



SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE INFORMATION CLEARINGHOUSE

BULLETIN NO. 8:

Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 3 – Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-making Processes



PROJECT TEAM: Eliane El Haber (*Lead Author, Bulletin No. 8*), Eshana Amarasinghe, Fergus Watt, Ishaan Shah, Jebilson Raja Joslin, Jeffery Huffines and Mwendwa Kiogora

ABOUT

Building on the proposals presented in [Our Common Agenda report](#), the Secretary-General (SG) is publishing a [series of Policy Briefs over 2023](#) to serve as inputs into the preparations for the Summit of the Future. The Policy Brief on Meaningful Youth Engagement is the third one in that series.

PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY BRIEF

The knowledge and resources needed to fulfill the goals of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) are available in the modern world. But without the support and participation of a wide range of players, revolutionary changes will simply not be achievable at the scale necessary. Particularly true for the 1.2 billion young people who are living today. Young people hold the key to developing novel ideas that can bring about the breakthroughs our planet so desperately needs. They also stand to suffer the most if societies grow more unstable and unequal and if the triple planetary catastrophe worsens unchecked, as they will be the planet's future keepers. Through social mobilization campaigns that demand racial justice, gender equality, and climate action, young people have recently emerged as one of the main forces behind societal change. Numerous instances of young individuals bringing about innovative change in a variety of fields, including business, technology, and science, have also been documented. Youth, however, continue to be mostly absent from the decision- and policy-making processes in public life. This is particularly clear at the national level, where organizations like youth councils and parliaments have a hard time having an influence on decisions made at the cabinet table, budgetary votes at home, concessions in a peace process, or agreements on just transitions. The same is true in the global arena, where youth continue to have limited influence over decisions regarding sustainable development, the upkeep of peace and security, and human rights, despite the establishment of a patchwork of youth involvement possibilities. Three important proposals are made in the current brief, building on Our Common Agenda and broad multi-stakeholder engagements, particularly with youth. The following is advised for Member States:

- ✚ Expand and strengthen youth participation in decision-making at all levels.
- ✚ Make meaningful youth engagement a requirement in all United Nations decision-making processes.
- ✚ Support the establishment of a standing United Nations Youth Townhall and an integrated program from the United Nations system to facilitate greater diversity, representativeness, and preparedness in youth participation. Closing the digital divide and advancing the SDGs.

What is meaningful youth engagement?

The term "meaningful youth engagement" describes how young people should participate in the formulation of decisions and policies. Governments, youth groups, and United Nations organizations have created several guiding principles over time that, when put into practice as a whole, may make youth participation more significant and efficient from the viewpoints of both young populations and policymakers. When youth participation deviates from these tenets, it runs the danger of becoming tokenistic and can lead to decisions that are made without consideration for the lived experiences, knowledge, and solutions of young people. As a result, governmental institutions lose public trust, which makes policymaking less efficient.

Meaningful youth engagement advances the achievement of sustainable development, peace and security, human rights, and gender equality goals

Young people, who have been referred to as the "torchbearers" of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#), were crucial in securing consensus on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Youth have a stake in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals because 90 of their indicators are thought to be connected to them. They will gain a great deal from the accomplishment of the Goals, and as will be discussed in the parts that follow, they are actively taking part in the implementation process.

Youth engagement at all levels: moving from quantity to quality

The United Nations and its Member States have consistently promoted youth involvement since the organization's founding. Discussions over youth at the UN began in 1965 with the adoption of the [Declaration on the Promotion Among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect, and Understanding between Peoples](#). The General Assembly took a step further in 1995 by urging "the full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and decision-making" in the [World Programme of Action for Youth](#) to the Year 2000 and Beyond. Numerous later resolutions have reaffirmed this pledge.

- ✚ Youth engagement in decision-making at the national level

Since the 1995 approval of the World Programme of Action for Youth, several governments have taken action to ensure meaningful youth engagement. Most governments have national youth policies in place, and many have also created systems to encourage the more organized involvement of adolescents in decision-making.

✦ Youth engagement in united nations organs and related mechanisms and processes

Young people have long participated actively in the United Nations system of decision-making. Despite significant advancements over the previous 20 years, there are still significant coverage gaps. Members of the United Nations called on "each country and the United Nations to support the promotion and creation of mechanisms to involve youth representation in all United Nations processes to influence those processes" in [Agenda 21](#), which was adopted at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. There has been a gradual, if uneven, growth of mechanisms to allow young people to participate actively in intergovernmental decision-making in response to this and other similar announcements.

Gaps and shortcomings

Youth engagement initiatives now in place throughout the world have serious flaws in four critical areas, according to young people. First, youth have drawn attention to the disparity in chances for youth to participate in UN decision-making processes. [The Major Group for Children and Youth](#), for example, does not have authority over all of the General Assembly's activities, and because it is one of 21 constituencies made up of major groups and other stakeholders, participation options are fairly limited. Second, youth have also expressed their dissatisfaction with the disconnect between input and impact. They are extremely worried about "lip service" involvement, in which they are only contacted when a significant decision is announced. Third, they have warned that current policies may act as obstacles to inclusiveness and diversity. The most fortunate adolescents are frequently the ones who can afford to give their time and make out-of-pocket expenditures to participate in the multilateral processes since there is a lack of systematic and organized funding to promote youth engagement. Fourth, youth have emphasized the difficulties of being adequately equipped to participate in decision-making processes. They highlight challenges to cooperation amongst young constituencies, a lack of timely access to information, insufficient chances for training and mentoring, and challenges navigating a disjointed and complicated United Nations decision-making structure.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEMBER STATES

✦ Expand and strengthen youth participation in decision-making at all levels

- ❖ Make a strong commitment to meaningful youth engagement in decision-making at the local, national, regional and global levels and endorse a global standard for meaningful youth engagement based on the core principles outlined in the present brief.
- ❖ Ensure the establishment of a national youth consultative body in every country that adheres to the core principles and has a mandate and the requisite resources to formally engage in national policy-making and decision-making processes.
- ❖ Establish a clear and effective monitoring framework to track progress against these commitments, including through regular reporting to the General Assembly.

✦ Make meaningful youth engagement a requirement in all united nations decision-making processes

- ❖ Take a decision to ensure the systematic integration of meaningful youth participation into all United Nations intergovernmental mechanisms and processes at the global and regional levels.
- ❖ Put in place clear arrangements for youth engagement across the work of the General Assembly as a complement to those under the remit of the major groups.
- ❖ Grant formal status and a stronger mandate to the [Economic and Social Council Youth Forum](#) so that it serves as the official entry point for youth engagement across the Economic and Social Council cycle.
- ❖ Review the working methods of the Security Council and its relevant subsidiary bodies to significantly strengthen youth engagement in its work.
- ❖ Enhance the [United Nations Youth Delegate Programme](#) through wider participation by Member States and by expanding its application across a wider range of United Nations intergovernmental processes.
- ❖ Ensure more systematic financial resourcing of youth engagement in intergovernmental processes with a particular focus on boosting participation of young people from developing countries.

✦ Support the establishment of a standing united nations youth townhall and an integrated programme from the united nations system to facilitate greater diversity, representativeness and preparedness in youth participation

- ❖ Support the establishment of a standing United Nations Youth Townhall, convened by the Assistant Secretary- General for Youth Affairs, to provide the world’s young people with a dedicated space to better prepare for participation in decision-making mechanisms of the United Nations and to boost the diversity of youth voices informing the work of the United Nations.
- ❖ Support the development of an integrated programme of work by the United Nations system to facilitate more meaningful youth participation at all levels ranging from capacity development and training to systematic sharing of tools and information.

CONCLUSION

Initial discussions with Member States, the UN system, and organizations headed by and focused on young people have helped to clarify the gaps and areas for proposed action as laid forth in the current brief. To fulfill our shared goal to involve youth in decision-making in the most meaningful and effective way possible, Member States now have the chance to capitalize on the momentum and expand on each of these areas for action. The Secretary-General also urges young people to continue supporting and joining in with our initiatives to achieve Our Common Agenda, to carry out the Sustainable Development Goals, and to participate in decision-making processes in the spirit of openness, inclusiveness, and cooperation that our time needs.

RESOURCE

1. [Policy brief on Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-making Processes](#)