



# WORKING WITH AND FOR YOUTH

**Practical ideas to foster youth engagement  
in policies, processes and programs**

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# Foreword

Youth all around the world are standing up for democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law. They are organized, courageous, and are dedicated to creating a more peaceful and sustainable future. These young women and men are actively working to improve human rights, advance equality, enhance access to justice, address the challenges posed by climate change, and so much more. Their ideas can help enhance the policies and programming we pursue in order to address the challenges of today and tomorrow.

This is particularly crucial given the challenges we currently face. The Covid-19 pandemic has taken a real toll – not least on youth who were confronted with such a major disruption at such a crucial time in their lives – whether at school or in the early days of their professional careers. The pandemic has had a major detrimental effect on equality and has exacerbated pre-existing cracks in the practice of participatory democracy. We’ve also seen horrible violence with the war against Ukraine. The war has destroyed lives and livelihoods and the impacts are felt across the OSCE region and around the world. In these circumstances, it is more important than ever to ensure engage youth in addressing these challenges. Their perspectives can help us shape better policies and plans. And their buy-in is essential if we are to succeed.

Yet, far too often, youth lack access to power structures – formal and informal, which results in limited opportunities to influence processes. But they are committed to their futures. They continue to strive to create workable solutions and build sustainable peace and prosperity.

It is more important than ever to invest in youth leadership. To empower youth and support other organizations that wish to join these efforts, the OSCE developed a platform for exchange and dialogue among stakeholders and practitioners that promote the meaningful inclusion of young men and women.

One way in which we’ve done this is through the Youth Digital Roundtable Series, organised in partnership with PeaceNexus. This series focused on how to draw on a range of tools and approaches to prevent conflict and build sustainable peace. It included careful attention to the human dimension of security, because efforts to promote secure and just societies can only be effective if the rights and needs of the people that policies are meant to serve are kept ever in focus. We are grateful to the speakers and participants for sharing their experiences from their local, national and international perspectives.

It is our sincere hope that this paper will be a useful tool for policymakers, public servants and youth practitioners seeking to develop new policies and strategies aimed at improving the inclusion of youth in work on peace and security. We also hope that it will inspire further dialogue and co-operation between youth practitioners on how to advance youth engagement in policies, processes and programmes - because this essential to realizing truly inclusive, just, and sustainable security for all.



Helga Maria Schmid,  
OSCE Secretary General



Matteo Mecacci,  
Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic  
Institutions and Human Rights



Ambassador Jan Braathu,  
Head of the OSCE Mission  
to Serbia

# INTRODUCTION



**With over 1.8 billion young men and women globally, there are more youth than ever before. Many of them face inequality, insecurity or uncertainty, but they also strive for peace, justice, inclusion and human rights. This is also the case in the OSCE region, where young women and men are often actively engaged with their communities, mobilizing peers to address violence and other negative phenomena, and demonstrating leadership in building peace.**

Throughout the OSCE region, nearly 40 per cent of the population are young people under the age of 30, while 30 per cent of the population are under 24. In some participating states, this last percentage is higher than 50 per cent. These percentages raise questions about inter-generational justice, since they are not reflected in the compositions of national and international parliaments.

The OSCE takes note on existing challenges in the region and provides targeted assistance to public institutions, parliaments and civil society to improve the inclusion of youth voices in the policy cycle, as well as to build capacities of young public officials, activists and politicians. The OSCE's programmatic interventions are guided by the set of commitments built up over decades, including Ministerial Council declarations, setting a platform to execute OSCE's unique mandate in all three dimensions.

Indeed, in recent years, there is a growing consensus that youth should not only be an issue discussed at the table, but that young women and men should also be around the table. The Youth, Peace and Security agenda has gained momentum, marking a shift in the understanding of young people and their role for peace and security.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250, adopted in 2015, was the first international policy framework to recognize the positive role young people play in preventing and resolving conflict, countering violent extremism and building peace. Integrating youth perspectives contributes to achieving and sustaining comprehensive security.

Young women and men influence, and at the same time are affected by, many security trends. Their fresh experiences, innovative ideas and creative solutions are an indispensable resource to address challenges old and new.

Yet, despite being an important part of our societies with great potential for fostering peace, youth voices often remain unheard, especially in multilateral settings. Understanding how the experiences of young people vary over time in response to changing political, economic and social landscapes is a necessity: strategies for sustainable peace can be effective only if they respond to the needs of all segments of society.

However, young people's contribution to peace and security remains limited to specific niches. The methodologies and knowledge regarding youth, peace and security are not yet standardized and the impact of different initiatives have not been measured appropriately. Until now, good practices have not been identified and/or shared more broadly.

To this end, this OSCE publication seeks to provide a critical point or reference for organizations that want to improve their engagement with young people. Throughout, it will share how this engagement is being standardized, measures and spread more broadly through the sharing of several good practices and examples.

# Purpose

**This paper is intended to be used by youth practitioners from international organisations, public institutions and the youth sector within the OSCE region and beyond.**

It includes an overview of existing practices and good practice examples, based on the experience of youth practitioners who contributed to the roundtable discussions and key informant interviews. The paper also calls for continued peer learning and support among practitioners and youth activists from different sectors. So much is being done in the youth field, but practitioners too often work in isolation. The OSCE roundtable events upon which this paper is framed sought to bring people together and inspire a community of good practice around youth engagement. This tool seeks to extend the lessons from these events to an even broader audience, further growing the community.

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"I believe that we can foster the next generation to have better trust in democracy than what we see right now... if politicians want the next generation to believe in democracy, be good citizens, take action in society and make the world a better place, we have to start showing them via inclusion. And not just at the end of the decision-making process when politicians only explain why they have decided what they already did. We need to be involved all the way through. Politicians should always allow youth to give specific feedback and evaluation whenever they involve them in their decision making in order to make sure that inclusion is real. Not only when we are talking about youth policies, because all policies affect youth and our futures."

Lisa Coermann Nygaard, EU Youth Delegate for the Danish Youth Council, speaking at a roundtable discussion in 2021

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## Consult this paper if:



**You want to be inspired**  
in your youth work



**You are curious**  
to know how key actors  
leading efforts on the  
youth agenda are  
making an impact



**You want to go  
beyond theory**  
and know what effective  
youth work looks like in  
practice, having a real impact  
on young people's lives'



# Methodology

This paper offers practical findings based on:



Extensive desk analysis of multi-sectorial work with and for youth



Informant interviews conducted with stakeholders centred on work in this field (multilateral organisations, youth networks, feminist organisations, academics)



Continuous consultation with experts in youth participation, peacebuilding, youth organising and democracy



A series of round table discussions conducted online in 2021, in which a total of more than 200 stakeholders took part.<sup>1</sup>

The roundtable meetings were conceptualised around the following topics:<sup>2</sup>



Inclusion of youth voices in policy-making and strategic processes



Youth perspectives in the programming of organisations working with and for youth in OSCE region



Enabling a youth-inclusive environment



Connecting and moving forward (laying groundwork for a community of practice)

The roundtable process aimed to enable both peer-learning and support. Participants shared successes and challenges in promoting youth inclusion in policies, processes and programmes and collecting tools, resources and mechanisms. They also connected and kicked-off the community of practitioners and young stakeholders around the operationalization of youth participation and inclusion.

This publication is therefore to be seen as a collection of sometimes-opposing visions, different practices and inspirational strategies, that are unified around the relevance of youth participation. In that regard, referral to 'youth' acknowledges a variety of approaches to the age range defining it.

While there are commonalities and shared values, this paper may not map 'the best' approach, but rather offers a review that cherishes diversity and encourages space for continuous dialogue, exchange and synergy. Emphasis is placed on practitioners' actual examples of how they have implemented these practices.

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**"When it comes to meaningful youth participation, we must recognize that working with and for young people is both a goal and a means to a better world. Participation is not only about numbers and the physical presence of youth, but rather about influences in processes and decision-making power."**

**Jayathma Wickramanayake, UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth**

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<sup>1</sup> Practitioners self-identified as working on Youth Peace and Security issues, whether in a governmental, multilateral or a civil society organization in the OSCE region; representatives of national institutions working with and for youth in the OSCE region; and/or young stakeholders interested in advancing youth engagement in policies, processes and programmes in the OSCE region. The OSCE region refers to the 57 participating States of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. However, the series hosted attendees operating/living beyond the region, too.

<sup>2</sup> For more detailed information on the series please refer to: [www.workingwithandforyouth.org](http://www.workingwithandforyouth.org).

# KEY CRITERIA OF MEANINGFUL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

**These longstanding principles underpin all the practices covered throughout the paper. The following preconditions, principles and drivers of youth engagement are the foundation of the existing body of practice on youth participation and are key to moving forward with the practical steps given later.**

**1) Youth rights:** Young people are citizens in their own right. They should not be seen as passive receivers of public services, but rather as rights holders themselves. This principle is grounded in human rights and aims to achieve the social, political and economic equality of young women and men. Together with equity, this principle should be well articulated and operationalized in the documents and mechanisms steering the process.

**2) A systemic and evidence-based approach** to youth engagement encompasses the need for the continuous and widespread application of inclusion mechanisms, that foster processes that are data and success driven. This type of approach can demonstrate positive outcomes and impact for young people both in the environment where it is applied (e.g., organization, sector, geographical unit) and society in general. To track the performance of the youth mainstreaming mechanism, the process must be appropriately monitored and evaluated, as well as resting on robust data collection and analysis. Stakeholders should be able assess youth engagement with a mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators. Data collection and analysis also allows young people to act and participate in research on relevant target issues, which can strengthen their agency, inform policy, democratize the process and elevate ownership of youth mainstreaming processes and results.

**3) Meaningful youth participation that avoids tokenism** is crucial for youth engagement to succeed. Youth participation needs to be ingrained in all phases of your efforts. For the process to be (co-)owned by young people, co-creation should also meet co-management.

**4) Promote youth ownership:** to ensure that inclusion measures and processes are not solely in the hands of other age groups. While this requires a political or managerial willingness to include the interests of young people in the steering of society, administrative processes also need to translate these values into action with a cultural shift.

**5) Awareness raising, capacity building, and widespread education and training processes** are crucial for mindset shifts and breaks in administrative cultures to happen, even when all political conditions are met. This calls for permanent capacity-building support to be provided to all involved in the youth engagement process, as well as systemic support for a community of practice necessary for the accumulation and retention of acquired experience, evidence and knowledge.

**6) Such a support scheme demands the continuous allocation of resources** (financial, human, and other) towards work with and for youth to be ingrained into the core processes of an organization to guarantee stability, long-term commitment and the implementation.

**7) Building on resources, education, training efforts and their outcomes, a cross-sectoral policy approach** guarantees youth engagement is integrated into many policy fields across different levels. This prevents differentiation of youth engagement in certain policy spaces and supports cross-sectoral and wide-reaching policy collaboration.

8) “Do not harm” is key when working with youth. Young participants need to be **safeguarded** from potential risks since power-challenging processes are not always accepted without resistance from existing power holders.

9) **Use plain language** in policy-related discourse. Communicating with technocratic language, featuring an abundance of terminology and policy jargon makes it inaccessible and difficult to understand for outsiders, including youth.

10) **Recognize the heterogeneity of young people** and that, as with other age groups, they can differ immensely. Youth inclusion needs to account for the fact that multiple biases persist in society and that complex intersectionality of discrimination and oppression can also impact youth mainstreaming. Considering social, cultural, political, economic and geographical dimensions when designing possible policy responses and measures is important. ‘One size fits all’ policy responses can even accentuate some forms of exclusion.

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“I guess I'm not telling you anything new by saying that we are living in a particularly challenging time, in times of multiple crises, climate change, huge social and economic inequalities within and between countries, shifting geopolitical and global power relations threaten the lives, livelihoods, democratic and human rights of millions of people around the world. [...]

Who are the people making decisions about all these challenges? No, not the young people who have more future in front of them than most of the people in power. Not women, not marginalized people. Creating an inclusive society, sharing the power of decision-making and implementation with young people is a matter of urgency. In times of multiple crisis, when the future of humankind itself is at stake, we need young women and men to actively partake in decision making. And international organizations have an enormous role to play in this, not only because of their norm setting role, but also because we can share the insights and learnings from the work of different mechanisms, including youth, with participating states and encourage them by showing the results.”

Farah Karimi, Head of Delegation, Special Representative on Youth Engagement, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

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## Setting the tone for young people to meaningfully participate

The responsibility for meaningful youth participation in events lies with organizers. Institutions and older stakeholders with power and resources should make space and conditions that are empowering and supportive of young people’s engagement. One roundtable participant shared an experience of being added to a panel of speakers as the “youth representative”. Having experienced a form of tokenism, she went on to describe practical steps that can be taken to ensure the rightful and respectful participation of young speakers in this sort of scenario. These include suggestions for organizers and supporting networks who seek fruitful youth engagement in events:



Embrace the mentorship role when preparing young people for speaking roles, it will help their participation be more effective for all involved



Create a space that equally belongs to youth, individuals should not have to fight to be heard



Keep youth participants from feeling invisible by not automatically making them the last person to speak or giving them less time



Do not burden individuals to give a broad youth perspective - there is no such thing as one youth perspective



Ask, instead, for personal elaboration or reflections on some challenges that young people experience in the context of the topic



Acknowledge their expertise and ask questions appropriate to their perspectives

Drawn from an interview with Eliska Jelinkova, United Network of Young Peace Builders (UNOY)

A person's feet in various styles of shoes (brown leather, white sneakers, blue sneakers, white sneakers) are shown standing on a stone ledge. The background is a sunset over a town, with a red and blue color gradient overlay.

**PART 1**

**ENABLING A  
YOUTH-INCLUSIVE  
ENVIRONMENT**

To really move youth participation to its rightful place, mainstreamed in how all policymakers and practitioners do their work, finding a common language, ensuring safe participation, welcoming youth self-organization and creating a community of practice are keys to success.

Successfully incorporating youth into politics needs to happen in **open, accountable, and inclusive institutions** that give space and a voice to young people. Such youth-centric approaches demand responsive, inclusive, and democratic decision-making that nurtures public access to information and fundamental freedoms and strives for non-discriminatory laws and policies.

For successful youth inclusion, strengthened institutions need to emerge in all phases of policy processes and policy sectors that have a stake in the implementation of all goals and decisions relevant to youth. The performance of these institutions – when it comes to youth – rests on **youth participation** in participatory and representative decision-making mechanisms. Decisions that affect their lives require an adequate level of their participation. Responsive institutions and the robust engagement of individuals and civil society organizations are pre-requisites for successful youth mainstreaming. This translates to the involvement of institutions with competences and stakes in different policy fields relevant to youth, as well as **the involvement of organizations of and for youth and individuals**, depending on the participatory and representation model.

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**“There is this misconception about young people not wanting to work in formal institutions and decision-making structures. What happens is that many of the young people actually try to join these formal institutions, but their experience is so disappointing that they just decide to leave. That is partly because they feel that there is tokenism, so they are taken to offices, and they are expected to make change, but they are not given the extra tools, the level of seniority or importance that is needed for this. And so, when they feel like they are being used, or that they can't achieve the changes that they envisioned, then they just leave the structures.”**

Rita Izsak-Ndiaye, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Special Representative on Children

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**“Of course, depending on which kind of space we're talking about, there is the issue of being fluent in an official language, which then of course, it makes it very hard for some people from minority communities to contribute and participate; then there's the issue of being fluent in 'policy language'. But then also, are you diplomatic enough? Do you present the issues in a way that are palatable to the organization's, especially senior, management?”**

Roundtable Participant

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One major aspect of this inclusion is finding common language with youth. Institutional language and culture can have the affect of entrenching intergenerational gaps. Young people know they must have the ability to make informed contributions. However, participation spaces should be customized to accommodate a diversity of participants.

While there is no unified one-size-fits-all methodology, some **common values** overlap across different sectors and geographies. From the perspective of an entity or organization, regardless of its size, inwards and outwards oriented elements can create a robust a youth-inclusive environment.

Regarding spaces and structures, young people seem to organize differently. Finding common ground with them is the first step to creating more spaces, not barriers for the engagement. Acknowledge young people as power holders, often within leadership models that are more horizontal.

Also, enabling a youth-inclusive environment requires understanding how they express their political positions, from the streets around the world, from their schools to civic action on and offline. Today's youth express themselves differently because the tools they have in their hands are significantly more powerful and different than what previous generations had. The urgency with which they express political opinions often falls on deaf ears within institutions, and is not matched with equal urgency from institutions. This can cause young people to lose trust and faith in institutions, whether they are international organizations, multilateral systems, the private sector or NGOs. Changing this requires political courage, but also the leadership to look internally just as much as institutions look externally to engage young people.

## Three critical steps towards building a youth inclusive environment are:



### Focus on online space

For young people, online spaces are seen as trans-local, so that trans-local nature needs to be understood. Within online spaces, seek institutional partnership with young people, do not assume they are villains and troublemakers. Carry out real conversations online, communication should not be one-way.



### Provide civic education in political spaces

From community to national levels, young people are creating lots of different platforms to engage, generally not traditional NGOs. Youth clubs, young people's associations, or online communities can be very powerful places to engage if organizations are able and ready.



### Finance youth power and leadership in a serious way by investing in young people



## Youth Partnership Broadening "Space" for Youth

Youth partnership, a joint project of the European Commission and the Council of Europe, connects policy research and practice of youth engagement. Its research has uncovered two main trends in this field.

The first is young people are taking part in conventional ways of doing politics. That may be through voting in elections, being part of political parties, by taking part in referendums, running for office, taking part in co-management structures, being members of youth parliaments and youth councils.



Second, if young people do not feel included, then they choose to use a different type of nonconventional participation. When engagement within the social movements, boycotts and protests, which are often focused on short-term, specific topics, is also considered youth participation is very high.

A key element influencing how and when young people engage relates to the types of "youth spaces" that are available, not only the physical or virtual spaces where participation and organization can take place, but space also as a kind of democratic environment within which young people engage.

How do organizations make these engaging spaces? Funding for youth organizations, prioritizing certain types of participatory environments, building competencies among those that provide space for young people and encouraging all categories of young people to participate are all important.

Addressing basic administrative and legal barriers to young people's participation also cannot be overlooked. As a result of the pandemic, more restrictions on young people's participation arose, for example on young people's right to assembly. States can change laws to enable youth-inclusive democracy, as well as ensuring that young people who are activists are not criminalized.

Then, in spaces targeted for youth participation, ensuring that all young people have access to them, that they are funded, not segregated away from broader society or exclusionary to particular groups, especially women. In the virtual space, addressing clear digital gaps in young people's access to online events is also key.

Young people will find a way to take part and have their voices heard, regardless of whether using conventional avenues or not. Organizations can bridge the gap between the two types of participation by enabling an environment that encourages engagement and teaches them how to work within the system.

Drawn from an interview with Joanne Hunting, Secretary to the Advisory Council on Youth at the Council of Europe.

## Changing the norms and architecture within organizations

A paradigm shift in the organization's norms and values is a precondition for its culture to rise above prejudicial mind-sets about young people, and welcome youth in all processes. This shift presents a complex organizational development challenge and might not occur from top-to-bottom, in the experience of practitioners from different sectors.

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**“The whole participatory agenda with young people needs to be strongly connected to the wider framework infrastructure umbrella of youth policy. It's not a separate issue. And youth policy accommodates a whole range of things, one of the most central of which must be young people's voice and capacity to contribute without the certainty that their aspirations will be fulfilled.”**

Howard Williamson, Professor of European Youth Policy

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Another crucial element is adopting a reflective culture of learning within an organization. Such a culture allows for the step-by-step testing of approaches and decisions taken, as well as learning from the failures and mistakes of each iteration towards a 'product' that successfully meets continuously questioned and identified needs.

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**“You really do have to step back from yourself as an organization, and ask yourself those difficult questions about, you know, what are we trying to do here with respect to young people? How is it going to work? What's the point of doing it? Until you have that discussion among yourselves at your organization, and come out with a decision that this is what we're going to do, for the following reasons, you might just go ahead and check the box, and you're doing it only for mechanics. So, I think that organizational shift where you see young people as assets, and not problems, will not be immediate. Not every organization will start off in the ideal space, but we have to keep supporting them to get to that place.”**

Roundtable Participant (Multilateral organization)

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This could also be understood as an honest self-evaluation practice, free of repercussions and the pressure of perfection (often including questions such as: How did I do? Could I have done it better? What didn't I do? What do I not do the next time around?).

Further normative elements include adhering to ethical standards and alignment with other organisational commitments, such as gender equality and non-discrimination, as well as having an accountability framework accompanied by incentives to create a realistic environment for progress. This however implies investing in human and other resources, as well as a suitable measuring and impact assessment practice.

Other principles also include a do no harm approach, evidence-based policy making and a rights-based approach, which is mentioned both as a value and as a strategy in the work of different stakeholders.



### Shifting Youth Policy Terminology for Long-Lasting Impact

Search for Common Ground, an NGO leading the youth in peace and security agenda, does not use the word youth mainstreaming in official strategies, but instead focuses on things that will lead to a mainstreamed approach. The language is important here, because terms like “mainstreaming” and “national action plans” come with baggage. For example, a guide for public officials to map out the different policies, programmes and projects across governmental agencies that impact young people's lives will likely have more impact.

The organization seeks to influence these processes to adapt the youth inclusive approach, or a youth sensitive approach. Again, mainstreaming centric, but not using that language itself, because this language impacts implementation and financing.



After two to three years of implementation of mainstreaming action plans, the funding usually declines, as well as the political will to actually do anything. One response to this problem is to embed youth strategies across different ministries with different ministries co-leading.

In practice, implementing action plans is a transactional relationship focused on outputs. Instead, this organization advocates a relationship-based approach to peacebuilding strategies.

The first example of such was a global coalition that came together to create something bigger, a UN Security Council resolution. The focus was on getting to know each other, building a coalition of partners, and building a sense of trust. An enduring approach of relationship-building and trust-building can last longer than a single project or action plan. Building National Coalitions that include different ministries, different civil society groups and different youth groups, with financing from the full range of actors, enables broad-based political will to make change and build peace.

Having this financed and supported in partnership with civil society creates a deeper accountability structure, that can withstand political shifts within governments. With young people, there is a tendency to own these coalitions and youth strategies and keep moving them forward, creating a strong layer of accountability.

Drawn from a roundtable speech and interview with Saji Prelis, Search for Common Ground, Youth 360 | [Search for Common Ground \(sfcg.org\)](#).

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**“Young people's leadership and organizational models are horizontal. So then the issue is, our institutions are vertical. How do we coexist within these spaces?”**

Roundtable Participant (INGO)

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## Adjusting outwards approaches toward beneficiaries

Among the recommended approaches that are compatible with creating an inclusive environment that were mentioned during the roundtable discussions include:



### Impact approach



### Horizontal approach



### Rights-based approach

Many principles underpinning these approaches overlap. For instance, **the impact approach** assumes trust-based processes done in co-production and co-creation, based on a realistic cost-benefit ratio and questioning ‘business-as-usual’ investments if they do not deliver results over a prolonged period. This approach also goes back to a thorough needs assessment, which is participatory and, as such, creates fertile ground for impactful interventions. Some similar elements can also be recognized in horizontal approaches, which again place a greater emphasis on co-creation and power sharing.

**The horizontal approach** implies a decentralized, autonomous organizational structure set out ‘horizontally’ in nature. Such models are embraced often in start-up ecosystems with a flat organizational structure. It is argued that such approaches already exist in fields related to “artificial intelligence, such as neural networks, web 3.0”, which could inspire more traditional structures. Within this approach, young people would be treated as equals.

**The positive youth development (PYD) approach** can be found in the programming of USAID, and it is described as engaging youth along with their families, communities, and/or governments so that they are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets, and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the environment; and transform systems.<sup>3</sup>

Young people are seen as assets, as in The Commonwealth's asset-based approach, and treated as transformative agents.<sup>4</sup> Within this approach, young people are engaged, because it is their right to be engaged in agenda setting and activating society.

Finally, **rights or human rights-based approaches** (RBA) are based on the conscious and systematic integration of human rights and rights principles across all aspects of programming work. It has been promoted by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Council of Europe, European Commission and UN agencies, but also by youth-led networks such as European Youth Forum. However, the approach originated as a new model for addressing social problems with the Declaration on the Right to Development, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1986.

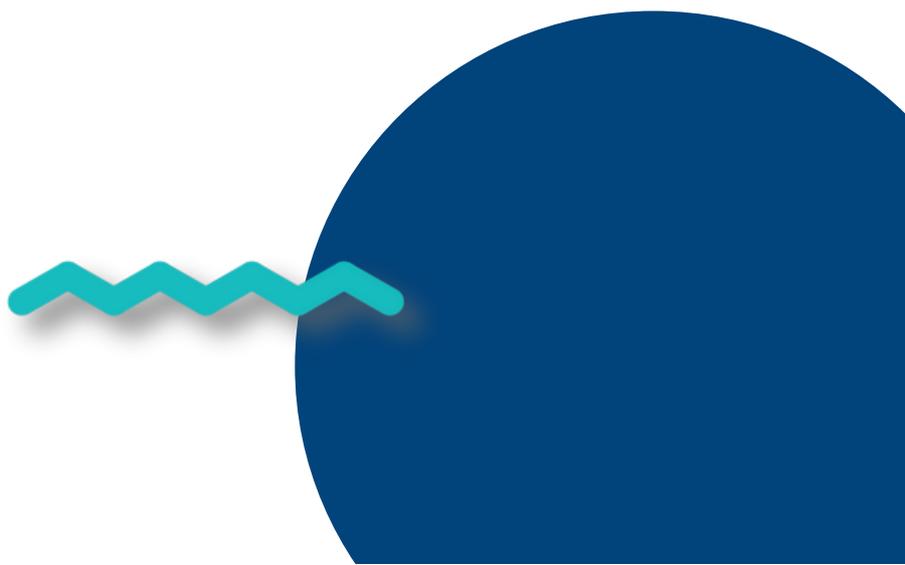
RBA as a term is used to indicate a broader scope, i.e., the rights of individuals derived from other sources of international law besides human rights, such as labour rights, intellectual property rights, basic economic and social delivery rights, as well as sexual and reproductive health. This approach is usually already assumed in other recommended approaches and is probably the most prominent and explicitly identified in the policies and practices of many organizations. It rests on the understanding that youth are rights-holders with specific needs to which they should not be denied access because of their age.

When effectively creating a youth inclusive environment, young people become central to the work of an organization and are less likely to be reduced to a target groups or beneficiaries.

Instead, young people become integral to the process of finding solutions and part of implementation teams and processes. Proactive and transformative processes can radically improve young people's wellbeing by offering strategies for reaching intergenerational equity and justice. This, in turn, enables young people's capabilities, participation and rights to be an integral dimension of the analysis, design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in inter-sectoral planning across all social, political and economic spheres.

<sup>3</sup> Learn more about this at: [youthpower.org](http://youthpower.org).

<sup>4</sup> Learn more about the Commonwealth's approach to youth here: <https://thecommonwealth.org/our-work/youth>.



# GOOD PRACTICES THAT CREATE YOUTH INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

## Capacity building of staff

Training courses on transformative and inclusive leadership, understanding unconscious biases, discussing and analysing the power of relevant actors, and intersectionality could be important for organizations that are willing to ensure youth participation. As voiced within key informant interviews conducted in contribution to this paper, capacity strengthening should not be organized only for youth. It is necessary for everyone to receive that support, particularly in transformative processes.

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**“There must be consideration of the importance of capacity building of staff in any multilateral organization, especially in this regard itself, concerning horizontal work with and for youth.**

**Because otherwise, if you want to work sustainably, it depends on civil professionals and often these civil professionals do not have the tools to apply these ideas, this is detrimental to development and sustainability.”**

**Roundtable Participant (Multilateral organisation)**

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## Creating tools to strengthen youth engagement at all levels

The UN Interagency Network on Youth Development adapted an initial engagement tool to make it accessible to all UN staff working across the UN's programmes and activities relevant to youth. This toolkit can be used to:



Develop the technical capacity of UN staff who are interested in developing programmes and activities that are relevant to youth and/or that engage youth at different levels



Enable and prompt meaningful youth engagement activities and programmes at headquarters and in field offices of UN System entities



Raise awareness and build the capacities of peer UN staff within respective organizations, to strengthen the organizational buy-in for youth mainstreaming or youth engagement.

It contains clear “dos and don'ts” and breaks down four degrees of youth engagement, with steps to take towards the goal of youth leadership. UNESCO, the initiating agency, plans to adjust this tool to national contexts due to the demand from Member States.

This guidance for UN staff on engaging with youth can be found at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2021/05/Meaningfully-engaging-youth-Guidance-training-UN-staff.pdf>.

One of the specifically mentioned recommendations is about the usage of Theory U. It suggests shifting from a personal, individual-centred approach to a collective, group-centred one in order to move towards a more sustainable, healthy life. It implies that society should get to “ecosystem awareness” driven forms of co-operation.

### **‘Theory U’ has three main elements:**

- 1** A framework for seeing a ‘blind spot’ of leadership and systems change: the “interior condition” from which people operate
- 2** A method for implementing awareness-based change, with the focus on building collective capacity to shift the inner place from which individuals operate
- 3** A new narrative for evolutionary societal change, outlining a framework for “updating” operating systems of educational institutions, economies and democracies.<sup>5</sup>

On a more subject-matter level, organizations increasingly recognize the need for additional staff capacity building in support of quality youth participation, as outlined in the following good practice examples.

5. For more info visit: <https://ottoscharmer.com/>

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**“We did a study on the effectiveness of this training and continued dialogue. With it our country development and co-operative strategies saw a notable increase in the mention of youth, as well as the commitment to youth and our development objectives and our intermediate results.”**

Sarah Byrne, Youth Advisor at the Bureau of Europe and Euroasia at USAID

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## **Relevant training and tools**



### **Swedish Folke Bernadotte Academy**

Programming handbook and training on Youth, Peace and Security agenda, for UN and similar organisations’ staff.



### **USAID – US Agency for International Development**

Positive youth development training for youth advisors and other staff.



### **The Commonwealth Secretariat**

Capacity building as the fifth step in The Commonwealth’s “12 step to youth mainstreaming” approach in development planning.

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**“When youth mainstreaming, when young people’s perspectives are integrated really well into development, thinking and planning of programmes and policies, it is transformative, it is inclusive, it is proactive, it places youth at the center, they have to be at the center of democracy and development, thinking and planning.”**

Layne Robinson, Head of Social Policy, Commonwealth Youth Programme

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## OSCE Tools to Enhance Youth Inclusion

The OSCE structures have created and carried out a number of training initiatives to create youth empowering environments. The OSCE Secretariat, under a joint mentorship programme with the Folke Bernadotte Academy, developed a set of tools for OSCE staff to enhance youth inclusion, including:



An OSCE guidance note on youth sensitive communications



An OSCE briefing note on youth, articulating the relevance of the youth and security agenda to OSCE's work and mandate



An OSCE guidance note on youth- and gender-sensitive conflict analysis



A curriculum on youth, peace and security to be adapted for use with different target groups within OSCE structures

In addition to the core foundations and basic principles of youth, peace and security, the curriculum covers aspects related to conflict analysis, gender mainstreaming, project management, political advice, and strategic planning. Another example is the OSCE Mission to Serbia has written guidelines for youth mainstreaming and training on youth mainstreaming for staff of the Mission and other executive structures.

Also, ODIHR's Agenda for Youth and Democracy is a compilation of action points offered by young people to public authorities in the OSCE area, International organizations and civil society on three thematic areas: (1) democratic institutions and meaningful youth engagement in decision-making; (2) youth activism and participation through non-conventional means; (3) civic education as the foundation for youth engagement.



## The Generation Equality Forum: A youth-led initiative

The Generation Equality Forum is a landmark effort to bring together governments, corporations and change-makers from around the world to define and announce ambitious investments and policies aiming for a permanent acceleration in equality, leadership and opportunity for women and girls worldwide.

The Generation Equality Forum is seeking to create a powerful and lasting coalition for gender equality, as its leaders believe this is a vital moment for activists, feminists, youth and allies to achieve transformative change for generations to come.

A "Core Decision Group" was established where young people sit together with government representatives, UN WOMEN and other CSOs. The Core Group is a decision-making body for the Generation Equality Forum. It is co-chaired by UN Women, France, Mexico and two representatives from civil society (from Global North and Global South).

The Core Group is a decision-making body for the Generation Equality Forum. It is co-chaired by UN Women, France, Mexico and two representatives from civil society (from Global North and Global South).

Within this initiative, different youth groups came together and mobilized around their Young Feminist Manifesto, which does not include only recommendations for youth but recommendations from youth for the whole process and how it should look for youth to co-own the space and lead the process.

Based on an interview with Xenia Keller, Generation Equality Forum. To learn more, visit: <https://www.youthcoalition.org/meaningful-youth-engagement>.

## The Role of Youth-Led Organizations

Strengthening youth-led, youth-driven priority setting is key to lasting youth engagement. Youth leadership should be recognized and integrated within global, regional, and national decision-making spaces. Youth are the experts in their own realities and need to be meaningfully engaged for truly effective programmes and policies.

Youth-led networks such as European Youth Forum and the Generation Equality Forum are examples of youth-led initiatives that are having an impact in the OSCE and beyond. Active youth organizations that are welcomed into broader discussions go a long way towards fostering a youth-inclusive environment.

## National Youth Councils

The EU defines national youth councils as, “representative bodies contributing, in a consultative role, to the discussion and definition of youth policies. They have the right to formulate opinions and recommendations on youth issues directed to policy-making bodies at all levels of government. At the national level, youth councils are often umbrella organisations representing youth associations, local and regional youth councils, youth unions, as well as individual young people.” The effort towards the engagement of young people that dynamic youth councils involve are another pillar of youth-inclusive environments.

In about half of the countries that have them, the establishment, role and composition of the youth council are defined by law. In some of them, they are under the direct authority of the ministry in charge of youth policy, which provides the necessary logistical and budgetary resources. And in still other countries, youth councils are non-governmental organisations without an official legal basis. They are usually constituted by several associations representing young people or by a network of local or municipal youth councils. However, they are considered partners to be consulted on issues related to youth policies by the national authorities, and as such entitled to receive funding from public sources.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For more information and comparative overviews of the youth councils in Europe, visit: <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/comparative-overviews/participation/national-youth-councils/2019>.



## Youth consultation through Irish Youth Council

In Ireland, within a broader consultation on the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission reached out to the National Youth Council of Ireland for a youth consultation. This initiative invited the voices of young people across Ireland to really tell the UN what young people, from diverse backgrounds, are facing in Ireland. The consultation took a horizontal and intersectional approach in understanding that young people are not only young but have many aspects of their lives.

The commission’s input was made more authentic by including real young people’s voices. EQUINET, the European Network of Equality Bodies, jointly with the European Youth Forum facilitates cooperation of this sort – between equality bodies and national youth councils. These organizations have found that workshops and other forums to bring these groups together in dialogue makes a positive impact on policy affecting youth.

Drawn from presentation at the first roundtable by Sarah Cooke O’Dowde, EQUINET, the European Network of Equality Bodies.

At the international level, intergovernmental organizations are putting in place youth-led systems to guide their inclusion of young people’s voices and also to strengthen the youth-led organizations that make up their international councils.



## UNESCO Youth team, putting youth at the center of peace and security initiatives

UNESCO Youth team's unique, cross-sectoral response to the Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, puts young people at the very heart of addressing the root causes of violent extremism. The collaboration between Education, Social and Human Sciences, Communication and Information and Culture ensures that young people are provided with the multifaceted training, skills and support required to engage as active citizens and lead the global movement towards the creation of a peaceful world.

The Youth team co-ordinates a variety of initiatives that put youth front and centre of UNESCO's response to PVE. This includes:



Working with youth organizations to improve their skills, capacity gaps and to address any challenges they experience related to youth



Developing capacity building workshops to equip young people with the skills they need to be active global citizens



Working with partner organizations on the development of national youth policies, ensuring that young people themselves are fully engaged in the processes



Evaluating digital youth platforms and encouraging civic participation through social media



Organizing global and regional events to promote youth public participation in addressing radicalization.

Learn more about the Youth Team at: <https://en.unesco.org/preventingviolentextremismyouth>.

Another key benefit of engaging with youth-led organizations is that their input will surely make the policy environment more targeted to real issues for youth, making all institutional efforts more impactful. Communicating with youth organizations in innovative ways is one of the first and most important steps towards shaping policy goals.



## UNESCO's practice of identifying youth needs

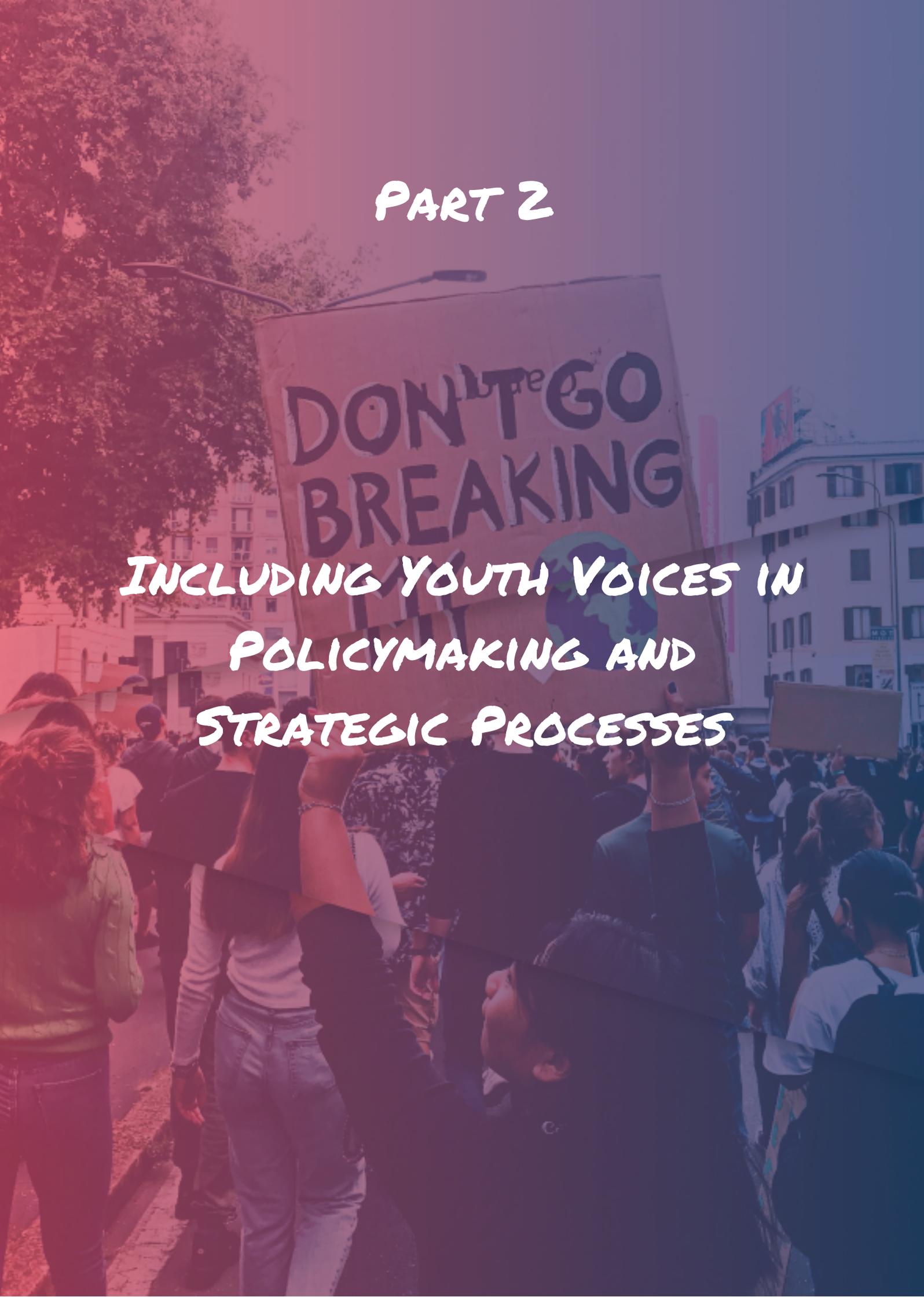
When UNESCO works in partnership to meaningfully engage young people, youth needs are always pre-identified. Identifying youth needs is a starting point in implementing a programme or project with or for young people. In practice, this is allowed by working with different profiles of young people, youth networks, youth organizations, etc. The organization leverages its field offices that work with grassroots youth organizations and, thus, can more precisely identify youth needs.

The key challenge in identifying young people's needs in an organization such as UNESCO relates to the presence of many stakeholders and decision makers that are "stronger" power holders than youth in creating the agenda and organizational priorities. It is very important to understand young people's priorities and perspectives in key social spheres through their own inputs and not through the "glasses" of these power holders only. There are different ways and global trends through which UNESCO works to grasp a broad swath of young people's needs. Some examples include observing social media, reading articles, exploring research on youth. The large UNESCO community on social networks provide invaluable feedback from young people on different activities related to youth. The UNESCO communication team not only monitors what is happening in social media, but that information is fed back into our needs assessments.

Drawn from key informant interviews with Kristina Balalovska, Maria Kypriotou and Claudia Maresia, UNESCO Youth Section, Social and Human Sciences Sector, 2021.

## PART 2

# INCLUDING YOUTH VOICES IN POLICYMAKING AND STRATEGIC PROCESSES



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**“Youth participation is not just a nice to have, it’s really a must have. When young people are engaged in policymaking, they tend to be more satisfied with government’s performance. There’s a need to step up meaningful inclusion of youth voices in policymaking and in strategic processes.”**

Alexandra Robinson, OECD Public Governance Directorate

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Truly including youth in policy-making and strategic process requires that they get a seat at the big table, whether that be in consultative or co-management roles. These practices strengthen the future of democracies by creating equal partnership with youth, while avoiding tokenism.

The challenge of unequal burden-sharing across different generations in modern societies is exacerbated by the fact that the participation of young people in decision-making processes has been neither fully enabled or exploited. While political participation is lowest among young people in comparison to other age-groups, the drop in their participation rates has not been matched by any other age groups, thus making them disproportionately more disengaged from the formulation, passing and implementation of public policies.

## Youth connection with politics

Young people are less connected to the political process than other parts of the population, as they are increasingly turning away from traditional politics and structures. Young people disproportionately do not stand as candidates in elections and party membership among youth has dropped across European democracies. All this affects the recruitment and mobilisation functions of political parties and negatively impacts the political representation of young people.

The percentage of parliamentarians younger than 30 is only 2.6 percent globally, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, not enough to bolster youth interests in political decision-making. Similar disengagement patterns can be seen in other conventional forms of participation, such as partaking in election campaign activities, contacting public officials and active participation in political groups.

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**“For me, the independent voice and participation of young people on matters affecting their lives is incontrovertible. It brings distinctive ideas to the table. It is part of a package of opportunity and experience that I have always viewed, hopefully, as a right for young people. It provides the chance to practice active citizenship. And it will invariably make for better policy and practice. [...]**

It is not, however, the only voice of relevance to many debates, nor indeed is it always an authentic voice. Youth participation structures and processes often remain too narrow for my liking. A greater diversity of access routes, beyond those that are now established (such as youth councils and youth forums), is now both possible and desirable, in person and online. We need to marshal this mosaic of knowledge and understanding in a creative, not destructive, tension. That is the basis of what I have called the ‘youth policy clock’. Without robust debate, amendment and challenge, effective policy measures grind to a halt. When directed at young people, it is young people who are well-placed to provide their sense of lived experience, irrespective of how such policy may have been expressed by politicians or enacted by public officials. Policy directed at young people needs to be meaningful and relevant to young people, otherwise its purpose falls short. That does not mean, however, that competing and counter views should not be entertained.

We need a broader highway and pathways for youth participation, providing access to a greater diversity of youth representation and voice. We know that the young people most adversely affected by the pressing challenges of our time – employment, security, climate, mobility, technology and health – are least likely to be active in those debates. That must be the most pressing priority for the youth participation agenda for the future.

Excerpt from an essay The ‘youth policy clock’ by Howard Williamson.

For more on this topic see: About time! A reference manual for youth policy from a European perspective

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Young people's participation is often described in terms of providing a 'seat at the table', pleading for 'space' among adults, being 'inside/outside of the room', and similar spatial metaphors. Experiencing challenges within participation opportunities in formal systems or 'invited' spaces, is often framed as tokenistic. Tokenism is by no means a new phenomenon. As Adam Fletcher, author of *Facing adultism* explains, "tokenism happens whenever adults put youth in formal and informal positions, without any substance, purpose or power in order to say they have youth on board". In the words of one round table participant, tokenism is understood as:

*"..an act or a series of acts to provide a platform of false political influence to an individual or specific group, sometimes intended or perceived as representation".*



### Canadian Coalition for Youth, Peace & Security survey of tokenism

Experiences of tokenism have been documented by the Canadian Coalition for Youth, Peace & Security (CCYPS), a network of individuals and organizations working on Youth, Peace and Security locally, nationally and globally. In July 2021, CCYPS launched a web-based survey on the tokenization of young people's experiences, which concludes that most respondents experienced mild to extreme bias in social, political, and civic spaces due to their age, as well as that most young people experienced age discrimination on Governance boards or committees (CCYPS 2021). The CCYPS also points out that "young people rarely have the space to have conversations about tokenization and are often silenced when they challenge the status quo" (CCYPS 2021).

To learn more, visit: <https://www.canadayps.org/more-than-tokens>.

Even successful youth engagement in policy processes must overcome barriers, including a lack of trust in young people's potential and of not fully understanding their interests and needs; a lack of a credible feedback mechanism, depriving youth of a tool to make public authorities accountable for the follow-up and implementation of young people's ideas; and language and culture that maintains persistent intergenerational gaps. Logistical and administrative barriers such as time, transport, scheduling and financial compensation also stand in the way of proportionate youth participation.<sup>7</sup>

In the current UN Youth Strategy Youth 2030, mainstreaming is considered a cluster of activities to "incorporate across all entities of the UN and work relating to all UN pillars, the need to meaningfully and sustainably engage and partner with young people and their organizations, networks and movements, through formal and informal mechanisms and platforms to realize universal rights-based youth participation." This broad focus on engagement and partnership in the processes and policies of various institutions is a two-pronged strategy since it first integrates the youth perspectives in policies in various policy fields and processes and, secondly, aims to narrow the gap in specific areas directly addressing the needs of youth.

There are four key dimensions of youth mainstreaming. First, engagement must ensure **participation** in decision-making or engagement in a dialogue with young people to create opportunities. Next, **partnerships** between youth and organizations must be created to collaborate and integrate young people's views and priorities into policy making, also by setting up joint projects, with clear definitions. Third, organizations need to **integrate** youth perspectives into policies, sectors, processes institutions and programmes. The final dimension requires the **empowerment** of young people by recognizing their agency and value.

<sup>7</sup> Borkowska-Waszak et al. 2020, analysed 30 cases of successful youth engagement in policy processes, as commissioned by EU DG REGIO.

# GOOD PRACTICES TO INCLUDE YOUTH IN POLICYMAKING

There are different models to enable youth representation, with strengths and weaknesses. Examples include large intergovernmental models, including the global UN youth delegates programme and the Council of Europe's Advisory Council on Youth. RYCO provides a strong model of co-management. National and local governments employ advisory councils for youth, from temporary informal bodies to permanent representational structures that offer good practice examples. And different entities, including in the private sector, also provide lessons from less organized or unaligned youth focused work. These diverse models all seek to empower youth to take a seat at decision making tables. When shortcomings, such as temporality, superficial involvement, and accountability primarily towards 'constituency youth', are mitigated these can be practical examples for organizations working to strengthen youth participation.



## United Network of Young Peace Builders' mission to make youth engagement meaningful

The United Network of Young Peace Builders (UNOY) seeks to foster a safe space for youth-led organizations, but also individuals to voice their frustrations regarding their exclusion. Participation that is tokenistic and not beneficial for youth themselves or their organizations will not have real impact. UNOY's members use their privilege and contacts to open doors to opportunities, increasingly stressing paid opportunities.

UNOY creates platforms for more meaningful advocacy efforts and works to convince gatekeepers to engage more directly and meaningfully with young people.

Specifically, UNOY created a Checklist for Meaningful Youth Engagement, which is not an exercise in simply ticking boxes, but really puts together a detailed list of questions to assess whether an opportunity is meaningful. The Checklist can be used by anyone, whether a non-youth organization or youth organization, as it is not only specific to the youth, peace and security agenda.

The checklist includes questions from preparation and implementation through to follow-up and funding. The checklist is a concrete tool towards recognizing and resourcing youth as equal partners with their own experiences, agency and decision-making power.

The complete checklist can be downloaded at: <https://unoy.org/downloads/mye-checklist/>.

To mitigate the issues of temporality and superficial involvement of youth, international organizations can build and support networks for a co-ordinated approach to including youth perspectives in policy making.



### Better co-ordinating youth engagement through the OSCE Youth Focal Points Network

Recognizing the value of youth focal points for coordinating youth-related activities across the OSCE, most executive structures within the organization have in place a youth focal point (YFP). Ideally, working within the office of the structure's head, with access to relevant programmatic departments, YFPs should have coherent and harmonized informal terms of reference. They may also set up youth contact points in departments and units for information sharing and co-ordination.

YFPs are key to promoting and co-ordinating implementation of the Youth and Security agenda within the OSCE. As of December 2020, 16 of the 19 executive structures had appointed YFPs, including the Secretariat, two of the three institutions, and 12 of 16 field operations.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly also has an YFP. Most OSCE YFPs are women, national programmatic or administrative staff, working mainly on human dimension issues. Half of the executive structures have established networks of youth contacts or are in the process of doing so.

Only a limited number of executive structures have mechanisms for regularly consulting their YFP on planning and implementation of relevant programmatic activities. In some executive structures, the YFP co-ordinates and provides inputs through email or phone calls, while in others there was a more systematic approach.

## Making space in policymaking

Consultations (surveys, youth dialogues) are the first means available to youth to have some say in programmatic decision-making. Youth forums, with their requisite youth delegate or representative programmes, are the next step to deepening the involvement and impact on youth in strategic processes.



### UNESCO's Youth Forum, evolving to empower young people

UNESCO's Youth Forum was created in 1999 to provide young people with the opportunity to present their concerns and ideas to Member States and help shape the direction of UNESCO. Every two years, young people from 195 Member States come together at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris to discuss and debate thematic areas of concern.

The forum culminates in a series of recommended actions to be presented at the UNESCO General Conference. These actions take into account the lived experiences and unique perspective of youth, as well as the challenges facing young people today, ensuring that the voices of youth are properly represented in programmatic decisions made by the Member States.

UNESCO is trying to improve the current role of the Youth Forum and nomination process for appointing the delegates. The aim has been to bring diversity to the Youth Forum and not only to have delegates that represent their Member States.

This started mostly as nominations from the Member States and now many Member States have consulted and nominated representatives of national and local CSOs, youth networks, youth led organizations.



At the most recent Youth Forum five young people (from all five UNESCO regions) with some organizational skills were hired to provide meaningful consultations with youth and not just to present their views on how UNESCO should work with youth. It was the first time this way of working was implemented. A series of very useful ideas came up, some of them, however, have been hard to implement.

The most frequent recommendation from the Youth Forum has been to involve more young people within national delegations that are coming to the General Conference. This issue, though, is a jurisdiction of the Member States, their national practice and public awareness of youth roles and their place in the decision-making process. Sometimes young people seek quick change, which could lead to disappointment. But the issue has been raised, and young people are creating the momentum needed for real change.

Drawn from key informant interviews with Kristina Balalovska, Maria Kyriotou and Claudia Maresia, UNESCO Youth Section, Social and Human Sciences Sector, 2021.

Other methods of encouraging a youth perspective in policymaking involves setting up institutional means for young people to be heard and recognized. One common way is to organize and empower youth advisory groups or councils.



## The OSCE's Youth Advisory Groups

The OSCE's Framework on Youth recommends that field operations consider establishing internal consultative youth mainstreaming mechanisms, such as Youth Advisory Groups, to support integrating a youth perspective and to provide a channel for input and feedback from young people into planning and programmatic activities of the organization.



The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina was the first to set up a Youth Advisory Group in 2014. The full Group meets quarterly and specific meetings on planning and implementation of the Mission's conflict prevention plans are held in different field offices according to their areas of responsibility. Advisory group members are involved in local initiatives organized by Mission field offices, they provide comments on programmatic planning and help to plan activities and advise programmatic staff on youth-related issues.

The **OSCE Presence in Albania** established a Youth Advisory Group in 2018 to address the challenges of working with youth and to promote a youth mainstreaming agenda. This group is composed of nine young people from different regions of Albania with distinct academic backgrounds, interests and areas of focus. Meeting once a month, the Group identifies youth concerns, needs, challenges and priorities in their communities and proposes actions and initiatives to address them. YAG members receive mentoring and are exposed to the OSCE's work across diverse thematic programmes. They are also expected to promote OSCE values and mobilize youth through various communication channels.

The Youth Advisory Group at the **OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe** provides recommendations on including a youth perspective in the projects implemented by the Office. It also helps the Office to enhance its activities on youth and security.

The **OSCE Mission to Serbia** is working to establish a Youth and Security Advisory Board consisting of up to 10 members, in part selected through an open call and in part invited directly to join the Board with a two-year mandate. They would contribute to promoting a participatory approach in the Mission's activities with and for youth; enriching programmes and activities with youth perspectives; enhancing awareness of the OSCE values and principles among young men and women; and raising awareness among stakeholders about OSCE commitments, Ministerial Council decisions and youth participation and mainstreaming principles.



## ODIHR's programmes to support youth engagement in policy making

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) **Young Policy Advisers course** is designed to strengthen knowledge of democratic institutions and OSCE commitments in the field of democratic governance. It also aims to facilitate a deeper understanding of the role of policy advisers, and the skills needed to undertake core tasks and policy-making functions.

The objective is to ultimately strengthen democratic institutions throughout the OSCE region by building the capacity of young civil/public servants in the early-mid stages of their careers, thus ensuring long-term results. More than 500 PolAd alumni contribute to policy making process by drafting and submitting legislative initiatives in respective parliaments, as well as being promoted to and appointed at high-level posts.

ODIHR's tolerance and non-discrimination department launched **the Youth for Inclusion project for Ukrainian and Polish youth** in 2022. As part of ODIHR's Advancing the Human Dimension of Security in Ukraine project, the Youth for Inclusion activities include a capacity building workshop series implemented in various cities throughout Poland where youth develop their capacity to promote mutual respect and understanding based on a common understanding of shared human identity so they are better equipped to foster equal, inclusive and cohesive societies.

After the workshop, youth apply their learnings through youth-designed and led activities to promote respect for diversity and inclusion. Partnerships with various municipal offices and city youth councils further amplify youth efforts and highlight the important role young people play in shaping potential policy and activities to foster social inclusion.

Co-management is currently the most promising practice to avoid tokenism and systematically foster true shared responsibility for programming that most affects youth and their interests. Co-management, widely seen as one of the most visionary participation methods, is still extremely rare in practice. In the words of one of the young key informant interviewees:

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**"All these international stakeholders have youth delegates and other support systems but no one has a co-management system. Everyone is saying it's great but they are not introducing it. Why? I think they are afraid of losing power."**

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There are organizations, though, working to make co-management a reality.



## Council of Europe Advisory Council: Youth as co-designers of policy

The Council of Europe is celebrating the 50th anniversary of its Youth Sector, which has been supporting young people's participation in decision making processes for that entire time. The Council regards meaningful youth participation as involving young people in decision-making processes as co-designers of policies with officials.

The Advisory Council on Youth acts as a co-management structure to establish the standards and work priorities of the Council of Europe's youth sector and make recommendations for future priorities, programmes and budgets. Its 30 members, NGO and youth network representatives from all over Europe, have a real say over decisions related to youth though its advise to the Committee of Ministers.

The Advisory Council on Youth has most recently focused on priority topics including the political representation of minorities and artificial intelligence. The contributions made by youth council delegates in these areas has led to many formal instruments being adopted.



The Council on Youth hopes to broaden its impact by placing a rapporteur on youth mainstreaming in all committees of the Council of Europe, as well as within the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

When the COVID-19 pandemic moved all of PACE's sessions online, this enabled greater participation of the Advisory Council. This has enabled delegates to stress the importance of taking into consideration a youth perspective in all decisions and has strengthened co-operation, with the hopes that PACE members will look for more structured avenues of involving organized youth in a meaningful way in its activities, and their work in their home countries. The co-management system developed within the Advisory Council on Youth, where young representatives work responsibly on a pro-bono basis, could be replicated and implemented within national councils, committees and other decision-making bodies and processes at local and national levels in States. Youth delegate schemes could also be replicated both nationally and locally. Building out co-management systems of this nature is only a matter of political will and a question of resources, both human and financial.

Members interviewed for this paper expressed that having the same voting power at the decision-making table is a great privilege and, most important, this can not be removed. Being associated with the Committee of Ministers and having support from the Advisory Council on Youth Secretary in introducing young people's views into legislation, as well as the learning opportunity to utilize internal procedures and current structures in the Council of Europe makes this the most effective form of youth participation in policymaking.

Drawn from an interview with Joanne Hunting, Secretary to the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) in May 2021. To learn more about the Advisory Council visit: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/advisory-council-on-youth>.



## Youthwise at OECD, facing the challenges of co-management

Youth advisory boards work better when young people have the possibility to also shape the agenda and are empowered to take action and not only react. This good practice is, in effect, co-management. For example, when youth representatives are given documents to examine, it is difficult to have their input taken into consideration on already outlined topics, which perhaps are not exactly the topics of interest to youth. The opportunity to shape the agenda or take direct action can instead yield very positive results.

Co-management of this nature requires co-operation, most often because young people starting their careers do not yet have the full theoretical framework and knowledge to make policies. Co-operative arrangements with more senior officials can enhance that knowledge. While this is challenging for both parties, what can be accomplished is noteworthy. The input of youth is fresh. When youth communicate something and act on it, rather than just reacting, the solutions to problems posed can be innovative and worth the trouble.

Drawn from speech at the youth roundtable event given by Angela Gales, OECD Youth Advisory Board "Youthwise" To learn more about Youthwise, visit: <https://www.oecd.org/about/civil-society/youth/youthwise/>.



## Leveraging international space to raise the profile of youth

There are multiple ways in which international organizations and conferences can include youth voices in policy making. These good practice examples show that when clear avenues for young people's involvement are created and clear outcomes are defined an impact can be made.



### Guiding youth inclusion in peace processes

In January 2022, the High-Level Global Conference on a Youth-Inclusive Peace Process was co-hosted by the State of Qatar, Governments of Finland and Colombia and co-organized with civil society and UN partners.

The event was co-organized by the Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth (OSGEY) and Search for Common Ground (SFCG) in collaboration with the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA/PBSO), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Education Above All (EAA), and the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY).

The Doha conference invited heads of government to come together with key stakeholders and to shape and act on two key outputs: guidelines for governments on creating inclusive national strategies on youth, peace and security; and a five-year roadmap to look at strengthening and improving peace processes to become more integrated and inclusive of young people, who are inheriting today's deals.

For more information, visit:

<https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/doha2022/>.

See the conference outcome paper here:

<https://youth4peace.info/book-page/global-policy-paper-we-are-here-integrated-approach-youth-inclusive-peace-processes>.

## Youth Voices in International Review Process

The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is the central UN platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and provides space to States to share experiences, successes, challenges and lessons learned in their development efforts through Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). With the inclusion of youth perspectives in these reviews, the VNR process presents a leverage point for youth engagement at the national level in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda implementation.

**"The government of Serbia invests efforts to sensitize all segments and groups of society for the reporting process. I think it's a good example of how we can really involve youth. We conducted focus groups with Roma children and with youth in conflict with law, so that we can also hear their voices and what they think about the implementation and youth actions within the Agenda 2030. Young people are the main resource of every society and a force to influence its overall development."**

Snezana Klasnja, Special Adviser to the Serbian Minister of Youth and Sports



### Young people's involvement in voluntary national reviews

In 2019, Serbia conducted a VNR that was youth mainstreamed. This process included consultations with young people, in-person and via UNICEF's U-report Viber platform. The Special Adviser to the Serbian Minister of Youth and Sports said that, in addition to consulting youth organisations and schools, due attention was also given to vulnerable groups of youth to have their say concerning the treatment they experience, but also their expectations on sustainable development goals.



Within this process, UN youth delegates were also involved in the presentation of the report. In this way young women and men can contribute to pursuing goals dealing with all areas of life, from gender equality, to peace and security and economic growth.

This process was also joined by young people in Norway in 2021, where the Norwegian Children and Youth Council (LNU) took part in the civil society shadow report that was published in Norway's official report, representing about 450,000 young people via 97 member organisations. As in Serbia, young people were included in the official country delegation as UN youth delegates.

In Moldova in 2020, National Youth Council also tapped into the VNR process and produced a report as part of the national campaign Youth of Moldova for #GlobalGoals, implemented in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Young people were consulted via the U-report platform.

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique process that involves a periodic review of the human rights records of all 193 UN Member States. The UPR also includes sharing of best human rights practices around the globe and a good practice is to include youth, both on the national and international levels as showcased in these two examples.



### National Youth Council of Ireland consultations for the Universal Periodic Review

As an innovative way of including youth in the UPR, the National Youth Council of Ireland worked together with the Department of Justice and Equality during the UPR process in their country to engage wide consultation with young people. As an innovative way of including youth in the UPR, the National Youth Council of Ireland worked together with the Department of Justice and Equality



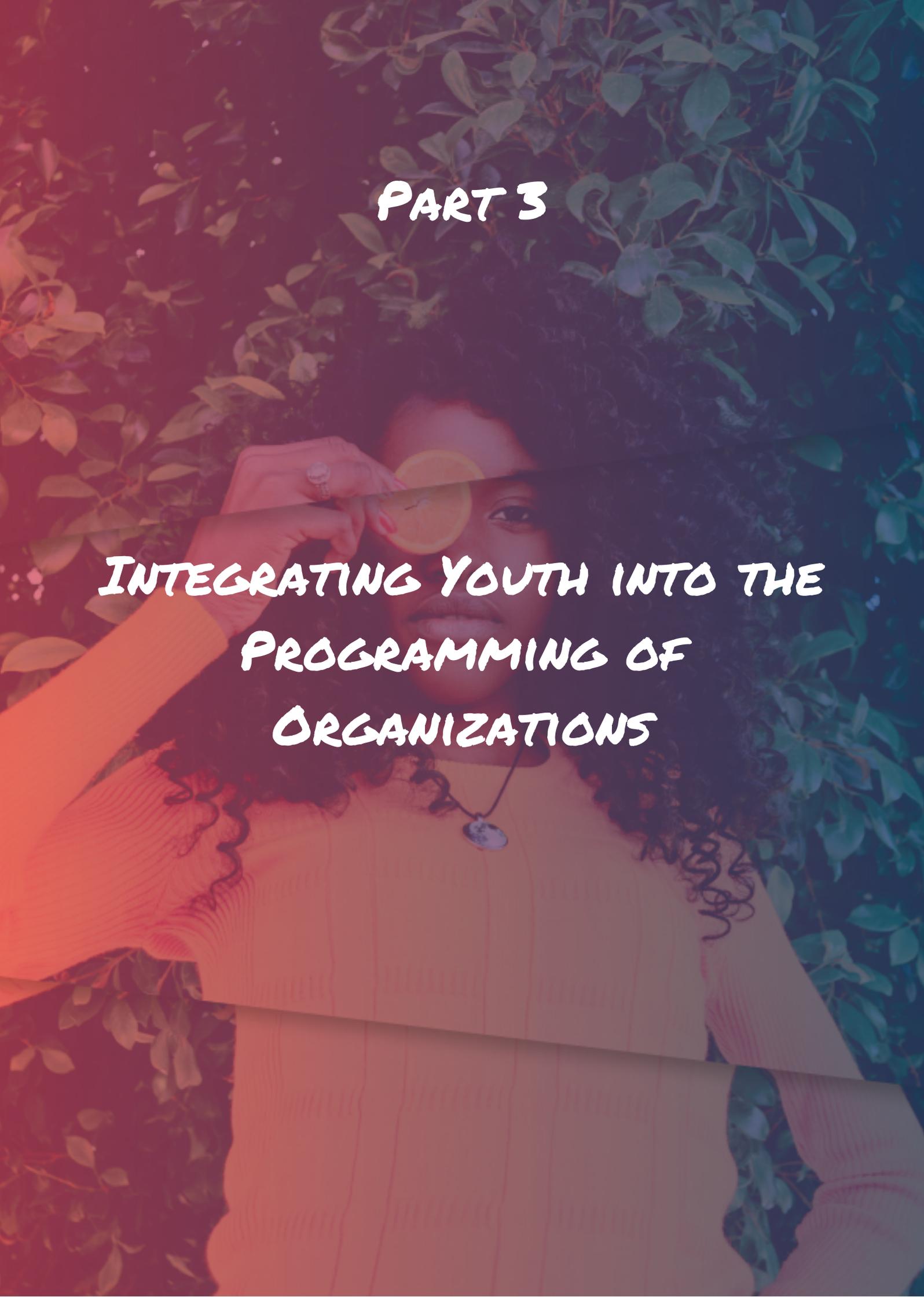
during the UPR process in their country to engage wide consultation with young people.

In accordance with the Government's commitment to the protection of the rights of children, a dedicated Government Department of Children and Youth Affairs was established. The Department has led the development of harmonized policy and quality integrated service delivery for children and young people and has carried out specific functions in the social care field, driving co-ordinated actions across a range of sectors, including health, education, youth justice, sport, arts and culture. This collaboration is expected to ensure that young people's participation is a priority and that outcomes are robust and evidenced-based.



### European Youth Forum's involvement in UPRs

Since 2015, the European Youth Forum (YFJ) has helped to submit 15 reports for the UPR and alternative reports for other treaty bodies. They organize capacity building opportunities for their member organisations across Europe, towards strengthening technical capacities needed to partake in such a process and they have an Expert Group on Youth Rights, which focuses on mainstreaming rights of young people into the UPR. According to YFJ, the number of recommendations that tackle youth rights increased in the last five years thanks to this systematic effort of the youth sector to have their voices integrated into the process. The organization also held a national-level training event, "The UPR process and youth meaningful participation" in 2021. The outcome document of the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law recommended that "governments and CSOs should regularly submit. Universal Periodic Reviews could be an approachable entry point for national youth organizations to hold their governments accountable while also strengthening their institutional capacity to advocate for young people.



## PART 3

# INTEGRATING YOUTH INTO THE PROGRAMMING OF ORGANIZATIONS

Fully integrating youth in programming requires sustainable long-term partnerships, resources, and the ability to participate in the entire process, from concept to implementation.

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**“We found out in OECD youth governance surveys that only around 20 per cent of national youth strategies are fully participatory, budgeted, monitored and evaluated. There is this really big risk that we will move forward without meaningful engagement of youth stakeholders at the national level. We need to invest and it's really worth it. In countries where their national youth strategies rank higher, in this OECD assessment framework, young people tend to express greater interest in politics. That is a really compelling case on how we can embed and institutionalize inclusion of participatory youth voices in strategies at the national level.”**

Snezana Klasnja, Special Adviser to the Serbian Minister of Youth and Sports

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The integration of youth perspectives in processes, programming and policies is taking various forms across the OSCE region (and beyond) and in the work of governmental entities, multilateral stakeholders, civil society and even the private sector. Continuous enabling of youth voices through the institutional framework is a democratic tendency that can be observed at the level of human rights institutions, international organizations and political institutions. The inclusion of youth voices in policymaking is not limited only to public policy documents and processes that target youth directly, such as national youth strategies. Young people's interests can be observed throughout all public policies and in relation to international commitments.

While the majority of engagement initiatives give youth a consultative or advisory role, the inclusion of youth voices and perspectives can have a much wider reach into strategic, organizational and programming areas.

Many international organizations have dedicated programmes to work with and for youth, with some going a step further to enable youth participation throughout their overall programming. One of the prerequisites of youth mainstreaming is to move beyond 'youth projects' and 'youth activities' and **adopt a holistic approach to integrating youth in all stages of the policy process.**

Partnerships with diverse youth groups, the youth sector and all stakeholders committed to human rights are immensely important to secure such a holistic approach, and it is crucial to avoid practices that stimulate any kind of injustices or inequalities.

Youth mainstreaming also needs to be transparent and the integration of relevant stakeholders in the process necessitates the establishment and maintenance of an **ongoing dialogue** with all of them. This can also be supported by harnessing the potential of youth media, and youth information and communication networks.



### UNESCO's Global Youth Community linking youth-led initiatives worldwide

The UNESCO Global Youth Community (GYC) is an inclusive platform, run by youth and for youth. It aims to provide a space that fosters youth-to-youth collaboration and intergenerational learning and increases the visibility of youth action and work of young change-makers. GYC enhances the horizontal networks that currently engage with UNESCO and solidifies collaboration with youth on a permanent basis.

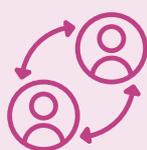
This initiative emerged during the 11th UNESCO Youth Forum in November 2019. Seventy-five young people, from all regions of the world who are leading ground-breaking change in their countries and communities, gathered to discuss the best strategies to improve Youth Engagement with UNESCO. They created the UNESCO Global Youth Community.



The UNESCO Global Youth Community has two objectives:



Emerge as an independent learning community by and for young people across the globe to co-learn, co-design and co-implement projects and programmes related to UNESCO's fields of competence, in a safe, flexible and inclusive space



Encourage and facilitate meaningful engagement of young people in the development and implementation of UNESCO projects and programmes

Integrating youth into processes should promote equity throughout policymaking cycles, from conception to implementation to review, and all stages in between. Any mainstreaming strategy ultimately seeks to ensure the implicit integration of different perspectives (e.g., youth, gender) across various processes and programmes.

Mainstreaming affects policy processes, which need to be developed and re-organized to incorporate equality perspectives across policies at all levels to ensure equality between youth and older adults. It implies that youth concerns, visions and contributions are fully accounted for by all government ministries, departments and agencies, as well as other institutions and organizations.

This work should focus the causes of discriminatory practices, above their consequences, in the hopes of correcting inequality. It should be a deliberate initiative to engage youth through partnership in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes.



## UNFPA's strategy to put young people at the center of sustainable development

UNFPA, the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency, is implementing an innovative global strategy for adolescents and youth, "My body, my life, my world!", which builds on its longstanding focus on young people. It puts young people—their talents, hopes, perspectives and unique needs—at the very center of sustainable development.

As a means of collaborating with, investing in and championing young people around the world, the strategy focuses on three key circles: "My body" refers to sexual and reproductive health. "My life" is a part of the strategy that includes affirming sexual orientation and gender identity; choosing whether, when and whom to marry; determining whether and when to have children and how many; and deciding when and with whom to have sex. The third pillar, "my world", promotes youth participation and youth engagement in the world, including as peace builders.

This strategy has clearly defined outcomes related to youth participation including relevant indicators to monitor and evaluate achieved results. Youth participation is a precondition for other aspects that the strategy defines and is required for meeting other objectives. All country offices must report on youth engagement and collaboration with youth-led organizations.

One practical mechanism UNFPA has to ensure youth participation is its Standing Youth Engagement Reference Group. This group meets monthly, bringing together regional offices and youth organizations to discuss different topics, from climate change to universal health care, and is a platform to share information with and collect perspectives from youth organizations. Formally, the UNFPA system only requires obligatory consultation with young people on strategic processes and document development.



Formally, the UNFPA system only requires obligatory consultation with young people on strategic processes and document development. Beyond the formal, though, UNFPA recently conducted an independent evaluation process with young evaluators, in co-ordination with the Reference Group.

Agency leaders are now more aware of the necessity to implement a youth-focused approach to measuring impact. The organization is committed to including young people within each evaluation process to look objectively at young people's experiences, their needs and rights.

To read and utilize the strategy visit:  
<https://www.unfpa.org/publications/my-body-my-life-my-world>.

Drawn from interviews with Irem Tumer and Cécile Mazzacurati, UNFPA Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, May 2021.

Making sure that organizations norms and values are aligned to the concept of youth engagement and participation is a paradigm shift in most organizations. The process of really integrating youth into programming requires seeing young people as assets and partners.

Creating a culture that is reflective, geared towards learning will also go a long way toward integrating youth fully into programming. As organizations have already begun the process of aligning their values around other important norms, such as gender equality and non-discrimination, there is the opportunity for those shifts to transcend into the youth engagement as well. So what will move these norms into real practice?

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**"How and when can we make co-creation possible, really touching on the existing sort of outdated tools and methods that we have available to us and how to rethink those and make them more applicable going forward and promoting higher quality youth engagement. What does that mean, and what does that look like?"**

**Roundtable Participant (Multilateral organisation)**

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Many of the mechanisms which can integrate youth into programming originate either in gender equality struggles or child-right promotion processes. A useful definition of youth mainstreaming comes from The Commonwealth Youth Programme which sees this important mechanism as:

***The process of assessing the implications (for youth) of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making (youth) concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes, in all political, economic and social spheres so that (youth) benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.***

In the current UN Youth Strategy Youth 2030, mainstreaming is considered a cluster of activities to "incorporate across all entities of the UN and work relating to all UN pillars, the need to meaningfully and sustainably engage and partner with young people and their organizations, networks and movements, through formal and informal mechanisms and platforms to realize universal rights-based youth participation."

This broad focus on engagement and partnership in the processes and policies of various institutions is a two-pronged strategy that first integrates the youth perspectives in policies in various policy fields and processes and, secondly, aims to narrow the gap in specific areas directly addressing the needs of youth in programming. It is one that can be replicated more broadly.

# GOOD PRACTICES TO INTEGRATE YOUTH IN PROGRAMMES

## Assessment models and measuring impact

Youth analysis that examines the relevant policies, legislation, institutional settings, organizational environments and available programmes is an immensely important step in youth integration. This also includes a situation analysis examining the internal and external environment to understand the organization's capabilities, customers, and operating environment through a youth lens. Youth analysis inevitably includes the active participation of young people, both as providers of insights about the context, institutions and processes, and as researchers at various stages of analysis. Youth analysis provides grounds for the identification of measures addressing problems, as well as planning and budgeting processes.

Programming needs to translate policy into operational plans, including monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, in collaboration with youth and discussed with a wider set of stakeholders. The implementation phase rests on programmed and appropriately budgeted plans, committed implementation structures, coupled with participatory monitoring and evaluation, and appropriate sustainability commitments. The effective communication of youth mainstreaming results to external and internal stakeholders is also vital for making youth mainstreaming sustainable.

An increasing number of OECD countries are exploring ways to conduct regulatory impact assessments with a focus on age-specific impacts. Different countries use tools that may differ in the scope of their application. Some may be triggered with any new policy or any new legislation, or only when legislative proposals are initiated by the government.

Highlighted below are some examples of these youth-focused regulatory impact assessments.

### Generation/Youth Checks

#### Youth checks

- Austria, Flanders (Belgium) – considering youth and children, too
- Germany, France – considering adolescents and young people
- Flanders, Belgium– the threshold for application: young people must be identified as a direct target of a new regulation for this youth check to be in effect
- Austria, Germany – threshold: sufficient that youth would be indirectly impacted

#### Generation check aiming to generate evidence of the expected impact of all policies and regulatory proposals across different age cohorts

- Netherlands

#### Age lens applied in public financial management

- Spain
- Slovak Republic
- Canada - examining how government spending and policies to recover from the COVID 19 crisis will affect people across social groups of young people and especially, so they have a very simple matrix that acknowledges the intersecting identity factors of gender and age

During the roundtable discussion, it was acknowledged that countries' response and recovery plans to COVID-19 are a new and an important opportunity to ensure legislation have an integrated youth lens.

The regulatory impact assessment framework can be explored in more depth through the work of the OECD and their Youth Stocktaking Report: Engaging and empowering youth in OECD countries - How to bridge the "governance gap". Youth impact assessment is also moving to the international level at the EU.



### The EU Youth Test to assess impact

European Youth Forum has created and is working to integrate the 'EU Youth Test' into the work on the European Parliament. This impact assessment tool will ensure young people are considered during policymaking processes within the European Union.

The Youth Test should enable the EU to create better targeted policies that are impactful; work to reduce inequality gaps; and support current and future generations. The initiative draws on some of the previously mentioned national level practices, which all serve the purpose of mainstreaming youth in policy making and ensuring that the impact on their lives is considered. The tool supports the mainstreaming of youth by addressing their lack of involvement in policy fields that are not usually considered youth-related, e.g. sustainability, economic policy or infrastructure.

The European Youth Forum recently published its Guiding Framework for the practical implementation of the EU Youth test. This tool is their latest contribution to the development of youth impact assessment to ensure that all policies are considering young people now and in the future.



It includes suggestions for every part of the EU Youth Test, meaningful participation, impact analysis, and mitigation measures, while it also supports the introduction of a such tool on the local, regional and national level as well.

For more information, visit: [https://www.youthforum.org/files/EU\\_Youth\\_Test\\_Guiding\\_Framework.pdf](https://www.youthforum.org/files/EU_Youth_Test_Guiding_Framework.pdf).

Alongside national-level regulatory impact assessments, organizations of all types that work with and for youth should regularly assess their processes and programming to ensure the desired impacts are being made, and to shift their efforts if necessary.



### RYCO: Assessing youth co-management

The Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) is an independently functioning institutional mechanism, founded by the Western Balkans six participants, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. Kosovo\* also takes part in RYCO. It aims to promote the spirit of reconciliation and co-operation between the youth in the region through youth exchange programmes.

The RYCO Governing Board works on the principle of co-management. It has a total of 12 members, six representatives of the governments involved and six youth representatives. Everyone has the same right to vote. Decisions are made by consensus. Therefore, every member of the board, regardless of whether he/she is a representative of the government or young people, can stop a decision being made.

RYCO recently did an assessment with the aim of improving its existing co-management mechanism.



One of the recommendations was to harmonize the ways in which youth representatives are elected to Governing Board, because currently each member state has regulated it in its own way. This process should be democratic and participatory, as well as focusing on youth from civil society who are not tied to politics. For example, in one state youth ministries announce invitations publicly and selection committees include representatives of the ministry and a previous youth representative. RYCO suggests harmonizing a non-political approach to choosing youth representatives.

Joint decision-making on the Governing Board is challenging, as broader political tensions from the Western Balkan region can come into discussions. Young representatives often try to reduce those tensions, but that is difficult if they are elected under political influence in their country.

In practice, the Governing board is consulted by the Secretariat to give feedback on draft grant schemes and other public calls. But once the calls have been launched, the Governing Board does not have any further role. There is a debate as to whether members of the Governing Board should be involved in the evaluation of project proposals. While it could strengthen selection, it would require a lot of time and resources.

Another practice key to the success of co-management is early capacity building for youth representatives. When first elected, coming to understand their roles and their independence from their governments is critical to be able to properly convey the voice of young people from their country. Training courses on youth participation in decision-making, but also on the topics of lobbying and communication, are helpful to this.

Governing Board meetings often include no time for broader discussion, only voting. Youth representatives may need professional assistance in understanding complicated topics before making decisions.



For example, it can be difficult to read a 200-page budget for approval. Government representatives, of course, have the support of ministries for the review of materials. The youth representatives should have means for support as well.

\* All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, should be understood in compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

Drawn from interview with Andrea Micanovic, Youth Representative in RYCO Governing Board, in June 2021. To learn more about RYCO visit: <https://www.rycowa.org/>.

Interest in 'social return', as described by the young round table participant, was also echoed by others who acknowledged the relevance of young people's conceptualisation of indicators when assessing programmes and processes.

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**"The question of who measures impact and who legitimizes that impact is an important question to ask, just as much as we asked about what impact matters itself. [...] And instead of us as donors or practitioners, thinking of indicators, 'What do young people consider indicators? What do impacted communities define as indicators of impact?' But the approach we are taking is to understand what social value is created from youth-led efforts and measuring the social return on investment on it. [...]"**

**To measure the impact of youth-led efforts to their peers, impact of youth led efforts to the community, impact of youth led efforts to the state institutions, and to the private sector, and other entities that the community and others define as important stakeholders. And it is true that this intuitive process is a social return on investment strategy. Hopefully, it will lead to some indicators that the collective body can also use."**

Saji Prelis, Search for Common Ground

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One of the biggest challenges identified among different sectors is measuring impact and ensuring sustainable youth engagement. While there is no doubt that accountability, learning and progress are intrinsically connected to monitoring and evaluation frameworks, this area seems to present a challenge to meaningful youth engagement. Measuring exercise do not always resonate with young beneficiaries.

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**"I think the biggest problem with donors is that they don't really want to check the impact. They ask for us to provide them with frameworks, methodologies and indicators when we apply for grants. But in the end, those indicators are not tied to social return. Donors only want to see the end result in terms of outputs delivered but they don't measure the impact in the long term, they are not listening to stories after a project is over."**

Roundtable Participant (South East Europe)

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When organizations do choose to try to measure their impact and really assess whether their programmes are working as they would like, this can often lead to interesting findings and shifts in programming, as was the case in the following examples.



### **Open calls! Increasing diversity among youth representatives**

Years ago, youth participation was more surface level - having young people around at conferences or on ad-hoc youth advisory boards to give youth opinions on key topics. Today youth rights and generally youth participation are more mainstreamed at the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). Youth organizations are consulted on a permanent basis and the process has moved towards generational partnership.



Involving youth in the decision-making process and power sharing with youth-led organizations is more common.

To continue this evolution, UNFPA recently changed its way of choosing whom to represent young people in its work, with the result of increasing the diversity of those around the table. Historically, country offices were invited to send two youth representatives to major conferences. At the same time, there was a recognized need to support youth with different characteristics to be involved in UN programmes. Instead, the agency launched an open call for young participants. A huge number of young people applied, with more than 11,000 applications. More resources were required for the selection process than had been needed in the past, but, on the other hand, many new, highly motivated young people were able to speak about challenges they face within their communities.

After the process was conducted, country offices recognized that this method to identify and invite interested and knowledgeable young people was a success. Many individuals who had not before engaged with UNFPA were able to present about their communities, speaking up about their infringed rights and current needs. Since this change, at times both approaches are combined (launching an open call and asking country offices to nominate young people).

Drawn from interviews with Irem Tumer and Cécile Mazzacurati, UNFPA Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, May 2021.

Another initiative that strengthens youth integration into programmes at the local level is the European Youth Capital designation. It not only integrates youth into chosen cities' governments but creates good practice examples that can live on after the initial designation.



## European youth capital experience from the City of Lublin

One of the critical issues for young people is, do they have command and control of some resources to make an impact in their lives? The City of Lublin Poland was chosen as the European Youth capital for 2023. The city enables some measure of participatory budgeting that includes youth stakeholders. Although youth are at times dismissed by older politicians, being named European Youth Capital is an opportunity to move city government towards more participatory approaches and programmes, starting with youth.

European Youth capitals have the opportunity to showcase how youth-oriented programmes can support overall city development. Many former European Youth Capitals have continued to progress with pioneering wider participatory structures, not just targeting young people.

Drawn from participation of Marcin Bubicz, Councillor of the City of Lublin. To learn more about the city of Lublin as the European Youth Capital 2023, visit: <https://lublin.eu/en/lublin/youth-lublin/idea/>.

Disclaimer: The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) sits in the selecting board of the European Youth Capital.

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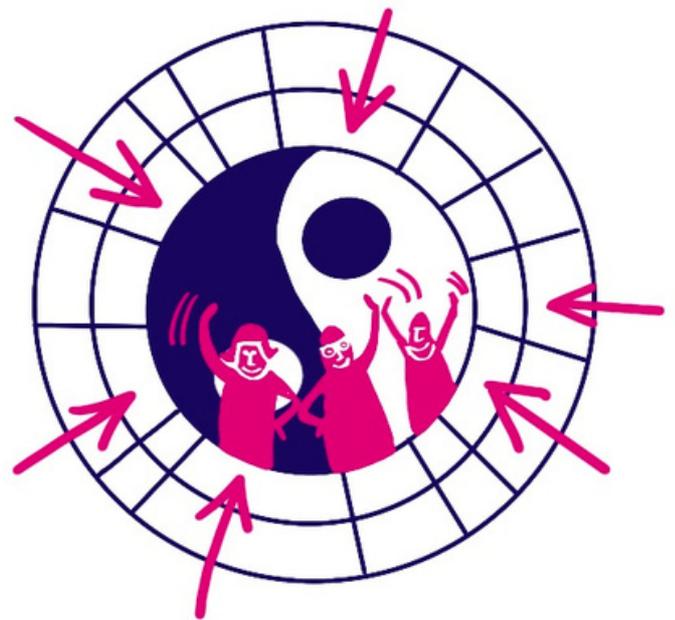
The ball is on governments' and policymakers' sides, as young people try to make better use of every single space that we have access to.

But we are not always invited to some processes. We always try to be bold, asking for meaningful youth participation and refusing tokenistic participation.

Sometimes, as a young person, I get the feeling that we are repeating ourselves are not really given the opportunity to have a say in the processes and programmes. We can not provide proper participation in events that we don't have some control over.

**Maria Rodriguez Alcazar, European Youth Forum (YFJ)**

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A person with long hair, seen from behind, is walking up a set of stone steps in a dense, lush forest. The person is wearing a dark t-shirt with a graphic of a palm tree and a skull, and dark pants. The scene is bathed in a dual color palette of deep red on the left and deep blue on the right. The text "LOOKING AHEAD" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font across the center of the image.

**LOOKING AHEAD**



In recent years, the OSCE has increasingly recognized and strived to harness the potential of young people to contribute to political, economic and social development across its work as a security organization. This compilation of a broad range of practitioner experiences highlights the shared principles that underpin this work and illustrates the diverse ways in which those working with and for youth have been inspired to operationalize these principles in their respective contexts.

Promoting youth engagement in policies, processes and programmes is not just about factoring youth capacities and interests into policy responses and planning, but rather understanding how policies and sectors influence each other, across areas relevant to youth. It is a complex process that can and should be introduced at various levels and with very different scopes, including at all government levels, sectors and institutions.

Institutional change requires courageous champions. The positive examples within this paper aim to strengthen their case for youth engagement, as well as to encourage others to promote it within their own institutions. While practitioners shared a sense of isolation, as they often face resistance in their efforts, their experiences show that their work to promote youth inclusion at the regional and local levels is not futile. Their bottom-up approaches, informed directly by the needs of relevant stakeholders on the ground, can serve as a launchpad for broader adoption and offer learnings for others to build upon. The roundtable conversations provided space for these individual learnings to be shared and exchanged, revealing an emerging community of practice.

Their stories, however, have also shown that youth inclusion and empowerment is most successful when efforts at various levels are systemic and co-ordinated. At its best, youth inclusion is integrated across local, regional, national and international decision-making structures, reflecting our collective responsibility to foster youth-inclusive efforts towards a safe future.

## **THE NEXT STEP IS TO ACT**



