally and internationally.

A good example is Liberia, a country with a history of several civil wars and young people playing a major role in those conflicts. With this tragic history, one of the peacebuilding strategies Liberia adopted in the post-2003 civil war period was to meaningfully invest in young people through education, fellowship programmes, and to give them platforms to advance their voices, while also influencing government policies. This approach has been largely successful in the country. This is evident in the recent efforts by the Federation of Liberian Youth in advocating for a violence-free election in October 2023, and even going to the extent of encouraging youth leaders in political parties to sign the Buutuo Declaration – a pact that commits all signatories to promote peaceful conduct during the forthcoming electioneering process, as well as overall political stability in the country. This is also the case in Nepal and the Solomon Islands – countries that have experienced several internal struggles and civil conflicts over the years. After becoming a democratic republic in 2008, Nepal began to consciously integrate young people into its public affairs, especially youth from minority groups. While there is still much work to be done, the country has been experiencing relative peace and stability. Similarly, the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established to investigate the causes of ethnic violence, emphasised the importance of enhancing youth participation in decision-making at both local and national policy levels in order to prevent conflicts in the future.

Policy recommendations

To promote sustainable peace and stability, governments should pay keen attention to the youth population. This can be done in the following ways:

1. Quality education and empowerment of young people: Empower young people with quality education and transferable skills to maintain peace and security. Educating young people with relevant knowledge and skills will make them meaningful contributors to the country's socio-economic development. With adequate civic education, young people will understand their history (whether tragic or otherwise) and identify their significant roles in driving peace and security, as well as maintaining political stability. Countries should invest heavily in quality education, including civic education and other programmes that help young people become responsible citizens. This can be achieved by providing scholarship opportunities for young people at primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions. Governments should make conscious efforts to educate young people on historical events, highlighting their roles in shaping history for future generations. With this understanding, young people will not be used as a tool in the hands of politicians to drive civil unrest or political instability.

2. Institutionalising youth inclusion in public affairs: Establish constitutional provisions and policies that erase the structural barriers limiting the participation of young people in public affairs. Meaningfully integrating young people into politics, elections, and civic engagement requires conscious efforts from the government. For instance, voting age should be reduced to acceptable standards (this could be 16 years old or 18 years old depending on the local context). Young people should be able to vye for any elective position of their choice, both at the county and federal levels, and governments should introduce affirmative actions and reduce age restrictions for elective positions. Beyond these constitutional provisions, governments should mandate political parties to provide the necessary support for young people through nominations and supporting them with campaign finances. With changes such as these, young people will not be limited to just being voters, they will also be active players in national governance.

3. Promoting the human rights of young people: Commit to promoting and protecting the human rights of young people, including freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, right to job and economic freedom, and right to political participation. To avoid civil unrest, governments need to respect and promote the rights of young people to secure decent jobs, as well as freedom to express their views, either online or offline. The constant abuse of these rights leads to frustration, subsequently drives civil unrest, and distorts the peace and stability in these countries. If any country seeks to promote peace and stability, it must commit significant resources to advancing the human rights of young people.

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Building the capacity of young people

Capacity building is at the heart of any significant effort to integrate young people into public affairs. Young people need to build adequate technical and leadership skills to meaningfully participate in politics, engage in civic activities, or significantly contribute to national development priorities. With adequate training programmes for young people, governments will be addressing the obstacle of poor education, and building productive future generations.

Findings from the case countries revealed that the governments are investing in quality education for young people, mentorship opportunities, and leadership and technical skills training. In Malta, the government is integrating civic education as part of the country's curriculum, while also supporting the "Degree Plus Initiative" helping young people gain additional technical skills through volunteering and civic activities. This is also in addition to other simulation events supported by the government such as Model UN, National Youth Parliament, and Model EU Council, which helps young people gain relevant experience, build technical capacity, and widen their network. In Morocco, the Child Parliament has been shaping political and civic consciousness from an early age. The Australian government spends more than AUD$6.4billion on youth formal education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and also invests up to AUD$2.3billion to support the mental health of young people. Beyond financial investment, national and local governments in Australia are also collaborating with The Y to host the National Youth Parliament – an annual simulation programme that helps young Australians to propose, debate, and vote on bills on issues of national governance. This programme not only helps young people understand national issues but also improves their skills in public speaking. Australia's Youth Advisory Group programme, which gives young Australians the opportunity to contribute to the government's policies, allows young people to work with government federal departments and agencies on five thematic issues. Selected young people are paid an honorarium to compensate for their significant contributions. In the Philippines, the National Youth Parliament is organised every two years, and all local youth council (SK) officials are required to attend several mandatory training sessions, including governance and financial management. The President's Young Professional programme in Liberia is a two-year paid training and mentorship programme that recruits and places young Liberian university graduates into government roles. Through this programme young Liberians are integrated into the country's civil service system that helps them build the relevant capacity and experience to meaningfully contribute to the development priorities of the governments. All these activities provide enormous opportunities for young people to build their capacity and meaningfully contribute to public affairs.

Policy recommendations

For governments to effectively improve youth participation in public affairs, they must invest in building their capacity. This can be achieved in several ways:

1. Civic education and mentorship programmes: Invest in quality civic education for young people while also integrating political education, history courses, and development courses into school curricula. This will not only build young people's understanding of the socio-political landscape, but also help them become politically conscious and identify their roles in advancing democracy. Beyond formal education, government ministries and agencies should put in place training programmes, simulation events, and bootcamps that will build the technical and leadership skills of young people. Governments should explore public-private partnerships to provide opportunities for young people to learn on-the-job through paid internship programmes, paid fellowship programmes, and periodic visits to parliaments or offices of multilateral organisations.

2. Financing youth-led initiatives and programmes: Provide financial support to youth-led initiatives to build leadership and management skills through experiential learning. This is one of the most important measures to meaningfully empower young people. Many youth are forced to abandon their ideas for civic engagement because of inadequate funding. This is also the case for many youth-owned start-ups that have been frustrated by the lack of access to funding. Governments should provide youth-focused funding while also removing the red tape that makes it difficult for young people to access.

3. Partnerships for youth development: Prioritise multi-stakeholder partnerships to improve youth participation in national development efforts. Governments must understand that building the capacity of young people is not their sole responsibility, but rather a joint effort of all relevant stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society, and international organisations. Governments should work with these partners to provide paid opportunities for young people to learn and unveil their ideas, while also encouraging them to contribute to the national development agenda.

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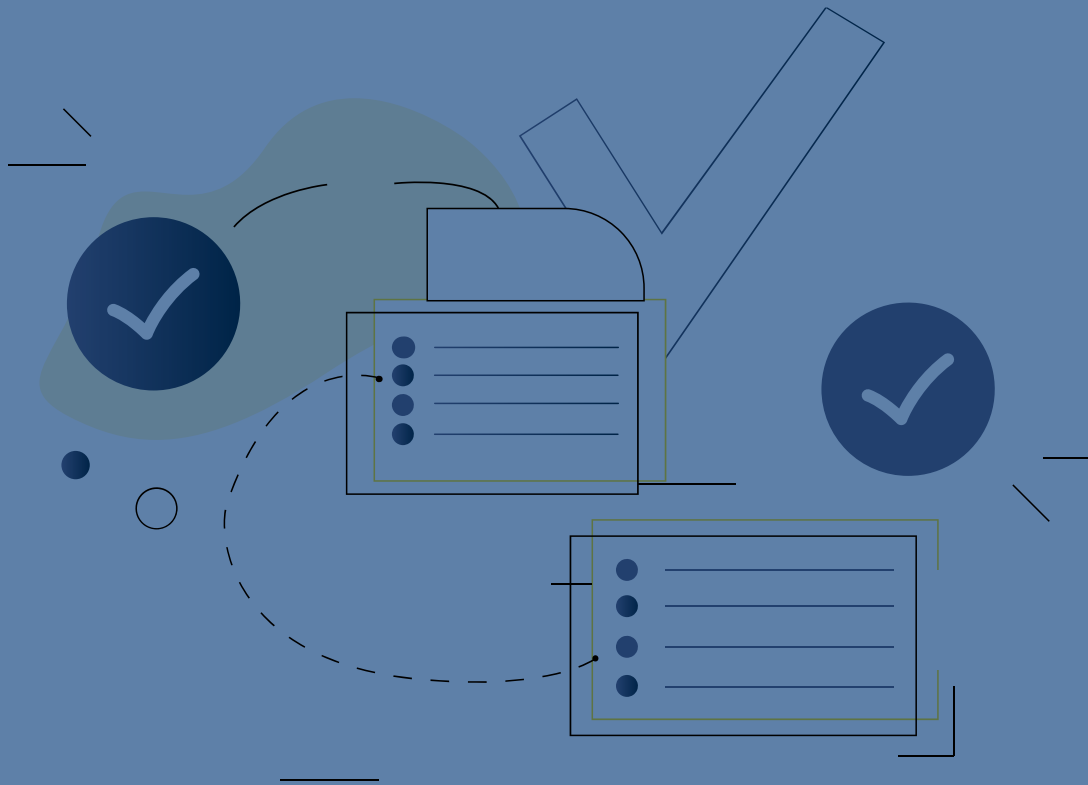
Conclusion

Conclusion

The primary objective of this scoping study was to select ten case countries on a global scale with exemplary practices in youth participation in public affairs – including politics, elections, and civic engagement – considering contextual information, and their unique opportunities and challenges. Through a systematic process of analysis and assessment, this study examined government-initiated youth initiatives that appeared to be significant in improving the participation of young people in democratic practices.

The analysis of ten case countries revealed similarities and differences in government approaches to youth participation. All the case study countries described had formulated official documents outlining their vision for youth development in their country. Although their effectiveness varies, most countries have established, or are in process of establishing, youth representation bodies (Australia, Costa Rica, Liberia, Malta, Morocco, Philippines, and Solomon Islands). Some governments have opted to implement affirmative actions within their governmental structures (Kenya, Morocco) or within their youth-oriented programmes (Costa Rica, Philippines). Many countries have undertaken significant efforts to enhance the capabilities of young people (Australia, Costa Rica, Kenya, Liberia, Malta, and Philippines). Several countries have recognised the value of fostering youth participation at the local level by establishing local youth councils (Costa Rica, Kenya, Solomon Islands, and Philippines) or actively encouraging municipal governments to adapt national youth policies to suit their particular contexts (Georgia, Kenya, Liberia, Solomon Islands). Many countries have decided to foster youth leadership by providing financial support to youth-led projects and initiatives (Australia, Costa Rica, Kenya, Liberia, Malta, Nepal, and Philippines).

A key insight emerging from the scoping study is that each country has its own distinct approach to advancing the involvement of young people in public affairs. It became evident that a single perfect solution or fixed path guaranteeing improved youth participation does not exist, actions must be tailored to the local context and realities. To meaningfully integrate young people into public affairs and fully unlock their potential, governments must create an enabling environment that allows them to thrive. Beyond developing and publishing comprehensive national youth policies, governments should commit to implementing them by forging sustainable partnerships with young people. Governments must use both constitutional and policy instruments to support the participation of young people in public affairs, including elections, politics, and civic engagement.

To improve youth participation in democratic practices the study underscored the importance of establishing a collaborative and interconnected youth ecosystem, leveraging the power of technology, entrusting youth with responsibilities, building their capacities, and recognising their potential to contribute to peace and security. A recurring observation within these countries is that young people should not be denied access to opportunities or political participation because of age restrictions, gender, socio-economic background, or identity. Creating an enabling environment also means policymakers need to respect and protect the human rights of young people, including their right to vote and be voted for, their right to peaceful protest, and freedom of expression. In the name of national security, governments should not restrict access to the internet for young people or deny them civic engagement. An enabling environment requires adequate financial and non-financial investment in building the capacity of young people, while also removing red tape limiting their engagement in public affairs, by addressing corruption, erasing bureaucratic bottlenecks, transforming institutions to become more youth-friendly, and providing funds for youth-led initiatives.

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Annex 1: Interview questions

English

Policymakers

What's the level of young people's participation in public affairs in your country?

Can you provide an overview of the government's policies and initiatives aimed at promoting youth political and civic participation in your country?

What specific measures (programmes, policies, initiatives, etc) has your institution taken to drive meaningful youth engagement in public affairs, including political affairs, elections, civil society, and media?

Can you share an example of a government-led initiative that has been particularly successful in improving young people's engagement in democratic practices and decision making processes? What were the key factors contributing to its success?

How do you evaluate the effectiveness and impact of government-initiated initiatives on youth political and civic participation? What metrics or indicators are used to measure success?

Based on your experience, what recommendations would you provide to other countries looking to replicate and amplify successful youth participation initiatives? Are there any specific considerations they should take into account?

Youth Groups

What's the level of young people's participation in public affairs in your country? How meaningful is it i.e. are youth voices considered and taken seriously?

Do you know of any government policies/programmes currently driving youth participation in public affairs at both local and national levels?

In your opinion, what have been the strengths and weaknesses of the government's efforts in addressing the needs and aspirations of young people in terms of democratic practices, including political affairs, elections, civil society, and media?

Beyond government policies, can you identify any factors improving or limiting youth participation in public affairs in your country?

Can you share an example of a government-initiated initiative that has been particularly successful in improving young people's participation in democratic practices and decision making processes? What were the key factors contributing to its success?

How effectively does the government collaborate with youth in designing and implementing initiatives to enhance youth participation in political and civic activities? Are there any recommendations you would give to improve this collaboration?

Civil Society/NGOs/Research Think Tanks/Media

What's the level of young people's participation in public affairs in your country? How meaningful is it, as opposed to tokenistic participation, i.e. are youth voices considered and taken seriously?

From your professional experience, how do you think the government is integrating young persons in the public process in your country?

Do you know about any government policies/programmes currently in place that aim to encourage youth participation in decision-making processes at the local, national, or regional level? Elections (quota), as elected officials, involvement in civic life.

Based on your assessment and experience, what government-led initiatives on youth political and civic participation are (or were) particularly effective in your country?

Can you share any successful initiatives your organisation is implementing to advance youth participation in public affairs? Are there any lessons you would like to share?

How is your organisation collaborating with the government and youth groups to improve youth participation in public affairs in your country?

Do you think the government has created a conducive environment for youth participation in politics? For instance freedom of expression, ease of joining political parties, freedom of association, among others.

Español

Responsables de políticas

¿Cuál es el nivel de participación de los jóvenes en los asuntos públicos en su país?

¿Puedes proporcionar una descripción general de las políticas e iniciativas del gobierno destinadas a promover la participación política y cívica de los jóvenes en su país?

¿Qué medidas específicas (programas, políticas, iniciativas, etc.) ha tomado su institución para fomentar la participación significativa de los jóvenes en los asuntos públicos, incluyendo asuntos políticos, elecciones, sociedad civil y medios de comunicación?

¿Puedes compartir un ejemplo de una iniciativa liderada por el gobierno que haya tenido éxito en mejorar la participación de los jóvenes en prácticas democráticas y procesos de toma de decisiones? ¿Cuáles fueron los factores clave que contribuyeron a su éxito?

¿Cómo evalúan la eficacia y el impacto de las iniciativas iniciadas por el gobierno en la participación política y cívica de los jóvenes? ¿Qué métricas o indicadores se utilizan para medir el éxito?

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Según su experiencia, ¿qué recomendaciones daría a otros países que buscan replicar y amplificar iniciativas exitosas de participación juvenil? ¿Hay alguna consideración específica que deban tener en cuenta?

Grupos juveniles

¿Cuál es el nivel de participación de los jóvenes en los asuntos públicos en tu país? ¿Hasta qué punto es significativa, es decir, se consideran y se toman en serio las voces de los jóvenes?

¿Conoces alguna política o programa gubernamental que actualmente fomente la participación de los jóvenes en los asuntos públicos a nivel local y nacional?

En tu opinión, ¿cuáles han sido las fortalezas y debilidades de los esfuerzos del gobierno para abordar las necesidades y aspiraciones de los jóvenes en términos de prácticas democráticas, incluyendo asuntos políticos, elecciones, sociedad civil y medios de comunicación?

Además de las políticas gubernamentales, ¿puedes identificar factores que mejoren o limiten la participación de los jóvenes en los asuntos públicos en tu país?

¿Puedes compartir un ejemplo de una iniciativa iniciada por el gobierno que haya tenido éxito en mejorar la participación de los jóvenes en prácticas democráticas y procesos de toma de decisiones? ¿Cuáles fueron los factores clave que contribuyeron a su éxito?

¿Con qué eficacia colabora el gobierno con los jóvenes en el diseño e implementación de iniciativas para mejorar la participación de los jóvenes en actividades políticas y cívicas? ¿Hay alguna recomendación que puedas dar para mejorar esta colaboración?

Sociedad civil / ONG / Grupos de investigación / Medios de comunicación

¿Cuál es el nivel de participación de los jóvenes en los asuntos públicos en tu país? ¿Hasta qué punto es significativa, es decir, se consideran y se toman en serio las voces de los jóvenes?

Desde tu experiencia profesional, ¿cómo crees que el gobierno está integrando a los jóvenes en el proceso público en tu país?

¿Conoces alguna política o programa actualmente vigente que tenga como objetivo fomentar la participación de los jóvenes en los procesos de toma de decisiones a nivel local, nacional o regional? Elecciones (cuotas), como funcionarios electos, participación en la vida cívica.

Según tu evaluación y experiencia, ¿qué iniciativas lideradas por el gobierno en la participación política y cívica de los jóvenes son particularmente efectivas en tu país?

¿Puedes compartir algunas iniciativas exitosas que tu organización está implementando para fomentar la participación de los jóvenes en los asuntos públicos? ¿Hay alguna lección que te gustaría compartir?

¿Cómo está colaborando tu organización con el gobierno y los grupos juveniles para mejorar la participación de los jóvenes en los asuntos públicos en tu país?

¿Crees que el gobierno ha creado un entorno propicio para la participación de los jóvenes en la política?

Por ejemplo, la libertad de expresión, la facilidad de afiliación a partidos políticos, la libertad de asociación, entre otros.

Francais

Responsables des politiques

Quel est le niveau de participation des jeunes aux affaires publiques dans votre pays?

Pouvez-vous donner un aperçu des politiques et initiatives gouvernementales visant à promouvoir la participation politique et civique des jeunes dans votre pays?

Quelles mesures spécifiques (programmes, politiques, initiatives, etc.) votre institution a-t-elle prises pour favoriser l'engagement significatif des jeunes dans les affaires publiques, y compris les affaires politiques, les élections, la société civile et les médias?

Pouvez-vous partager un exemple d'une initiative gouvernementale qui a été particulièrement réussie pour améliorer l'engagement des jeunes dans les pratiques démocratiques et les processus de prise de décision? Quels ont été les principaux facteurs qui ont contribué à son succès?

Comment évaluez-vous l'efficacité et l'impact des initiatives initiées par le gouvernement sur la participation politique et civique des jeunes? Quelles sont les mesures ou indicateurs utilisés pour mesurer le succès?

Sur la base de votre expérience, quelles recommandations donneriez-vous aux autres pays souhaitant reproduire et amplifier des initiatives réussies de participation des jeunes? Y a-t-il des considérations spécifiques à prendre en compte?

Groupes de jeunes

Quel est le niveau de participation des jeunes aux affaires publiques dans votre pays? Dans quelle mesure est-elle significative, c'est-à-dire les voix des jeunes sont-elles réellement prises en compte et prises au sérieux?

Connaissez-vous des politiques/programmes gouvernementaux actuellement favorisant la participation des jeunes aux affaires publiques aux niveaux local et national?

Selon vous, quels ont été les points forts et les points faibles des efforts du gouvernement pour répondre aux besoins et aux aspirations des jeunes en termes de pratiques démocratiques, y compris les affaires politiques, les élections, la société civile et médias?

Au-delà des politiques gouvernementales, pouvez-vous identifier des facteurs qui améliorent ou limitent la participation des jeunes aux affaires publiques dans votre pays?

Pouvez-vous partager un exemple d'une initiative initiée par le gouvernement qui a été particulièrement

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réussie pour améliorer la participation des jeunes aux pratiques démocratiques et aux processus de prise de décision? Quels ont été les principaux facteurs qui ont contribué à son succès?

Dans quelle mesure le gouvernement collabore-t-il efficacement avec les jeunes pour concevoir et mettre en œuvre des initiatives visant à améliorer leur participation aux activités politiques et civiques? Avez-vous des recommandations pour améliorer cette collaboration?

Société civile/ONG/Groupes de réflexion/ Médias

Quel est le niveau de participation des jeunes aux affaires publiques dans votre pays? Dans quelle mesure est-elle significative, c'est-à-dire les voix des jeunes sont-elles réellement prises en compte et prises au sérieux?

Selon votre expérience professionnelle, comment le gouvernement intègre les jeunes dans le processus public dans votre pays?

Connaissez-vous des politiques/programmes en place visant à encourager la participation des jeunes aux processus de prise de décision aux niveaux local, national ou régional? Élections (quotas), en tant qu'élus, participation à la vie civique.

Selon votre évaluation et votre expérience, quelles initiatives gouvernementales sur la participation politique et civique des jeunes sont particulièrement efficaces dans votre pays?

Pouvez-vous partager des initiatives réussies que votre organisation/division met en œuvre pour promouvoir la participation des jeunes aux affaires publiques? Y a-t-il des leçons que vous souhaitez partager?

Comment votre organisation collabore-t-elle avec le gouvernement et les groupes de jeunes pour améliorer la participation des jeunes aux affaires publiques dans votre pays?

Pensez-vous que le gouvernement a créé un environnement propice à la participation des jeunes en politique? Par exemple, la liberté d'expression, la facilité d'adhésion à des partis politiques, la liberté d'association, entre autres.

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A comparative analysis on
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