

Forum: Youth Assembly Paper 2

Issue: Encouraging youth engagement in active citizenship

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TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Civic engagement is an essential factor of successful modern-day societies. It is the active involvement of people in trying to enhance their communities and their presence in civic, political and environmental societal activities. It's not just about having legal rights as a citizen, it's about taking responsibility when resolving problems, supporting others, and encouraging democratic values. These all greatly contribute to the common good. By being an active citizen, you can volunteer, vote, and raise awareness about important issues.

Youth engagement in itself is a key element of active citizenship. New ideas, creativity and perspectives are contributed by young people to society. Young people can learn so many important skills like leadership, communication and critical thinking just through participating in any decision making or volunteering campaigns. All these are additional reasons why their participation is also a pillar for democracy, as it gives voice to any opinions or needs the younger generations may have. By giving young people the chance to participate, we're helping them become more confident and engaged citizens.

Low youth engagement, however, is a problem for many countries. Many young people feel as if their voices aren't heard or as if they cannot influence important decisions. Other young people might not even get the chance to participate, as they're unaware of civic activities, or because they don't trust their political institution. This leads to less engagement of young people in democratic purposes, which in turn leads to less diversity of ideas coming from young people, and a lower overall level of democratic participation.

But young people have always proved that they can make a big difference despite all of these challenges. Youth-led organisations have been advocating for human rights, environmental protection, and more, all across the globe. Young people contribute to solving both local and global challenges by volunteering, or through social entrepreneurship. By getting involved, they're not only benefiting society, they're also creating healthier and more inclusive communities where everyone can contribute.

In conclusion, it's become clear that it is of crucial importance to encourage young people to become active citizens. To inspire young people to do this and to create a positive impact on

society, societies can give education and chances to get involved. That way, we can build a more inclusive and democratic future.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

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Active citizenship

“Getting involved in the life of your community and nation so that you can help determine the country's future.”¹

Youth engagement

“Characterized by the agency of young people and their collective action to address issues that are important to them.”²

Civic participation

“Individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern.”³

Political participation

“The voluntary activities of ordinary citizens that aim to influence government decisions.”⁴
For example: Voting in elections, contacting representatives about a proposed law, or joining a political youth organisation.

¹Staff, C. C. E. “Active Citizenship.” *Civiced.Org*, <https://civiced.org/active-citizenship> . Accessed 1 Sept. 2026.

²“Youth Engagement.” *Unesco.Org*, 2024, <https://www.unesco.org/en/query-list/y/youth-engagement> . Accessed 1 Sept. 2026.

³American Psychological Association. “Civic Engagement.” *Apa.Org*, American Psychological Association, 2009, <https://www.apa.org/education-career/undergrad/civic-engagement> . Accessed 1 Sept. 2026.

⁴“Defining Political Participation: Key Concepts and Theories • PolSci Institute.” *Political Science Institute*, 16 Apr. 2024, <https://polsci.institute/understanding-political-theory/defining-political-participation-key-concepts-theories/> . Accessed 1 Sept. 2026.

Youth empowerment

“The process through which young people gain the ability, authority, and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and communities.”⁵

Digital citizenship

“The ability to navigate our digital environments in a way that's safe and responsible and to actively and respectfully engage in these spaces.”⁶

For example: Verifying information before sharing it online, reporting cyberbullying, or using social media to raise awareness about specific issues.

Civil society organizations

Non-governmental, not-for-profit groups and associations that represent the interests and values of citizens, often working to influence public policy and promote social change.”⁷

For example: Red Cross, Amnesty International, or any local environmental groups.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Importance of Youth Participation

There are around 1.9 billion people between the ages of 10 and 24, accounting for young people⁸. This makes them the largest generation of youth in history. Their participation in civic and political life is therefore extremely essential, as governments need to make decisions that reflect the needs of both current and future generations.

⁵WPAB. “Exploring the UN’s Approach to Youth Empowerment With NGOs - fundsforNGOs.” *fundsforNGOs - Grants and Resources for Sustainability*, 18 Jan. 2025,

<https://www2.fundsforngos.org/articles/exploring-the-uns-approach-to-youth-empowerment-with-ngos/>.

Accessed 1 Sept. 2026.

⁶media smarts. “What Is Digital Citizenship?” *MediaSmarts*, 8 Aug. 2022,

<https://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/general-information/digital-media-literacy-fundamentals/what-digital-citizenship> . Accessed 1 Sept. 2026.

⁷“Fiveable.” *Thinkfiveable*, Fiveable, 11 June 2026,

<https://fiveable.me/intro-to-poli-sci/key-terms/civil-society-organizations> . Accessed 1 Sept. 2026.

⁸ “Adolescents and Young People Today: Empowering a Growing Global Population.” *United Nations Population Fund*, 2026, <https://www.unfpa.org/adolescents-and-young-people> . Accessed 1 Sept. 2026.

Youth participation strengthens democracy abundantly, as it introduces innovative ideas and diverse perspectives. Young people are often first to speak for issues such as climate change, gender equality, or even educational reform by volunteering, campaigning, or participating in elections. By doing so, they contribute to stronger and adaptable communities. Aside from communities themselves, meaningful participation also benefits young people themselves. Civic engagement helps develop leadership, critical thinking and problem solving skills that are very important in today's society. At the same time, it increases trust in democratic institutions and helps younger people feel more included.

Current Levels of Youth Engagement

Youth engagement has increased in some areas, while declined in others.

Recent data illustrates these trends:

"In 2023, 24% of young people on average across all 38 OECD countries surveyed by the Gallup World Poll reported having volunteered time to an organisation in the previous month, compared to 22% of people aged 30-49 and 22% of people aged 50+"⁹

"In 23 of 27 EU countries, young people were more likely to use the internet for civic or political participation than the overall population."¹⁰

Despite these encouraging statistics, surveys continue to show declining trust in government across many young people.¹¹ This reduces participation in everyday political activities.

Although youth participation in traditional politics remains somewhat low in many countries, participation has actually shifted, and not disappeared. Young people engage mainly through

⁹Gagliardi, Pietro, et al. "Promoting Youth Volunteering and Civic Service Engagement: A Stocktake of National Programmes across OECD Countries." *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance No. 77*, OECD, 2024,

https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/12/promoting-youth-volunteering-and-civic-service-engagement_84e6995e/39659e6a-en.pdf . Accessed 1 Sept. 2026.

¹⁰Eurostat. *Youth Civic & Political Engagement Online: 24%*. 24 Apr. 2026, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/edn-20260424-1> . Accessed 1 Sept. 2026.

¹¹"OECD Youth Policy Toolkit." *Pillar V – Trust of Young People in Government and Public Institutions*, OECD, 26 Nov. 2024, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-youth-policy-toolkit_74b6f8f3-en/full-report/component-7.html . Accessed 1 Sept. 2026.

online advocacy, volunteering, or community-based activities instead of joining political parties. This shows changing approaches to politics, as many young people now prefer flexible, project-based participation that makes a solid, visible social impact. At the same time, surveys prove that trust in public institutions is lower in younger generations than that of older ones. This leads to lower voting participation in many democracies.

Barriers to Youth Engagement

Even though there is an increase in the number of opportunities available for young people, many still continue to face obstacles that limit their actual participation.

First off, many young people face a lack of civic education. Many academic systems devote little time to teaching students about political processes, democracy, or how they can influence public policy. Consequently, young people might not know how to get involved.

Another obstacle is political distrust. Many young people get concerned and end up not participating because of corruption scandals, political polarisation, or even the thought that politicians ignore youth concerns. When young people believe that participation will not influence any policy outcomes, they are consequently less likely to vote or participate at all in consultations.

Furthermore, young people that come from disadvantaged backgrounds have less resources available to them to have the ability to volunteer. Economic inequality can block the youth from participating in leadership programs or attending meetings simply because they have to prioritise employment or responsibilities that might help their families.

On the other hand, young people that are women, have ethnic minorities, are migrants, are LGBTQ+, or are disabled, frequently face additional barriers that other young people don't. Because of discrimination, many youth don't have equal access to opportunities.

The Role of Education

Education is one of the most important tools for promoting active citizenship. Schools help students gain a perspective about civic responsibility by teaching democratic values, human rights and media literacy. They do this also through student councils, Model United Nations conferences, debates and community service projects. It helps students get hands-on experience in decision making as well as leadership.

Apart from all that, civic education also helps students distinguish reliable information from misinformation, and understand different political viewpoints. Young people who experience civic engagement are more likely to remain active citizens in their adult lives.

Research keeps on proving that practical, hands-on civic education is tremendously more effective than simply teaching students about how governments and diplomacy work. To encourage students to apply more democratic principles in their life, schools can hold activities

like mock elections, student councils, community service, and Model United Nations. OECD research shows that students that take part in these kinds of activities are more likely to vote and volunteer in civic activities later in adulthood, paving the way for more future active citizens.

Technology and Social Media

Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube allow young people to organise campaigns, educate others and raise funds. Local issues can gain international attention just through hashtags and online petitions.

For example, youth-led climate campaigns have managed to collect millions of participants worldwide mainly through social media, while online fundraising matters have collected many donations after natural disasters or humanitarian crises.

However, technology and social media also present a challenge. Social media can help the spread of misinformation, hate speech and cyberbullying through algorithms. As a result, digital citizenship, in which one participates safely and responsibly online, has become a necessity of modern active citizenship.

Government and Community Initiatives

Governments and communities have introduced many initiatives to encourage youth participation. Some examples include the following: Youth councils, in which young people give their advice to local or even national governments on policies that affect any region's aspects, such as education or employment. Leadership development programs, that train young people to negotiate, to advocate, and to have more confidence when public speaking. Volunteer or civic service programs that allow young people to take part in environmental protection, disaster recovery, or healthcare. On a further note, there are many existing, effective programs that promote youth participation. Some of the most major ones include: European Solidarity Corps, a program that allows young Europeans to volunteer abroad and participate in community projects. OECD Youthwise, a youth advisory board that provides recommendations directly to the OECD. UN Youth2030: The first United Nations strategy on youth, that guides joint UN action with and for young people all around the world.

The Benefits of Active Citizenship

For young people, participation develops leadership skills, teamwork abilities, and communication skills while also increasing their confidence. On that same note, it also improves their critical thinking and employability, preparing them to be responsible future citizens.

For communities, active citizens strengthen social cohesion and help address local challenges through collective action.

For governments, greater youth participation makes policymaking even better by incorporating diverse perspectives, and making democratic institutions more representative and accountable overall.

All in all, active citizenship makes societies that are more democratic, inclusive, and more ready to tackle future challenges. By encouraging young people to participate responsibly today, governments invest in the leaders and citizens of tomorrow.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Finland

Finland is best known as one of the world's leading countries when it comes to promoting youth participation and active citizenship. The Finnish government integrates civic education from a very early age, teaching democratic values and media literacy all throughout the school curriculum. Schools constantly encourage their students to participate in student councils and debates, allowing them to experience something democratic firsthand.

Additionally, Finland has also established many youth councils, in both regional and national levels, making sure that young people can directly influence policymaking. The Youth Act (2016), that took place in Finland, legally requires governments to provide their youth with opportunities to participate in matters that affect them. Policies like these have helped create one of Europe's highest levels of trust about public institutions within youth, something truly groundbreaking. Finland's effective approach shows how combining civic education with meaningful opportunities can help strengthen democratic engagement amongst young people.

United Nations (UN)

The United Nations has played a very important role in promoting youth engagement and active citizenship, for over four decades now. It has consistently recognised young people as important pillars to achieving peace and democratic governance.

The UN has developed and established numerous crucial initiatives and factors that help encourage youth participation. These include the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), which was adopted in 1995, and the International Youth Day, which was established by the UN to be on the 12th of August. Additionally, the UN launched their own strategy called Youth2030, in aims of increasing youth engagement, while also promoting inclusive institutions and participatory decision-making for all citizens through Sustainable Development Goal 16.

These initiatives have greatly and successfully managed to encourage governments to establish youth councils, improve their civic education, and include more youth representatives when it comes to national or international decision-making. Although the way these policies are applied

varies significantly between countries, the UN has established youth participation as an international development priority.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Will provide an overview of the events, agreements, and developments that have shaped youth participation and active citizenship over time. (will help delegates understand how the issue has evolved)

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
1965	The “Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples” was adopted by the UN.
1985	The UN declares “International Youth Year” Participation, Development and Peace” ¹² .
1995	The “World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY)” is adopted by the UN General Assembly, making it the main international framework for youth participation.
1998	In order to encourage governments to integrate youth into national policy making, the “Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes” was adopted by the Lisbon World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth.
1999	The UN declares the 12 August as International Youth Day.
2015	Resolution 2250 was unanimously adopted by the UN Security Council, which recognised young people as partners in peacebuilding.

¹² UN. General Assembly (36th sess. : 1981-1982. “International Youth Year: Participation, Development, Peace..” *United Nations Digital Library System*, UN, 25 Nov. 1981, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/27015?ln=en&v=pdf> . Accessed 1 Sept. 2026.

2022	The United Nations Youth Office was established in aims of strengthening youth engagement or coordinating youth related work across UN Member States.
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RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

Present UN resolutions, treaties and frameworks related to youth participation. I will explain their contents and discuss how they contribute to addressing the issue.

UN General Assembly Resolution 40/14 (1985)

Resolution 40/14 formally established International Youth Year, and it recognises the important role of young people in development. It encourages governments to try and get more youth participation at local, national, and even international levels. It is known as the first global commitment to young people's engagement in civil activities.

World Programme of Action for Youth (1995)

The WPAY (World Programme of Action for Youth) still remains one of the main international

policy frameworks on youth, after it being adopted by the UN General Assembly. It recognises 15 priority sectors, which include employment, education, participation in decision-making, and health. It also encourages governments to develop policies that include young people in governance.

UN General Assembly Resolution 54/120 (1999)

This resolution formally established International Youth Day, which is on the 12th of August. This day celebrates young people's contributions, and encourages governments and organisations to promote youth participation too.

UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015)



Figure 1: Children within the Youth2030 Program (source: SDG Knowledge Hub)

Resolution 2250 was the first Security Council resolution that was entirely dedicated to young people. It urges member states to include youth in many aspects such as conflict prevention and peacebuilding, while also recognising them as good delegates of change.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Youth Participation Frameworks

One of the most important global attempts to address low youth engagement has been the establishment of international frameworks by the United Nations. In 2018, the UN launched the Youth2030, their Youth Strategy, which was one of the first ever strategies dedicated solely to youth. It aims to increase youth participation and to ensure that young people are recognised as partners when achieving an efficient, democratic development.

The UN has also emphasized meaningful youth participation, arguing that young people shouldn't only be called upon for participation percentages to increase, but they should have an active role throughout all the decision-making processes. However, the UN also acknowledges that many existing youth participation systems remain symbolic rather than effective, which creates concerns about the act of "tokening". This is when young people are included for appearance rather than given any legitimate influential power.

Civic Education or School-based Initiatives

Many governments have tried to increase their youth engagement by improving civic education within their schools. These programs try to teach students about important democratic values including human rights, responsibility, and media literacy. Examples of such programs can include debates, volunteering programs, or simulations such as Model United Nations. Practices like these can help young people adapt their leadership, negotiation, and decision making skills in experimental settings.

Youth Councils

Governments have come to increasingly create youth councils and advisory bodies that involve young people in policymaking. By doing that, they allow youth representatives to provide recommendations or insights on issues that affect them, such as education, employment, or community development.

For example, Finland has created one of the strongest youth participation mechanisms, by including youth councils at municipal levels. The goal of these councils is to make sure that young people's perspectives are being considered and implemented in local decision-making.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Strengthening Civic Education

Governments should integrate civic education into school curricula by teaching students about many democratic concepts such as human rights, media literacy and public participation. Instead of just orally teaching students, schools should also provide practical experiences, like mock elections, debates, Model United Nations, and even community service projects. Activities like these help students understand how democratic systems work and encourage students to engage with civic activities later in life.

Increasing Political Inclusion

Governments should create more opportunities for young people to participate in any political decision-making. They could do this by establishing youth councils, consulting youth organisations, or involving young representatives in such processes. This not only benefits young people, but it also creates a more diverse source of information when creating policies. They can also consider reviewing barriers like voter registration requirements, or minimum voting ages.

Expanding Digital Engagement

Governments, schools, and civil organizations should use digital platforms to increase youth participation in public affairs. Things like e-petitions, awareness campaigns or digital forums can make expressing young people's opinions with policymakers much more accessible. At the same time, digital literacy programs should also be provided to young people, so that they can adapt skills to identify misinformation, and protect their privacy online.

Strengthening International Cooperation

International organisations should continue supporting youth participation by promoting or by providing financial or technical assistance to Member States. Initiatives such as the United Nations Youth2030 Strategy encourage governments to include young people in decision-making, and to align the Sustainable Development Goals with any national youth policies. To help expand opportunities for participation, governments should cooperate, and international organisations or civil societies should be established. On that note, barriers that continue to limit youth engagement should also be addressed.

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Figure 1:

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