

# Youth Engagement

## 2025

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**Guides on Citizen  
Engagement for Parliaments**

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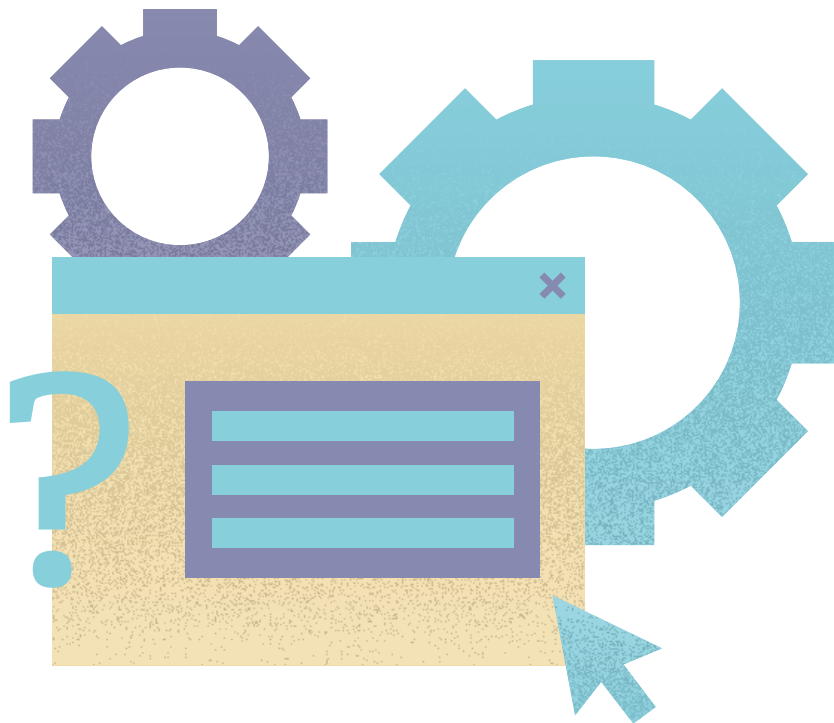
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# How to use this interactive Guide



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# Executive summary

Youth engagement is key for a healthy democracy. Young people are the future generations that will lead our democracies. They are also often amongst the most disengaged people of our societies. It is therefore a democratic imperative that parliaments actively promote **meaningful youth engagement**, if we are to strengthen our democracies into sustainable political systems.

This Guide is aimed at parliamentary staff and Members of Parliament (MPs) who want to learn more about engaging young people in parliamentary business. We use a wide range of examples from parliaments across the world to indicate how to design, deliver and evaluate meaningful youth engagement activities. By meaningful engagement we mean activities that are two-way and constructive, where the process itself is genuinely open to the input of young people.

The Guide reviews some of the **benefits** and **challenges** that meaningful youth engagement can bring for parliaments and the young people involved. We show that democracies stand to benefit from the democratic skills and knowledge that young people can build through meaningful engagement.

We then present four models that parliaments can use to carry out meaningful youth engagement in parliamentary business:

1. committees and caucuses
2. reference groups and panels
3. youth parliaments
4. outreach programmes and activities

This Guide then reviews how to implement these in practice, drawing from examples of different types of parliaments. Implementing any of these models effectively requires attention to the following considerations:

- » **Purpose and strategy**  
What do you want to achieve and why?
- » **Participant recruitment**  
Who should be involved and how will you reach them?
- » **Quality of engagement**  
How can you ensure open, equitable and informed engagement?
- » **Linkage with parliamentary processes**  
How will young people's contributions be used?
- » **Resources needed**  
What resources (e.g., staff, time, funds, technology) do you need to ensure meaningful engagement takes place?
- » **Evaluation**  
How effective are engagement activities (both for participants and as a way of informing parliamentary business)?

Finally, we provide a checklist for assessing whether your approach reflects our **eight principles of parliamentary public engagement**:



Purpose



Inclusion



Openness and transparency



Collaboration and empowerment



Ethical standards



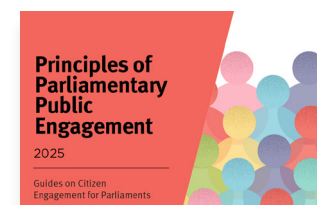
Planning and resourcing



Integration and coordination



Impact and evaluation



***See our Guide on 'Principles of Parliamentary Public Engagement' for more detail on the principles***

# Introduction

Improving youth engagement is an aim shared by parliaments around the world. The focus on young people and their representation in parliament has increased in the last decades. This is partly due to a recognition that young people make up half of the world's population, yet less than 3% of parliamentarians are under the age of 30.<sup>1</sup> Frameworks such as the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulate the right of children to be involved in decisions that concern them;<sup>2</sup> the European Union has also developed strategies and action plans to promote the meaningful participation and empowerment of young people.<sup>3</sup>

Another trend recognised by democracies around the world is declining trust in politics, including among young people. Young people are reporting lower engagement in 'formal' politics such as political parties and institutional bodies. Some point to an increase in informal engagement through volunteering and campaigning activities as a positive development; others question whether only more privileged groups engage in this way.

In this Guide, we call on supporters of parliamentary democracy to look seriously at youth engagement and consider how they can introduce programmes that facilitate truly meaningful engagement with young people.

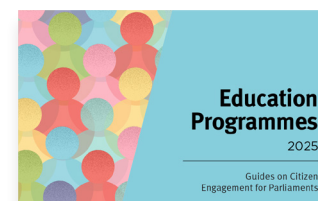
The Guide draws from extensive research of parliamentary practice, including desk research and interviews, and feedback from an international Advisory Group established to develop these Guides on Citizen Engagement (see Section 7):

- » **Section 1** outlines the potential benefits of youth engagement programmes for parliaments and young people
- » **Section 2** presents potential challenges
- » **Section 3** discusses four different models of youth engagement in parliamentary business
- » **Section 4** provides guidance on how to put these approaches into practice
- » **Section 5** suggests key considerations for evaluating the success of these approaches

- » **Section 6** draws on our Guide on Principles of Parliamentary Public Engagement, listing a checklist for assessing how well a programme or activity is meeting key principles
- » **Section 7** points to other sources of information on the topic of youth engagement with parliaments

## Who are 'young people'?

Throughout this Guide we refer to 'young people' as the target audience for engagement. The definition of 'young people' may vary across countries and contexts, given that benchmarks such as the age of majority and voting eligibility differ. This Guide offers advice for engaging those who are considered 'young' in the context you work in. The guidance is most relevant for young people of secondary school age and above.



**See our Guide on 'Education Programmes' for more engagement methods for younger children**

<sup>1</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (2021) *Youth participation in national parliaments*

<sup>2</sup> United Nations (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*

<sup>3</sup> EU Youth Strategy | European Youth Portal



## Meaningful youth engagement

Meaningful youth engagement is engagement that is two-way, constructive and conducted in good faith, with decision-makers responsive to the ideas raised and young people empowered by the process.

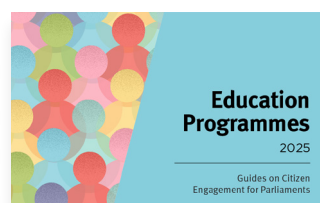
Young people are not just future voters: they can make contributions to political life and debate now. By meaningful youth engagement, we refer therefore to opportunities through which young people get involved in actual parliamentary business.

This is distinct from the activities parliaments deliver to build young people's understanding of parliament, including classroom activities, visits, games and simulations. This work can be incredibly valuable for encouraging participation in parliaments and for maintaining the legitimacy of democratic institutions across generations (see our Guide on Education Programmes for more information).

However, here we focus on how parliaments can empower young people by bringing them and their concerns into parliamentary business itself.

We also outline the ways in which youth engagement is beneficial for parliaments. We focus on four main models for involving young people in the legislative, oversight or budgeting processes of parliaments.

In presenting these approaches, we aim to address certain critiques that have been levelled at parliamentary youth engagement (Table 1) and provide guidance on how to avoid these potential pitfalls, drawing from a wide range of examples.



**See our Guide on  
'Education Programmes'**

**Table 1:** Critiques of parliamentary youth engagement programmes (or, how *not* to do it)

<b>Elitist</b>	Catering to young people who already have political ambitions, who are often also from advantaged socio-economic backgrounds <sup>4</sup>
<b>Individualistic</b>	Focusing on individual participants and their personal development, rather than benefits for wider communities <sup>5</sup>
<b>Patronising</b>	Celebrating the roles that young people will play in 'the future' rather than focusing on what they can contribute now and taking their inputs seriously. <sup>6</sup>
<b>Corrective</b>	Focusing solely on educational activities, based on the implicit assumption that those who are not inclined to participate have a knowledge deficit and need to be trained to participate in the 'right' way. <sup>7</sup>
<b>Limited/ing</b>	Allowing young people only to input on 'young people's issues' like education.
<b>Urban-centric</b>	Excluding those from more remote parts of the country (and those with fewer resources) due to activities taking place in the capital or other urban centres. <sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Keating, A. & Melis, G. (2017) Social media and youth political engagement: Preaching to the converted or providing a new voice for youth? *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 19(4), 877-894; Trivelli, C., & Morel, J. (2020) Rural Youth Inclusion, Empowerment, and Participation. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 57(4), 635-649

<sup>5</sup> Trivelli, C. & Morel, J. (2020)

<sup>6</sup> Kwon, S. A. (2018) The politics of global youth participation. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 22(7), 926-940; Matthieu, J., Vrydagh, J., Caluwaerts, D. & Erzeel, S. (2020) The democratic credentials of youth parliaments. The case of the Belgian Jeugd Parlement Jeunesse. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 26(2), 204-222.

<sup>7</sup> Walther, A., Lüküslü, D. G., Loncle, P. & Pais, A. (2021) Regimes of Youth Participation? Comparative Analysis of Youth Policies and Participation across European Cities. *YOUNG*, 29(2), 191-209.

<sup>8</sup> Trivelli, C., & Morel, J. Trivelli, C. & Morel, J. (2020) Rural Youth Inclusion, Empowerment, and Participation. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 57(4), 635-649.

## Section 1: Benefits

Meaningful youth engagement in parliamentary business offers substantial benefits for young people as well as the legislative, oversight and budgeting functions to which they are contributing (Table 2).

**Table 2:** Potential benefits of youth engagement in parliamentary business

<b>Shared benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Better representation of young people</li> <li>» Increased democratic skills and knowledge among young people</li> </ul>
<b>Benefits for parliaments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Hearing new and different perspectives</li> <li>» Increased trust and legitimacy among young people</li> </ul>
<b>Benefits for young people</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Experience of formal politics</li> <li>» Development of civic identity</li> </ul>



### Shared benefits

#### Better representation of young people

Young people have a deficit in descriptive parliamentary representation, with only about 3% of parliamentarians across the world being under the age of 30. Research

has shown that low levels of descriptive representation hinder substantive representation of citizens; put simply, when parliamentarians are not from a specific demographic group, they are less likely to understand the needs of that group. If parliamentarians are not young people themselves, they are less likely to be able to represent the needs of young people.

This is further amplified by the fact that young people tend to be able to vote or be a parliamentarian only from 18 or 21 years old onwards. Besides this, voter turnout is often particularly low amongst young people, which can mean that politicians feel they have less of an incentive to capture their needs and views. Young people therefore have a particularly acute deficit of representation.

Parliamentary youth engagement can help to redress this deficit. By providing pathways to consider the needs and challenges that young people face, parliamentarians can better understand how to represent young people. Meaningful parliamentary youth engagement activities can help to identify ways of addressing challenges faced by young people. Better representation of young people therefore benefits both parliaments and young people.

#### Increased democratic skills and knowledge among young people

Both young people and parliaments alike benefit from the knowledge and skills that young people can gain from effective engagement programmes and activities.<sup>9</sup> Along with knowledge about parliament, its functions and its history, engagement can develop the ‘soft’ skills that might enable active democratic participation in the future.

For example, formats such as deliberative methods might develop young people’s interpersonal skills as well as their ability to critically analyse information from different sources and form their own opinions. Other skills include collaboration with others and conflict resolution.

Some find that engagement activities can build young people’s confidence and sense of recognition by others. This might support the development of young people’s political ‘agency’: the ability to take action on issues they care about.

Others point to the intergenerational collaboration that youth engagement programmes enable between young people, parliamentarians and staff. This can help decision-makers to better reflect the interests of different generations in policy and legislation. Gaining experience of working with adults can also help young people gain skills that will be useful in education and work. Overall, parliamentary democracies should benefit in the long term from having a more engaged, active and informed citizenry.

<sup>9</sup>These are benefits that can be gained by all types of participants, not just young people. For further discussion of how specific engagement mechanisms can build democratic skills and knowledge, please see our other Guides (see [Section 7](#) for the full list).



## Benefits for parliaments

### New and different perspectives

Young people have ideas and opinions on many issues, not just those that we might automatically associate with youth concerns (e.g., education, climate change). Young people are affected by a wide range of policies such as transport, employment, health and housing. Their experiences and perspectives may differ from older generations'. Just like older generations, they have a right to be represented in debates on these policies.

Bringing young people in to contribute on a wide range of issues can therefore be valuable, for example to committees developing legislation or conducting scrutiny, or for individual parliamentarians when developing their understanding of an issue. Some argue as well that drawing on young people's views is a way for parliaments to guard against short-termism. Young people might highlight ways in which future generations stand to be affected by policy and legislation.

### Increased trust and legitimacy

Parliaments risk widening the gap between young people and democratic institutions if they don't make efforts to bring young people into parliamentary activity and decision-making. To young people, parliaments might seem "far and distant places",<sup>10</sup> and may even be objects of mistrust. Young people from marginalised or historically oppressed communities are particularly likely to hold negative beliefs about parliaments.

Establishing routes for these young people to engage with parliaments, rather than expecting that they will come of their own accord, can encourage young people to see parliaments as worth being involved in and open to them. Once young people develop trust in parliament, they are more likely to continue engaging longer term.



## Benefits for young people

### Experience of formal politics

Regardless of whether young people's ideas or proposals directly influence outcomes, parliamentary engagement activities can be an opportunity for young people to make their case, to place their views on the official record and to experience how formal political institutions work. This might demystify political institutions for them.

Formal, institutional politics are not necessarily the 'right' or only way for young people to make themselves heard. However, the experience may help them understand what is expected, the norms that are observed – for example, around how to express oneself and cite evidence – and on a fundamental level, how change happens in a parliamentary democracy.

### Development of civic identity

Long-term engagement programmes, such as reference groups or youth parliaments (see below), can offer young people the opportunity to connect with others who might share their views and experiences. This can enable a sense of community, and in a practical sense can constitute networks for future democratic activity.

Getting involved in engagement activities allows young people to come face-to-face with decision-makers. Young people might establish contact with their own MPs or one who campaigns on an issue they care about. This adds to the social capital (i.e. their relationships and networks) they might draw on for future civic participation, for their own benefit and that of their communities.

<sup>10</sup> Matthieu, J., Vrydagh, J., Caluwaerts, D., & Erzeel, S. (2020) *The democratic credentials of youth parliaments. The case of the Belgian Jeugd Parlement Jeunesse*. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 26(2), p.206.



#### CASE STUDY

### How young people are bringing the issues they care about to parliament



Even if they are not directly involved in parliamentary activity, young people understand that parliaments are important institutions and treat them as a focal point for protest and activism. For example, the School Strikes for Climate movement initiated by **Swedish** teenager Greta Thunberg took the form of weekly protests outside the Swedish Riksdag. Similarly, unrest in East African countries such as **Kenya** and **Uganda**, driven partly by youth dissatisfaction with the economic and political situation, has focused on parliament buildings.

Some parliaments are taking action in response to these signals from young people. For example, following the 2022 mass protests (Aragalaya) against the Sri Lankan government, the Parliament of **Sri Lanka** took steps to integrate young people and their concerns into parliamentary routines. This included the appointment of external youth representatives to the Sectoral Oversight Committees to ensure that committees were considering young people's needs. A youth-led campaign that has met with great success is 'Not Too Young To Run', the campaign to promote

the right of young people to run for elected office. In many cases, such as in **Nigeria** where the campaign started, the voting age and the age at which you can run for office are not aligned. The campaign considers this an injustice. Following a successful campaign in Nigeria, campaigns have been initiated in **Zambia, Zimbabwe** and **Paraguay**.

These examples and many others demonstrate that young people possess an energy and orientation towards their parliaments that parliaments would be wise to engage with directly.

## Section 2: Challenges

Building on the critiques presented in [Table 1](#), Table 3 outlines the main potential challenges to meaningful parliamentary youth engagement. Young people's lack of interest and trust in parliament is treated as a fundamental shared challenge.

**Table 3:** Potential challenges to youth engagement in parliamentary business

<b>Shared challenges</b>	» Mistrust or lack of interest
<b>Challenges for parliaments</b>	» Ensuring diversity » Limited time and resources
<b>Challenges for young people</b>	» Social barriers » Individual barriers



### Shared challenges

#### Mistrust or lack of interest

Many young people do not have positive perceptions of parliament, especially if they are from marginalised communities that have experienced poor treatment by those in authority. Overcoming mistrust, through carefully designed engagement that demonstrates institutional integrity and reliability, is key to facilitating meaningful youth engagement.

Bearing in mind the critiques presented in [Table 1](#), parliaments must be careful not to reserve engagement opportunities for those who come to them. They should make proactive efforts to build relationships with marginalised groups and design activities with inclusion in mind. This includes engaging with youth groups and ensuring communications show how parliament is relevant to young people's lives (see [Section 4](#)).

While young people's mistrust might be the larger challenge, we should not overlook the fact that many parliamentarians may in turn mistrust, or be wary, of young people. Young people's behaviour, norms and sense of humour may clash with parliamentary culture, and parliamentarians may not wish to let this unpredictable element into parliamentary life.



## Challenges for parliaments

### Ensuring diversity

Parliaments need to ensure they are not engaging only those who are already interested in politics and putting themselves forward for opportunities. Considerations around diversity and representativeness will differ across engagement formats and the topics being focused on. In some cases, parliaments might want to get the views of a specific group on an issue that is relevant to them. In others, they may want to hear from a more diverse group to understand the range of views on an issue. Methods such as deliberative formats call for representative samples in terms of demographics, attitudes and other factors.

### Limited time and resources

Involving young people in parliamentary business might present greater resource implications than delivering education or simulation-based programmes, where external partners such as NGOs and educational institutions can take on delivery responsibilities. Integrating with parliamentary business may require more staff time, potential amendments to procedure, and buy-in from parliamentarians. This integration into parliamentary institutions can help to mitigate the risk posed by over-reliance on NGO or donor funding, whereby initiatives can finish abruptly if funding is lost or comes to an end.

These resource implications can be mitigated by effective prioritisation, and by not aiming just for large, ambitious programmes but operating smaller, more ad-hoc projects relevant to the issues being considered by parliament.



## Challenges for young people

### Social barriers

Even young people come from all walks of life. Barriers like distance from parliament, a busy work or study life, and lack of resources affect how they might engage with parliament. In some contexts, young people may face additional barriers through irregular access to education (including limited civic education), lack of internet connectivity, or poor transport links. These factors can affect both access to parliament itself as well as access to information about parliament and opportunities to engage.

Parliaments can address these barriers when planning activities – for example by using online tools, or conversely by investing time in visits to remote communities – to enable engagement among all groups including those who are time- or resource- poor or live far away. Similarly, activities should be designed and delivered in ways that are open to those from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and those with disabilities.

Addressing these barriers also requires careful consideration of how parliamentary spaces, norms and practices might be experienced as exclusionary. Mitigations might include communicating clearly about what to expect, or working with young people and/or their representatives to co-produce engagement formats that will help them feel comfortable. This might entail holding sessions outside parliament itself.

### Individual barriers

Aside from the issues of trust and interest discussed above, young people's different personalities and level of political experience can mean that some find it harder to put themselves forward for opportunities, or feel excluded during activities if they do engage. To hear the perspectives of these less confident young people, inclusive recruitment, facilitation and moderation are therefore key for effective engagement.



## Section 3: Four models of youth engagement

This section presents four models that can support meaningful parliamentary youth engagement. Having one or more of these in place does not in itself guarantee effective and inclusive youth involvement in parliamentary business, but it does provide the potential – through the allocation of time, space, staff and other resources – for such activity to be developed.



### 1. Youth committees and caucuses

Committees and caucuses are groups of parliamentarians who are tasked with a particular responsibility, usually around a particular policy area. Committees' work usually forms a part of legislative and oversight processes and procedures, while caucuses' mandates are more informal. 64% of parliaments have committees that focus on youth issues.<sup>11</sup> In some cases this is not the sole focus of the committee, but is often combined with topics such as education.

21% of parliaments have caucuses of parliamentarians – usually young people themselves – who work together on issues affecting young people.<sup>12</sup> For example, **Zimbabwe's** parliamentary youth caucus hosted a youth inclusive budget conference which brought young people together with parliamentarians, ministers and civil society representatives over two days to discuss how to ensure the 2025 national budget would meet the needs of young people.

Having such a committee or caucus does not in itself guarantee that young people will get involved. Their activities need to be designed to make it easy for young people who are not

parliamentarians to engage, for example through appointing youth representatives to advise committees, or involving young people in consultation processes.

#### CASE STUDY

### Committees with a focus on children and youth



The Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science at the Houses of the Oireachtas in **Ireland** conducted extensive youth engagement during the 2020-24 parliament. Young people were encouraged and supported to provide written and oral evidence to the committee on topics such as mental health and the impact of Covid-19 on education. The committee also held outreach visits to gather the views and experiences of young people.

The Committee on Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth at the **German** Bundestag has a subcommittee called the Children's Commission (known as KiKo).

The role of KiKo is to represent the interests of children and young people in parliament. KiKo collaborates with experts and civil society organisations and actively encourages participation from young people in its work. The previous chair of the committee, Amelia Fester, was the youngest representative to be elected to the Bundestag, at the age of 23. During her time as chair, she instituted youth engagement by only inviting evidence from those under 27 years old.

Both committees are examples of existing parliamentary infrastructure that can be built on to enable meaningful engagement with young people.

<sup>11,12</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (2021) *Youth participation in national parliaments*



## 2. Reference groups and panels

Some parliaments have established reference groups and panels of young people to engage in parliamentary business over a sustained period of time. These groups typically contribute to a particular aspect of parliamentary business. These can be annual programmes that appoint a new group each year, or panels assembled to inform a specific piece of work (e.g., an inquiry or piece of legislation). Sometimes, as in the case of the **New Zealand**

Parliament Rito group, the remit of this engagement is open for definition by the young people themselves. In other cases, the focus is a particular parliamentary function, such as with the Parliament of **Sri Lanka** scheme to bring youth representatives into the work of sectoral oversight committees.

### CASE STUDY

#### Youth reference group at the New Zealand Parliament: Rito o te Paremata



Rito o te Paremata is a group of young people appointed each year to advise the Office of the Clerk and the Parliamentary Service on how to improve parliamentary relations with young people. The initiative was launched in 2021. The name of the group, Rito, comes from the term for new shoots in harakeke flax, symbolising the role of the group in fostering the growth of the next generation of citizens.

Each Rito group develops and delivers a project of its own choice, within the broad topic area of improving youth engagement with parliament. The 2021 group produced a four-part video series highlighting different ways that young people could get involved with parliament, from petitions to select committees. The group is also consulted on certain parliamentary business affecting youth and provides feedback on any youth-oriented materials that the parliament produces.





### 3. Youth parliaments

The overall aim of youth parliaments is to provide young people with experience of parliamentary activities and processes. Over half of all parliaments around the world run some kind of youth parliament, ranging from one-day events to programmes that run across a year or even two. Youth parliaments are a great opportunity to actively engage young people in parliamentary business.

The majority of youth parliaments function in parallel to national or state parliaments, with young people conducting independent campaigns or investigations on issues of interest and engaging in simulations of parliamentary work. However, some youth parliaments enable direct collaboration between youth parliamentarians and ‘actual’ parliamentarians.

#### CASE STUDY

### Youth parliaments



There are various ways that youth parliaments can facilitate direct engagement between young people, parliamentarians and parliamentary processes.

In **Cyprus**, youth representatives present their reports to parliamentary committees, who are then responsible for considering the findings.

In **Wales**, ministers and committee chairs participate in youth parliament committee sessions, with Senedd committees also consulting young members on issues of relevance to them.

In **Uzbekistan**, draft legislation is shared with members of the youth parliament for their feedback. Members of the youth parliament are also entitled to participate in committee meetings with the consent of the respective committee chairperson.

Another way for youth parliamentary work to connect with parliamentary work proper is for young people to submit reports or bills for the consideration of parliamentarians. For example, the youth parliaments of **France** and **Mexico** empower young people to bring forward draft bills. Since the inception of the Children’s Parliament in France in 1995, four bills proposed by young members have been passed into law. A further law, concerning environmental issues, included articles mandating biodegradable bags, proposed by members of the Children’s Parliament.

The Children’s Parliament of **Namibia** has achieved similar success through lobbying activities. In 2015, they successfully campaigned for increased grants for orphans and vulnerable children.





## 4. Outreach programmes and activities

Many parliaments conduct outreach in some form. Some parliaments have dedicated teams who are responsible for travelling around the country delivering sessions with community groups.

In some systems, this function of hearing and addressing local issues is reserved for MPs. Another common model is for the Speaker or Presiding Officer of parliament to conduct annual tours, visiting different constituencies and hearing their concerns.

Alongside the parliamentary structures discussed above, investing in relationships with youth organisations can enable both ad hoc projects and long-term programmes of youth engagement with parliamentary business. For example, consultation activities for legislation or oversight can use existing youth infrastructure outside of parliaments (e.g., youth groups, social media communities) to gather young people's views and experiences around a particular topic.

### CASE STUDY

#### Parliament on the road

The National Assembly of **Zambia** has been conducting a parliamentary 'roadshow' since 2017 as part of an effort to raise awareness about parliament. The roadshow's approach is one of 'infotainment', incorporating music and art to bring information to life as the roadshow moves

through communities making announcements about the work of the National Assembly and distributing materials such as brochures and T-shirts. The roadshow is particularly popular with young people due to its lively and entertaining approach.



### CASE STUDY

#### Maximising the value of youth engagement

The parliament of **Indonesia** runs a youth parliament each year that sees 132 high school students from across the country come to parliament for a programme of seminars and simulations. The initiative makes extensive use of social media in order to expand its reach beyond those participating directly in activities. Graphics, videos and images are

disseminated through TikTok, Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) to share information about parliament in an engaging, youth-focused way. Parliament also provides updates about the activities of the youth parliament itself in order to encourage further applications and engagement with the programme.



## Section 4: How to put it into practice



### Purpose and strategy

Youth engagement is a general concept that needs to be focused for activities to be meaningful and achieve impact.

When identifying a focus for youth engagement activities, parliaments can consider:

- » How do you already engage with young people? How can you **adapt** these activities to enable meaningful participation in parliamentary business? This might involve collaboration between education teams and teams focused on parliamentary business, e.g., committees.
- » Which **issues should you prioritise** for youth engagement? Where, for example, might youth voice be most needed?
- » What **impact** do you want activities to have on young people and their communities? What do you want them to learn or achieve? Often, youth engagement programmes focus on providing young people with the skills and knowledge they need to become politicians themselves. Programmes should also provide young people with active experience of wider democratic skills and values, such as engaging with multiple viewpoints, collaborating with others, and conflict resolution.
- » How will you **involve experts** such as youth organisations in the design, delivery and evaluation of activities?



## Participant recruitment

The purpose of a programme or activity usually includes an indication of the **target audience**. This is the group of young people whose views or experiences you want to bring into parliamentary business: for example, a specific group such as out-of-school children or disabled young people, or young people in general. Consider how you will capture the different experiences of subgroups.

Once you have identified the target audience, consider **how best to reach them**. Consider, for example, which organisations already work with them, or how they organise themselves online. This sort of information helps to inform methods as well: is there an advantage to bringing them together in parliament, or is it best to go to them, or set up a way for disparate groups to engage remotely (e.g., online, or through other infrastructure that might be

available such as constituency offices, schools, colleges, universities or external youth networks)?

Parliaments can engage such organisations if their aims and audience align with the purpose of the proposed engagement activity. However, there should be a balance between those who have already been ‘coached’ to participate and those who may need more support. Parliaments should also be careful not to show bias towards organisations representing particular views or agendas when selecting partners for engagement.

### CASE STUDY

## Organisations supporting young people to engage with parliament



The **Nigerian** NGO OrderPaper operates a programme called Leg’ACE (short for Legislative Accountability and Constituency Engagement), which targets young people (among other groups) at the grassroots level and builds their capacity as advocates. The programme educates citizens about parliamentary processes and how they can participate, and facilitates internship opportunities for students. The programme also empowers citizens to monitor the implementation of Zonal Intervention Projects, constituency-based initiatives for infrastructure development.

Similarly, Raise our Voice **Australia** (ROVA) focuses on building the campaigning skills of young women and gender-diverse people.

ROVA delivers workshops to build knowledge around democratic processes and to develop “values-led leadership”. ROVA also runs an annual programme, ‘Raise our Voice in Parliament’, which sees young Australians submit 90-second speeches on a specific question. Participating MPs then read out selected speeches in the chamber. The question young people are answering in 2025 is: “What should the government do today to make life better for young Aussies tomorrow?”



As mentioned, youth engagement programmes are often pitched at young people who are already high-achieving and interested in a career in politics. This group should not be relied on to represent the youth voice. Recruitment strategies should be driven by the issue or project at hand.

In the case of larger programmes such as youth parliaments, **diversity** should be of high priority when it comes to recruitment. Diverse recruitment can be achieved by working with specialist organisations or allowing young people to appoint their peers, rather than letting parliaments run selection processes.<sup>13</sup>

Youth parliaments often appoint their Members through elections. One way to ensure diversity amongst participants is to supplement the elected cohort with those from particular groups.

This is the case in **Namibia** and **Wales**, where those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and vulnerable groups are appointed with the help of specialist civil society organisations. The youth parliament run by the Parliament of **Trinidad and Tobago** has recently piloted an approach to involving young offenders in the programme.

Participants may need certain **costs** covered depending on the methods used. For example, participants may need help with travel costs or support with internet connectivity. Some parliaments have developed policies on travel subsidies to address funding gaps.

### Top tips

- ✓ Be clear about your target audience – do you need a cross-section of young people, or a more specific sub-group?
- ✓ Specialist colleagues or external organisations can advise you on what will help your target audience engage best
- ✓ Use a range of recruitment methods to make sure you're not just engaging socially advantaged young people

<sup>13</sup> Matthieu, J., Vrydagh, J., Caluwaerts, D., & Erzeel, S. (2020) *The democratic credentials of youth parliaments. The case of the Belgian Jeugd Parlement Jeunesse. The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 26(2), 204–222.

## Quality of engagement<sup>14</sup>

First, **ensure that the engagement activity is actually open to young people and their experiences.** Check with young people or organisations that represent them that the agenda or scope of the activity does not exclude different perspectives, and consider involving participants in designing the process. For example, committees might co-produce an inquiry with young people, or parliamentarians might work directly with young people to host an event or exhibition.

Second, **provide clear and accessible information about the engagement activity in ways that different groups can understand** (bearing in mind language barriers, sensory disabilities etc.). This might include details of the format of the activity, the topic(s) to be discussed, and what will happen next.

Third, **are you allowing young people time and opportunity to form and express their opinions?**<sup>15</sup>

This is related to the information you provide, so think about what young people might need before the engagement activity in terms of prompts and guidelines. This ensures they are prepared to engage in a way that benefits both them and the process. It is also related to the format that is chosen for engagement – are you offering ways for young people to share ideas with others, and have them challenged and built upon? Potential formats include deliberative workshops and focus groups, as well as design-oriented methods that task young people to co-create solutions to a given issue.

Finally, the inequalities that exist in society in general also exist among young people, which means that **it is important that activities are moderated not just fairly but equitably** (i.e. addressing the barriers that some participants might have, rather than treating everyone in the same way).

Facilitation techniques such as small-group discussions, allowing thinking time, and ensuring turn-taking, can help level the playing field for participants. This can lead to better outcomes in terms of insights gathered from participants.

More practical support such as language interpreting and alternative formats (Braille or Easy Read)<sup>16</sup> may be required depending on the needs of participants. Vulnerable participants and those under 18 should also be accompanied by trusted adults to support them if needed.

### Top tips

- ✓ Make sure that the activity and those involved in delivering it (including parliamentarians) are actually open to young people's views
- ✓ Provide young people with the information they need to engage fully
- ✓ Think about what formats will enable your target audience to engage best
- ✓ Actively address barriers and inequalities

#### CASE STUDY

### Youth Parliamentary Academy, Zambia

In 2024, the National Assembly of **Zambia** collaborated with Inter Pares to deliver a Youth Parliamentary Academy, a new initiative developed by Inter Pares.

Following a selection procedure that ensured participation from each province in Zambia, 20 young people (ages 19-24) were selected from over 400 applications to take part in the intensive programme.

Parliamentary officials and Inter Pares staff supported the young people to consider parliamentary procedure in detail and prepare recommendations for how the Assembly could better engage young people.

Participants were also specifically tasked to review and provide feedback on the Assembly's proposals for new civic education materials.

<sup>14</sup> Ideas adapted from Matthieu, J., Vrydagh, J., Caluwaerts, D., & Erzeel, S. (2020) *The democratic credentials of youth parliaments. The case of the Belgian Jeugd Parlement Jeunesse. The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 26(2), 204–222.

<sup>15</sup> Harada, A. (2021) *How to involve a diverse group of young people in local government decision making: A case study of Danish youth councils. Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 53, 820 – 836.

<sup>16</sup> Easy Read refers to the presentation of information in an accessible and easy to understand format, often combining images with small chunks of jargon-free text.



## Linkage with parliamentary processes

The linkage with parliamentary processes is more automatic for some models than for others. Committee activity (and to a lesser extent, that of caucuses) has direct links to parliamentary processes, but this will not always be obvious to participants ‘from the outside’. It should be made clear to participants how their input will be used and what will happen next.

Youth reference groups or panels are usually appointed for a specific time period and to align with the work of a particular parliamentary function. In some cases, as with the **New Zealand** Parliament Rito youth reference group, young people are able to define the focus of activities themselves (see case study in [Section 3](#)). In such cases, parliamentary staff responsible for administering the reference group or panel should be proactive in keeping other internal stakeholders updated on the group’s work and how they can engage with it.

There are various ways that youth parliaments can link in with parliamentary business, rather than proceed in parallel (see case study youth parliaments, [Section 3](#)).

It is usually best practice for parliamentarians to be actively involved in engagement initiatives from the planning stages (and in strategic stages, if initiating a new programme). This helps to ensure that processes have **buy-in from parliamentarians**. If parliamentarians cannot be directly involved in engagement activities with young people, staff should ensure that they learn about the activity through outputs like summaries to inform scrutiny, or ideas for new legislation or inquiry topics.

Parliamentarians are under no obligation to act on the input of young people from engagement processes, but they should acknowledge contributions and provide some form of response, justifying where views have been considered but not taken forward.

### CASE STUDY

## Alternative ways of including young people in the work of parliament



Many parliaments provide opportunities for young people to get experience of the working life of parliament. For example, the **National Council of Slovakia** offers annual internships for high-achieving university students. Interns are placed within a team in the parliamentary administration, the Chancellery. Interns might spend their time supporting the work of committees, parliamentary research services or the communications team.

Both houses at the **Parliament of Canada** operate ‘page’ programmes, paid opportunities for university students to provide administrative support to the chamber and committees while pursuing their studies at universities in the Ottawa region. The Library of Parliament’s tour guide programme is another opportunity for university students to gain work experience in the Canadian parliament and deliver a vital service that supports public engagement with parliament.

### Top tips

✓ Always acknowledge inputs from young people and how they are used by parliamentarians

✓ Look for ways in which existing work can be linked up, rather than inventing new schemes





## Resources needed

Youth engagement requires a combination of skills, expertise, infrastructure and networks.

Alongside regular engagement skills, staff and Members should be equipped with skills and knowledge about **how to engage with young people in particular**. Parliamentary staff might wish to produce specific guidance (ideally in collaboration with specialist organisations) on how to moderate discussions with young people. This matters given the power and experience gap that is likely to exist between young people and parliamentarians or parliamentary staff. Recruiting diverse staff can also help to bridge the gap.

If providing a dedicated programme for young people to feed into legislative, oversight or budgeting activity, **staff time** will need to be allocated. It may be helpful to start with one committee or topic area, and then scale up once staff resource is stabilised

and parliamentarians trust the process. Another option is to work with an external partner to deliver the programme in alignment with parliament's goals. For example, the **Scottish Youth Parliament** is delivered by a separate organisation with the same name, which has a staff team to conduct outreach, handle participant recruitment to the youth parliament, coordinate with parliament on activities held there, and support young people to run campaigns around issues that matter to them.

If your parliament focuses more on ad hoc youth engagement activities such as consultations, internal communication between engagement staff (where this resource exists) and those working on parliamentary business will be crucial – these links enable staff to identify opportunities for engagement, and for engagement outputs to be shared with decision-makers.

### Top tips

- ✓ Foster support among strategic leaders
- ✓ Invest in relationships with specialist youth engagement organisations and networks external to parliament
- ✓ Develop guidance for staff and MPs on how to engage young people, providing training where necessary
- ✓ Strengthen links between engagement staff and other staff, such as committees

## Section 5: Evaluation

This section suggests key considerations for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness and impact of youth engagement with parliamentary business. Collecting and analysing information on a range of dimensions will enable you to see how well you are meeting your goals and where your approach can be improved (Table 4).

Since the success of these activities requires good integration with parliamentary business, it is important to consider both the experience of young people themselves and those within the institution, i.e. staff and parliamentarians.

**Table 4:** Key evaluation dimensions of youth engagement with parliamentary business

Evaluation dimension	What to look at/measure
<b>Numbers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» How many young people are engaged?</li> <li>» How many activities take place? How many take place at parliament and how many take place elsewhere/online?</li> </ul>
<b>Representation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Who participates?</li> <li>» How diverse are the young people participating in the activity?</li> <li>» How representative are they of the population/your target audience(s)?</li> </ul>
<b>Linkage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Who is involved from the parliament? e.g., committees or other groups of parliamentarians, as well as staff.</li> <li>» At what stages are these groups of people involved?</li> </ul>
<b>Process and experiences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» What roles do different participants (including young people, parliamentarians and staff) play in the engagement process?</li> <li>» (How) were young people involved in the design of the process?</li> <li>» How were any tensions between young people's goals and interests and those of parliamentarians managed or resolved?</li> <li>» What is the feedback from young people on the experience and quality of engagement?</li> <li>» What is the feedback from parliamentarians and staff involved?</li> </ul>
<b>Outcomes and impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» What is the impact on young people's skills, knowledge and political engagement in the short, medium and long-term?<sup>17</sup></li> <li>» What influence does the activity have on parliamentary processes and policy?</li> <li>» What influence does the activity have on wider society? e.g., discourse, public opinion</li> </ul>

<sup>17</sup> For most parliamentary contexts, the short term, i.e. immediately after engagement, is what gets measured due to resources. However, for those with greater resources or access to academic partnerships, looking at impact on young people in the medium to long term can help inform programmes.

## Section 6: Checklist

Questions to help parliaments assess how well their youth engagement activities are meeting the eight principles set out in our Guide on Principles of Parliamentary Public Engagement.



### Purpose

Have you defined the objectives of your youth engagement activity or programme in collaboration with the relevant internal and external stakeholders?

Do you have the resources to achieve your objectives?

Are your objectives reflected in your evaluation plans?



### Openness and transparency

Have you developed information materials to support young people in their engagement – before, during and after the activity? Are these materials in a place and format that all young people can access?

Is the agenda open to young people's views and ideas?



### Inclusion

Have you considered the barriers different groups might face to engagement? Consider including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, ethnic minorities, disabled groups, speakers of minority languages, rural communities, young people not in education, employment or training.

Are you aware of/in contact with organisations/networks who can reach underrepresented groups?

Have you considered tailoring activities so that different groups, with different barriers can be heard?

Are the tools and methods you are using accessible for those you want to engage?



### Collaboration and empowerment

Are your activities designed to allow young people to engage as equals, and to be heard by parliamentarians?

Are your activities designed to build young people's democratic skills, knowledge and agency, as well as trust in parliament?



### Planning and resourcing

Do you have the resources (funding, time, people, skills) to design, deliver and evaluate effective youth engagement? A precursor to this is often having the support of senior leaders.

Have you considered how parliamentarians will be involved in or informed about activities or programmes?



### Integration and coordination

What opportunities are there in your parliament for youth engagement to be formally linked to parliamentary business?

Do staff and parliamentarians know how engagement can feed into their work?

Where specialist youth engagement staff exist, are there effective links between them and those working on parliamentary business?

Is there cross-party support for meaningful youth engagement in parliamentary business?



### Ethical standards

Are all staff and parliamentarians involved aware of their responsibilities under the relevant policies such as safeguarding and data protection?

Have you considered how to protect the rights of vulnerable young people and have you consulted with experts where appropriate?

Have you considered potential risks and how to mitigate them?



### Impact and evaluation

Do you have an evaluation framework based on your objectives?

Does your evaluation framework include ways to understand what kinds of young people are participating and where there are gaps?

Does your evaluation framework include ways to understand the experiences of participants as well as staff and parliamentarians?

Does your evaluation plan include points for reviewing and discussing data with relevant stakeholders (such as parliamentarians and senior staff)?



## Section 7: Useful materials on youth engagement

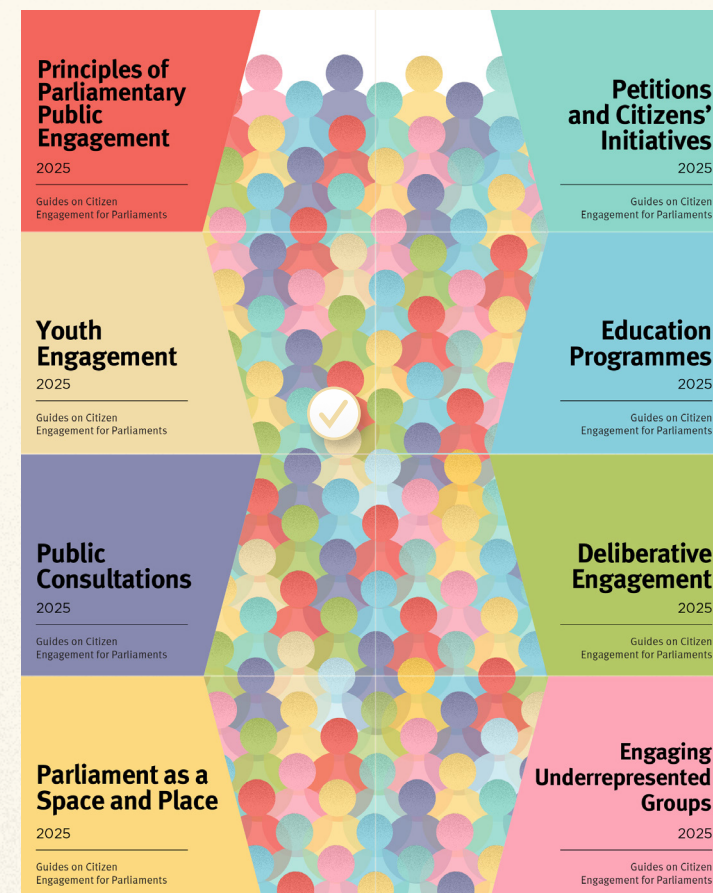
- » [Inter Pares, Youth Participation: A Self-Scan for Parliaments](#)
- » [Inter Pares, Key Principles for Youth Engagement](#)
- » [Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Youth Parliament Toolkit](#)
- » [Inter-Parliamentary Union, Youth participation in national parliaments](#)
- » [EU Children's Participation Platform, The Lundy Model of Child Participation](#)

### See our other **Guides on Citizen Engagement for Parliaments**

This Guide was developed by Professor Cristina Leston-Bandeira and Juliet Ollard at the International Parliament Engagement Network (IPEN) in collaboration with Inter Pares I Parliaments in Partnership – the EU's Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments.

The Guide draws from extensive research carried out in 2024 and 2025, including: a review of relevant academic research; interviews with academics and parliamentary officials from across the world; analysis of relevant practitioner reports and parliamentary documentation; testimonies from members of IPEN; and relevant seminars and workshops organised by Inter Pares and/or IPEN.

The Guide also incorporates feedback from an international Advisory Group established to develop this suite of Guides on Citizen Engagement for Parliaments, as well as from the IPEN Executive Team. The authors are very grateful to all those who shared their knowledge and expertise as part of this project.



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