

Forum: Youth Assembly Sub-Commission One (YA1)

Issue: Encouraging the Involvement of Youth in Democracy

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INTRODUCTION

Young people play a crucial role in developing democracy, as they are the ones who are going to succeed older generations. For many years, they have faced many restrictions and obstacles, as they were considered to be inexperienced, immature and people thought they should not be involved in such important matters. Financial constraints, legal and geographical restrictions, lack of technical knowledge and support are some of the many problems young individuals are confronted with, thus making their involvement almost impossible.

However, the youth has never given up and through youth movements, youth organisations and councils, it attempts to be equally represented and involved. Many countries have made adaptations to their legislation in order to include them in democracy but have also founded institutions specifically addressed to encourage their participation. Multiple NGOs along with the assistance of UN bodies have also created projects and programmes aiming to inform the youth about democracy and its importance. Some of them were not as successful as others due to the lack of participation, long term effects and implementation, funding and government support. Conventions and resolutions were also introduced advocating for youth involvement in democracy, but their non-binding nature made them unsuccessful.

Therefore, it is necessary to introduce long term solutions that are targeting the problem at hand and are also easily implemented. For instance, increased civic education aims to teach young people about decision-making processes and their importance within democracy. Support to youth organisations and councils will enhance participation and collaboration with respective NGOs, hence increasing their influence and impact. The adaptation of national and international legislation in order to include the youth in democracy serves as a permanent and clear recognition of their importance as well. Through such measures and many more with similar nature, young people will be encouraged to be involved more and they will actually make a positive impact on society.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Democracy

The word democracy comes from the Greek words "demos", meaning people, and "kratos" which means power. Thus, democracy can be described as "a system of

government in which the right to govern lies with the people. Traditionally, democracy referred to political systems in which the people directly participated in decision-making (i.e., direct democracies). Today, however, the term includes governments in which the people exercise their authority either directly or indirectly through elected representatives.”¹

Global Youth Participation Index (GYPI)

The Global Youth Participation Index (GYPI), launched on 18 June 2025, is a tool developed by the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD), in order to assess how young people participate in public life in over 140 countries. It is used by measuring indicators such as civic engagement and youth representation.

Ibero-American Countries

“Ibero-America or Iberian America is a region in the Americas comprising countries or territories where Spanish or Portuguese are predominant languages, usually former territories of Portugal or Spain.”²

Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs)

The term of “Less Economically Developed Countries” applies to states with a low standard of living and low Gross Domestic Product (GDP). “The low level of socio-economic development in LDCs is characterized by historically weak development capacity, low and unequally distributed income and scarcity of domestic financial resources.”³ There are in total 44 UN Member States, which are officially considered as LEDCs.

More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs)

A MEDC is considered to be a highly industrialised country, which in contrast to a LEDC has a higher GDP. The term also applies to countries that have a strong economy, while their citizens enjoy a good standard of living.

Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)

“A Non-governmental organisation is a voluntary group of individuals or organisations, usually not affiliated with any government, that is formed to provide services or to advocate a public policy. Although some NGOs are for-profit corporations, the vast majority are non-profit organisations. Some NGOs, particularly those based in authoritarian countries, may be created or controlled by governments. By most definitions, political parties and criminal or violent organisations are not considered NGOs. The issues addressed by NGOs run the gamut of human concerns (e.g., human rights, environmental protection, disaster relief, and development assistance), and the scope of their activities may be local, national, or international. Some NGOs fulfill quasi-governmental functions for ethnic groups that lack a state of their own. NGOs may be financed by private donations, international organizations, governments, or a combination of these.”⁴

¹ Cornell Law School. “democracy | Wex | US Law | LII / Legal Information Institute.” *Legal Information Institute*, September 2024, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/democracy>.

² “Ibero-America.” Planeta, 1 February 2021, <https://www.planeta.com/ibero-america/>.

³ United Nations. “About Least Developed Countries | Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.” *the United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/ohrls/content/about-least-developed-countries>.

Youth

Even though there is no agreed concrete definition of a specific youth age group, for statistical purposes, the United Nations categorises youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years old. “It is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and therefore, youth is more fluid than other fixed age-groups.”⁵

Youth Movements

“Youth movements are the organized, conscious attempts by young people to bring about or resist societal change. A prominent feature of modern societies, youth movements emerge out of generational tensions and relations and are rooted in specific socio-historical conditions. Youth movements have taken a variety of forms, including student rebellions, cultural innovations (literary, artistic, music), scientific revolutions, religious reforms, ethnic revolts, nationalist and political generations, and environmental, peace and antiwar movements.”⁶

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Historical Evolution of Youth Involvement in Democracy

19th and 20th Century Youth Social Movements

Even before the 20th century, young people were actively involved in democracy and overall politics. Despite societal norms, through dialogs and discussions in saloons, young individuals were extremely informed about each party and its ideology. However, their “participation” throughout the 19th century could be described as more social and communal, seeing as they had no decision-making influence nor authority within democratic processes. The “virgin vote”, first introduced in the US in the 19th century, is a vote cast by young people aged 21 and above in order to show their devotion, pledge and loyalty to the specific chosen party. Because of it, the youth was able to be involved in democracy and shape it in their own way.

The anti-nuclear movement in Britain during the 1960s was marked by an unexpected increase in youth participation. Many young individuals considered political parties to be unresponsive to their concerns about nuclear weapons, making them wanting to take matters into their own hands and engage in mass protests and take direct action. This youth movement paved the path for further movements and action to be taken by young individuals worldwide.

This event led to the formation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the US by young college students as part of their involvement in the civil rights movement. SNCC

⁴ Karns, Margaret P., and Michael Kenny. “Nongovernmental organization (NGO).” *Britannica*, 9 July 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/nongovernmental-organization>.

⁵ United Nations Youth. “DEFINITION OF YOUTH | United Nations.” *the United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>.

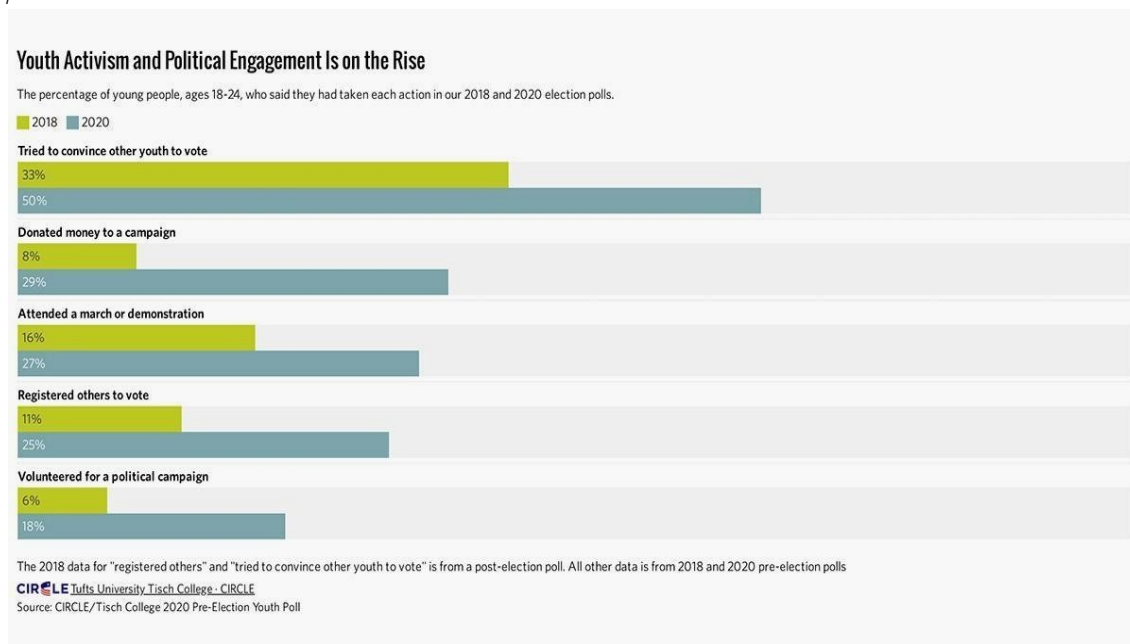
⁶ Braungart, R. G., and M. M. Braungart. “Youth Movements.” *Science Direct*, 2001, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/youth-movements>.

was unique at that time among other civil organisations, as it was the first civil organisation mostly led by young adults. The group empowered youth activism, thus encouraging more young individuals to be involved in democracy by taking action and increasing their influence.

Progress and Effects

The progress of youth involvement in democracy can be understood as a multifaceted process shaped by the increase in participation, influence and the undebatable recent support young people are receiving. This progress also reflects the rapid pace with which societal norms regarding the youth change and the very important role young people currently have within the society.

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In the more recent years, the rise in youth involvement in democratic processes such as elections and political engagement is more evident than ever. Young individuals have managed to increase their influence over decision-making and are taking action through protests and youth movements, while their representation in many national and regional parliaments and councils is undeniable.

Challenges and setbacks to youth participation in democracy

Lack of Positive Engagement by Political Parties/NGOs and Financial Constraints

⁷ Statistic showing increased youth involvement and engagement in democracy "Poll: Young People Believe they Can Lead Change in Unprecedented Election Cycle." *Circle*, 30 June 2020, <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/poll-young-people-believe-they-can-lead-change-unprecedented-election-cycle>.

Despite young people having succeeded in representation, influence, support and discussions with decision-makers, there are still multiple challenges and setbacks to their involvement in democracy.

First and foremost, some youth organisations tend to lack positive engagement and support by the correspondent political party or in general NGOs, thus deteriorating their impact and effect during policy formulation or the exchange of ideas with higher political entities. This might also result in financial constraints, seeing as the political parties and the relevant NGOs have no obligation to provide financial support to them.

Geographical Barriers

Some young individuals also face geographical barriers due to the isolated area in which they live, thus making their involvement almost impossible. They are usually unable to attend youth movements they are interested in or participate in youth organisation or council meetings, hence being left out of such opportunities.

Limited Technical Skills

Most young people also have extremely limited technical skills and knowledge, which might stand as an obstacle to making decisions. They are unfamiliar with technical terms needed to participate or make suggestions on a specific topic and are mostly unaware of the procedures followed. This might make them appear unprofessional and indifferent of a topic, hence hindering their actual impact and influence on the society.

Global importance of youth in democracy

Youth plays a pivotal role in democracy, also given the fact that nearly half of the world's population is under 30⁸. Young people are the ones who are constantly advancing democracy by introducing new, innovative ideas, which meet the standards of modern society. They also tend to promote and remind their peers and older generations of multiple democratic values and human rights. Additionally, by involving youth in democracy, inclusivity will be ensured, as the suggestions mentioned by young individuals will also include their needs. Most people nowadays tend to forget that we live in an ever changing world, thus forgetting that young people are completely different. By including them, the proper development and advancement of democracy will be ensured.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

European Union (EU)

The European Union plays an important role in promoting and encouraging youth involvement in democracy, something that is clearly evident from the multiple frameworks and strategies that

⁸ Razzaque, Ameena. "Are We Prepared to Serve the Youngest Half of the Global Population?" *Collaborative on Global Children's Issues*, 16 July 2023, <https://globalchildren.georgetown.edu/posts/are-we-prepared-to-serve-the-youngest-half-of-the-global-population>.

the union has implemented. “The EU Youth Strategy is the framework for EU youth policy cooperation for the years 2019 to 2027”⁹ and its main goal is to foster youth participation in democratic life, while promoting social engagement and ensuring that young people are able to participate in society overall. Moreover, with the founding of the European Youth Forum, which shows general support to young people and stresses the need to include them in political decisions, the EU once again focuses on their inclusion in democratic processes. The Global Youth Participation Index (GYPI), developed by the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD), is another innovative measure to assess and determine the overall inclusion and participation of youth in political affairs worldwide, hence identifying challenges and giving insights for researches and relevant stakeholders.

Japan

Japan has witnessed a huge decline in youth participation in electoral processes despite the lowering of voting age from 20 to 18 in 2015¹⁰. A concrete example would be the 2021 House of Representatives election, during which only ~37%¹¹ of that age group participated in comparison with ~72%¹² of those aged 70 and above, in spite of the former having received prior lessons on elections at school. The phenomenon of non-involvement of youth in democracy is also deeply rooted in the country’s culture and structure, thus making 80%¹³ of young Japanese believe that they are unable to influence politics and are unlikely to engage in political activism.

Nigeria

Nigeria faces significant challenges regarding youth involvement in democracy, including political exclusion and limited access to political platforms. However, there have been some great developments marked by the constant youth-led campaigns, which aim to empower the democratic participation of youth. Yiaga Africa is a student-led organisation established in 2007 wishing to build a sustainable democracy based on the principles of inclusion, accountability, and justice. It also urges and trains individuals, especially young people, how to positively change their community, be an active citizen and participate in Nigerian politics. Additionally, alongside with the UN Development Program (UNDP), a youth based CSO coalition was supported to take part in the constitution review process by deliberating on multiple issues, thus increasing youth political participation.

⁹ European Youth Portal. “EU Youth Strategy | European Youth Portal.” *European Youth Portal*, https://youth.europa.eu/strategy_en.

¹⁰ “Japan: Voting Age Lowered from 20 to 18 | Library of Congress.” *The Library of Congress*, 24 June 2015, <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2015-06-24/japan-voting-age-lowered-from-20-to-18/>.

¹¹ Masahisa, Endo. “Ideological Perception Gap: Data Analysis Reveals Left-Right Distinction Lost on Young Japanese Voters.” *nippon.com*, 19 August 2024, <https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/a09903/>.

¹² Masahisa, Endo. “Ideological Perception Gap: Data Analysis Reveals Left-Right Distinction Lost on Young Japanese Voters.” *nippon.com*, 19 August 2024, <https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/a09903/>.

¹³ Kyōko, Tominaga. “Why Are Japanese Youth Distancing Themselves from Social Activism?” *nippon.com*, 30 March 2021, <https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/d00668/>.

Sweden

Sweden has taken extremely important and innovative measures regarding youth involvement in democracy starting at the local level with the local youth councils. Many Swedish municipalities have specific structures for young people's participation and influence on decision-making processes. Additionally, the National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations, composed of nearly 100 Swedish youth organisations, provides a network for youth organisations to cooperate with national and international institutions for matters of common interests. The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF) is a government agency seeking to include young people in decision making processes, something that it is striving to achieve through its collaboration with six municipalities and one region, thus increasing young people's knowledge of and participation in local democracy.

United States of America (USA)

Multiple US States have implemented programs to enhance youth civic engagement in democracy and society. The California Youth and Family Civic Engagement Initiative aims to increase the young people's understanding of government and civic institutions, while also advocating for youth participation among low-income and disenfranchised youth. Similarly, the Youth Civic Engagement Program (YCEP) in Washington, established by the Seattle Office for Civil Rights, provides the youth and especially high school students with all the necessary skills to lead change in society through policy-making and many advocacy experiences. These programs have assisted and encouraged young people to be more involved in democratic processes in the US, thus increasing their representation and influence at a national level.

Venezuela

Nearly half of Venezuela's population is under the age of 25¹⁴, thus having to acknowledge their high potential impact on the society and more importantly on the country's democratic future. A huge step taken by the Venezuelan youth is almost all political parties having a respective youth organisation attached to them, such as the Juventud AD from Acción Democrática. However, the huge problem of unemployment and nescience among young Venezuelans aged 15 to 29¹⁵, hinders their potential future involvement in democracy and participation in youth organisations.

Youth Democracy Cohort (YDC)

The Youth Democracy Cohort, launched on 15 September 2022, is an inclusive platform which assembles governments, organisations, institutions and civil society with the sole aim of advancing youth involvement in democracy. The WYDE Civic Engagement Project is one of the many programs supported by the Youth Democracy Cohort, which seeks to increase the involvement of youth and women in public and democratic life as means to promote

¹⁴ Santi, Sophia. "Youth Should Participate in a Shared Vision for Venezuela." *United States Institute of Peace*, 1 September 2022, <https://www.usip.org/blog/2022/09/youth-should-participate-shared-vision-venezuela>.

¹⁵ Santi, Sophia. "Youth Should Participate in a Shared Vision for Venezuela." *United States Institute of Peace*, 1 September 2022, <https://www.usip.org/blog/2022/09/youth-should-participate-shared-vision-venezuela>.

development and change. Furthermore, the Digitalise Youth Project launched in January 2025 empowers local youth activists and civil society organisations in order to address disinformation in the Sahel region. Thereby, young people are encouraged to directly participate and combat social problems.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
April, 1960	Formation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the USA by young college students
6 October, 1995	The World Programme of Action for Youth was implemented by the United Nations General Assembly.
10 and 11 October, 2005	The Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Youth was signed. It supports youth participation in politics and decision-making processes.
19 September, 2015	The Democracy Project in Burnaby, British Columbia emerged.
9 December, 2015	The UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security was adopted.
27 February to 24 March 2016	UN Human Rights Council Report
24 March, 2017	The UN Human Rights Council Report regarding the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law was written.
15 September, 2022	The Youth Democracy Cohort was launched in order to bring together governments, civil society and NGOs.
1 December, 2022	The EU Charter on Youth and Democracy was signed.
January, 2025	The Digitalise Youth Project was launched as a part of the Digital Democracy Initiative.

18 June, 2025

The Global Youth Participation Index was launched by the European Partnership for Democracy.

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Youth

The Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Youth, which was signed in October 2005 in Badajoz, Spain and entered into force in March 2008, is an international agreement that protects the civil, political, social and cultural rights of young people aged 15 to 24 in Ibero- American countries. Article 21, paragraph 1 of the Convention explicitly mentions youth's right to participate in politics, while paragraphs 2,3 and 4 urge all participating states to promote youth involvement in policy-making. It is also mentioned that the countries shall support measures and social processes, which boost youth participation in organisations.¹⁶

UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace, and Security

The UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security, which was adopted on 9 December 2015, focuses on the role of young people in peace, security and democracy. Clause one urges Member States to increase youth representation in decision-making in both national and international institutions, while clause two supports the involvement of youth when implementing agreements, in order to consider their views as well. In general, this UN Security Council Resolution stresses the need to include young people in political decisions and organisations promoting democratic processes.¹⁷

UN Human Rights Council Report (2016 Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law)

The UN Human Rights Council Report related to the 2016 Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, which was reported during the Council's thirty-fourth session from 27 February to 24 March, focuses on creating an enabling environment for effective participation of youth in public decision-making. Additionally, youth representatives and organisations were brought together to identify the obstacles to youth participation in democracy and to share ideas for empowering young people in that involvement.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibero-American Young Organisation (OIJ). "Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Youth." *Global Law and Policy database*, 10 and 11 October 2005, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/radr/2005/en/71299>.

¹⁷ UN Security Council. "Resolution 2250 (2015)." *UN digital library*, 9 December 2015, https://digitallibrary.un.org/nanna/record/814032/files/S_RES_2250%282015%29-EN.pdf?withWatermark=0&withMetadata=0®isterDownload=1&version=1.

¹⁸ United Nations General Assembly. "First session of the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law." *digital library un*, 24 March 2017,

EU Charter on Youth and Democracy

The EU Charter on Youth and Democracy, which was signed in Brussels on 1 December 2022, consists of 49 recommendations in regards to the democratic participation of young people, while it was created along with youth organisations and young elected representatives from the EU. It aims to build a youth friendly democratic space, in order for the opinions and ideas of young people regarding multiple matters to be heard and represented.¹⁹

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

The Democracy Project in Burnaby, British Columbia

The Democracy Project in Burnaby, British Columbia is a student-led project emerged in 2015, which gives some young people the opportunity to become more actively involved in their regional school board. Initially it sought to address the inability of students to shape their own learning because of their exclusion from decision-making structures. Because of it, the way high-level school decisions were made changed by also including student representatives. Moreover, increased agency, cooperation and accountability was noted in all students, while they consider themselves to be an important member of this project. Lastly, their decision-making skills underwent an important change, seeing as the young participating people have learnt how to take into account all different sides before making a decision. All in all, the Democracy Project was extremely successful and because of it many students are going to take part in democracy in the future. The only issue with this project is its regional nature and its lack of addressivity to a wider audience of young people.

World Program of Action for Youth (WPAY)

The World Program of Action for Youth (WPAY), adopted by the UN General Assembly on 6 October 1995 and updated in 2007, is an international framework aimed at promoting the participation of young people in society, along with democratic processes. The program puts emphasis on the need for national policies and projects that increase opportunities for youth to participate in democratic processes. Additionally, it suggests empowerment of young people through education in order to ensure their informed participation. Despite the guiding and suggesting nature of this program, there have been some challenges and limitations because of its uneven implementation and some requirements that not every Member State follows.

Asia Young Leaders for Governance (AYLG)

The Asia Young Leaders for Governance (AYLG) initiative was implemented by the UNDP Regional Service Centre in Bangkok between the years 2005 to 2009 in order to train all young participants on conflict resolution and negotiation, leadership styles and democratic governance. “The project partnered with LEAD international, an international NGO, to produce a set of

¹⁹ European Committee of the Regions. “Charter on Youth and Democracy.” *European Youth Forum*, 1 December 2022, https://www.youthforum.org/files/EU-Charter-on-Youth-and-Democracy_signed.pdf.

customized leadership resource kits, hold 5 national and 2 sub-national leadership courses, train 29 leadership trainers and produce 187 leadership fellows trained in leadership skills.²⁰ The program was extremely successful with multiple relevant initiatives and stakeholders wishing for its continuation and constant development, but it was never prolonged neither in Asia nor internationally because of funding issues and a change in the political landscape in the continent.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Enhanced Civic Education and Inclusivity

School boards and administrations could include specific lessons towards young people aiming to teach them about democratic processes and how to be a more active individual in democracy overall. Thereby, educational opportunities will be provided to all students with no exception, thus ensuring a properly informed younger generation wishing to participate in decision-making and wanting to make impactful changes. Additionally, this process ensures that all young people will be included and that no discrimination takes place regarding who should be involved in democracy.

Social Media and Awareness

Young people can be informed through social media about the latest projects and conferences about the role and involvement of youth in democracy that are available to them, thus increasing participation chances and opportunities. The media can also be a way to remind young individuals of their importance in participating in democracy, as they are the ones who foster change and will help democracy adapt to modern challenges.

Founding of NGOs in LEDCs

By founding region specific NGOs, the inclusion of the youth in decision-making in LEDCs will be ensured, because of the exclusive attention each LEDC will receive. Such countries have been struggling with involving young people in democracy, because they usually have other priorities or do not consider it a pressing matter. However, by creating these NGOs, LEDC will have the chance to expand opportunities among young individuals and will probably be financially supported by other MEDCs cooperating with the NGOs and wishing to assist them.

Support to Youth Organisations and Councils

Youth organisations and Councils can be financially supported by providing them with accessible and sustainable funding, in order to increase participation and ensure the proper collaboration of all their members with relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, NGOs and youth organisations with the same goals and aspirations can be brought together to discuss and exchange ideas towards solving a common issue. Through such a kind of cooperation, the NGO

²⁰ United Nations Youth, and UN Development Program. "YOUTH, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND DECISION-MAKING." *Welcome to the United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-political-participation.pdf>.

will also be able to promote the youth organisation/council, thus increasing its impact on a regional, national and international level.

International Law and National Legislation

The international law should be updated in order to emphasise the importance of the involvement of youth in democracy and to urge Member States to include young people in democratic processes. This solution could be described as a more permanent and binding one, seeing as all countries will have to take immediate action so as to also make some changes in their national legislation. By each state assessing their legislation, they will be able to spot some incoherences and adapt it to include the youth as much as possible.

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