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# HASMUN

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Kadir Has University  
UNESCO  
Model United Nations



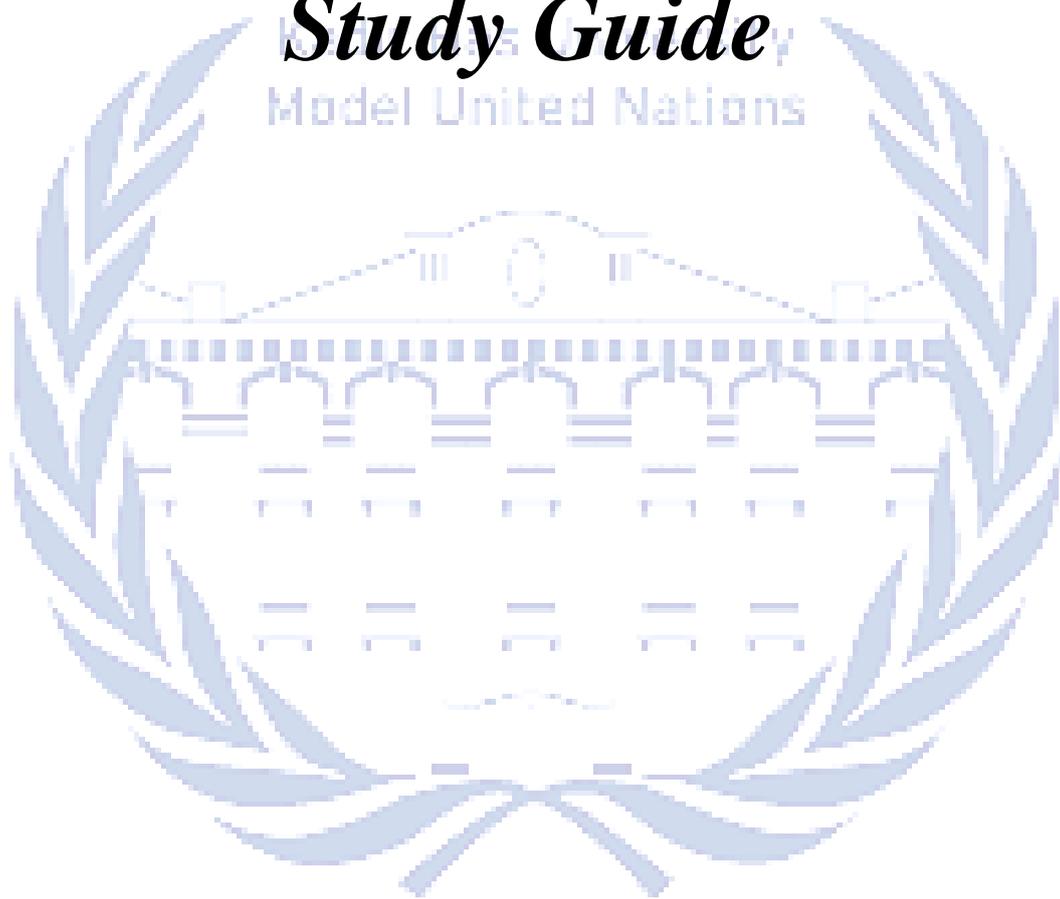
# HASMUN'25

## UNESCO

HASMUN

### *Study Guide*

Model United Nations



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# Letter from the Secretary-General

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to HASMUN 2025 — a journey that goes far beyond a typical Model United Nations conference.

This year, we invite you to become part of an experience built on diplomacy, dialogue, and the determination to create change. HASMUN has long stood as a platform for driven individuals to challenge perspectives, develop leadership, and speak for the world they envision. In every committee room, in every debate, we believe your voice has the power to shape not only resolutions, but real ideas for the future.

Whether this is your first MUN or one of many, we encourage you to approach each session with openness, curiosity, and commitment. The friendships you form, the ideas you exchange, and the challenges you overcome will stay with you long after the final gavel falls.

On behalf of the entire Secretariat, we are thrilled to have you with us. Prepare to question, to collaborate, and to grow.

We look forward to meeting you soon.

Warm regards,  
Nazrin Sadigova  
Secretary-General  
HASMUN 2025

# Letter from the Committee Board

Dearest Delegates,

It is an honor and a privilege to serve as the board members of UNESCO on behalf of HASMUN this year. We are all extremely proud to participate in such a prestigious conference. We share a deep excitement to see your enthusiasm in discussing the involvement of youth in political affairs, which is actually kind of funny seeing that we *are* the young individuals participating in a political simulation right now.

This year we tackle Combating the Erosion of Youth Participation in Electoral Democracies, a topic both urgent and essential to the future of democratic governance. While we discuss the issues affecting young people in the democratic electoral process—voter apathy and underrepresentation to structural barriers—we will work together to submit recommendations on how to resuscitate youth engagement in political decision-making. The input of young people towards a sustainable and more equal world is indispensable and yours will be at the vanguard in shaping an influential discourse on how their voice can be heard.

As your board members, we have prepared this study guide for you to grasp some general yet concise information about our agenda item as well as UNESCO itself. Although this document possesses a vast range of information about our topic, please keep in mind that you will have to do additional research on the policies, viewpoints, and actions of your allocated nations. These pages, as stated in their name, serve merely as a guide to lead you towards your further studies.

We aim to build a friendly, open, and respectful platform on which all the delegates will feel welcome to voice their opinion, react to opposing opinions, and prepare thoughtful plans. Regardless if it is your first or tenth MUN, we are here to help make the most out of it intellectually and personally.

Let's fill days like these with substance, cooperation, and diplomacy far greater than the closing ceremonies. Together we will discuss a subject at the very core of the futures of our societies, and we have little doubt the solutions we will propose will have a real impact.

If you have questions or would like to contact us in advance, please don't hesitate to do so.

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Best regards,

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## Introduction to the Committee

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, shortly known as UNESCO, is a body under the United Nations umbrella that focuses on promoting international education, science, culture, and communication all across the globe. Ever since its establishment in 1945, its primary mission has been to facilitate international cooperation across states as that's believed to be the only sustainable way to ensure and maintain global peace. The organization offers to share its expertise in education, sciences, and cultures with its 194 Member States in order to achieve and maintain that goal.

Over the years, UNESCO has been actively involved in advocating for human rights principles and democratic values to be integrated into each Member State's education system by encouraging them to create adequate policies, strategies, and programmes in this field, which it achieves through promoting dialogue among the authorized officials in the education industry. These officials include educational policy-makers, practitioners, teachers, researchers and more, and UNESCO supports these individuals in their progress towards developing national curricula, the preparation, production, and distribution of teaching and learning materials, and facilitates the networking of relevant authorities and stakeholders. These educational programmes, explained in detail in the next section, are mainly aimed to prepare learners to become informed and responsible citizens in just and democratic societies, and can be categorized on the organization's official web page as follows:

- Global citizenship education
- Education for just and democratic societies
- Education about the Holocaust and genocide
- Education as a tool to prevent violent extremism

UNESCO defines democracy as a something that cannot solely be defined as a concept that applies to every single case of its existence, but one that rather exists in harmony with each respective nation. It is a concept that is not purely participatory nor liberal, but the entirety of the process of organized arbitration between modernity and identity, in a representative sense. Since its establishment, UNESCO has greatly contributed to the construction and consolidation of democracy, as well as the development of democratic institutions to support the peaceful

democratic development of societies, particularly during transitional governments, governmental shifts, and the processes of transition itself.

## **UNESCO's Efforts in Relation to our Agenda Item**

As stated in its introduction part, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization has several educational programmes that aim to shape the world by educating the youth in the path of becoming responsible citizens in democratic societies. While each programme focuses on a certain topic, overall, they all contribute to the participation of youth in a democratic world.

### **Global citizenship education (GCED)**

Global citizenship education (GCED) is a term used to the educational programme that, while having been coined only fairly recently in the year 2011, aims to teach, integrate, and represent the core principles and values that are central to UNESCO's mission ever since the establishment of the organization. What that implies is that while not having that long of a history as a term, GCED is actually only the formalization of the educational policies and programmes that UNESCO has unnamedly been pursuing for over half a century.

The idea behind global citizenship lies within the notion that while citizenship solely includes the special rights, privileges, and responsibilities related to belonging to a specific state or a nation, the concept of global citizenship seeks to enforce the idea that individuals cannot solely be belongings of certain nations, but are much more than that — we are all a part of our greater world; we exist in a broader global community with the shared common aspirations of peace, mutual respect, and understanding. In an increasingly interdependent world, being a global citizen works to strengthen international solidarity by reminding us of our common ties of humanity.

Being a global citizen isn't an official title with a special passport or anything per se, but rather it's an adopted mindset and the collective actions of individuals. This mindset explores the economic, environmental, social, and political links between the separate components of humankind in the hopes of understanding and working together to find solutions to global

problems that affect us all. The global citizenship education programme teaches young individuals how to adopt a more considerate, democratic, and peaceful mindset in order to become global citizens. The programme aims to nurture cognitive and social skills so that the youth gains the abilities of critical thinking and active listening, both of which are key components of a just and democratic society and world.

### **Education for just and democratic societies**

Taking a look at the current situation of governments all across the globe, it is perfectly visible that especially over the past 15 years, mistrust towards the government and its officials has increasingly grown with a sharp incline, particularly among the youth. The rates of complete trust in governments have declined to reach a historical low, and the reasons behind this mistrust are in fact legitimate and rightful concerns arising from the evergrowing spread and accessibility of information, and thus, critical thinking.

UNESCO has developed educational programmes directed towards young learners to validate their concerns in justice and democracy. These programmes help the youth to become informed and responsible citizens by providing educational resources and interactive strategies to inform them of their responsibilities in a democratic society, as well as familiarizing them with the rights they have to engage and participate in its democratic processes. They also emphasize the need to act ethically in a fast-changing world of socioeconomic inequalities and corruption, all while encouraging young individuals to express their ideas in fields that affect them by communicating with their local and national policy-makers on the path to the attainment of more just democratic societies.

### **UNESCO Youth Programme**

While the United Nations as a whole defines youth as the group of individuals between the ages of 15 and 24, UNESCO opposes that claim with the reasoning that experiences of being young can greatly differ across nations and cultures. It instead considers youth as a flexible category of shared experiences, and also as a priority group of focus.

The youth programme of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization encompasses all principles and values across every single distinct field of the organization, in line with the United Nations Youth Strategy. The programme has one key objective: *“Strengthening Member States’ capacities to meaningfully engage youth in policymaking and support youth-led solutions to key challenges.”*, as stated in the official publications of UNESCO. Utilizing the aforementioned educational programmes to achieve this objective, the program lays its foundations in four key pillars, those being:

1. Knowledge brokering
2. Youth-related policy solutions
3. Capacity-building
4. Youth-led action

In line with this programme, UNESCO works to integrate young people into civil life by engaging with them as changemakers and partners rather than mere beneficiaries. It helps support young researchers in their studies with a collaborative investment called the Global Youth Grant Scheme, which provides financial aid to those that don't have the economic means to transform their ideas into impactful actions.

The programme also defends that there's a crucial need for the youth to participate in policy design processes, and collaborates with local and national governments across the globe to provide guidance and insight to help actualize inclusive and evidence-based youth policies. The countries that have received support from UNESCO through this programme for the integration of their youth in political processes include El Salvador, Mauritania, Saint Kitts and Nevis, South Sudan, Tonga, United Republic of Tanzania, Vietnam, and Zambia. UNESCO provides this support through its fields of expertise and competence, structures for inclusive methodologies for policy design, informed data analysis, and the establishment of representative youth structures.

UNESCO Youth Forum is another incentive under its Youth Programme that aims to give young people a voice to express their ideas on the decision-making processes that concern them, and a platform to discuss these opinions. The forum has been taking place every two years since 1999, getting its power from the need of youth to be represented in democratic and civil processes, and the belief of 75% of individuals under the age of 30 that their voices go unheard by politicians.

# Introduction to the Agenda Item

## *Combating the Erosion of Youth Participation in Electoral Democracies*

Over the past two decades, electoral democracies across the globe have witnessed a growing pattern of declining political engagement among younger generations. While the ideals of democracy rest on inclusive participation and equal representation, statistical evidence indicates that individuals aged 18 to 30 are voting less, joining political parties less frequently, and expressing increasing skepticism towards formal political processes. This decline in participation, especially in elections, is not a marginal trend but a systemic issue that affects the very foundations of democratic governance.

The concept of representative democracy is built on the notion that all segments of society have both the right and the opportunity to influence decisions made on their behalf. However, when a significant demographic group consistently abstains from participating in elections, the outcomes of those elections—and the policies that result—become less reflective of the population as a whole. As young people disengage, governments risk becoming unrepresentative of future generations, and democratic institutions lose legitimacy in their eyes.

This decline in youth participation is not limited to a particular region. In countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Nigeria, India, and Brazil, youth voter turnout remains significantly lower than that of older age groups. Even in contexts where political activism is high, such as during mass protests or online campaigns, this energy has not consistently translated into increased electoral engagement. This discrepancy between informal activism and formal participation reflects deeper structural, educational, and institutional challenges that merit close examination.

The problem is also generational. Research indicates that individuals who do not vote in their first eligible elections are significantly less likely to become regular voters later in life. This suggests that the current decline in youth electoral participation may not be a temporary phenomenon, but rather a signal of longer-term disengagement from democratic structures. If

young people are not integrated into electoral systems early, their absence may persist, further deepening political inequality across generations.

In the context of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the erosion of youth participation in democracies intersects with several key areas of concern. It affects access to civic education, the promotion of inclusive institutions (as outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 16), and the broader effort to foster cultures of peace and democratic resilience. Therefore, understanding the root causes of this trend—and identifying practical, inclusive, and globally adaptable responses—falls squarely within UNESCO’s mandate and responsibility.

## **Global Trends and Patterns**

Globally, youth participation in elections has declined despite increasing access to education, technology, and information. In the United States, the youth turnout rate in presidential elections typically falls 15 to 20 percentage points below that of older age groups. In the United Kingdom, only around 40% of voters aged 18 to 24 participated in the 2019 general election, compared to over 70% among voters over 65. Similar trends are observed across Europe, Latin America, and Asia, with notable exceptions in countries that have invested heavily in youth outreach and civic education.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, where over 60% of the population is under the age of 25, the disconnect is even more pronounced. Despite their demographic weight, young Africans are significantly underrepresented both at the ballot box and within political institutions. In Nigeria, for example, youth participation has declined even as digital activism and political awareness have risen. In Latin America, recent elections have revealed similarly low turnout rates among younger voters, despite their active presence in social and protest movements.

This global disengagement cannot be explained by apathy alone. Surveys show that many young people are highly concerned with political issues such as climate change, corruption, human rights, and economic inequality. However, their declining involvement in formal processes suggests that the current political environment does not adequately reflect or respond to their priorities. This sense of disconnection leads to a broader question: What is preventing

young people from participating electorally, even when they are politically aware and motivated?

## **Primary Contributing Factors**

### **1. Institutional Mistrust**

Young people frequently express low levels of trust in political institutions, parties, and elected officials. When political systems appear unresponsive or corrupt, participation is seen as ineffective or symbolic. This distrust often stems from lived experiences with inequality, political stagnation, or broken promises by leaders.

### **2. Inadequate Civic Education**

Many education systems fail to provide comprehensive civic instruction. Without a clear understanding of democratic processes, electoral systems, and the impact of voting, youth often feel unprepared to participate. This gap is especially harmful during a person's first voting experience, which can strongly influence future engagement.

### **3. Legal and Administrative Barriers**

Complex registration systems, inflexible voting procedures, and restrictive eligibility laws can disproportionately affect young voters—particularly students, first-time voters, or those living away from home. These logistical challenges create friction at a critical moment in a young person's democratic development.

### **4. Limited Representation**

Most national legislatures are dominated by older individuals. Young people rarely see themselves reflected in political leadership, which reinforces the perception that formal politics is exclusive and inaccessible. Legal age restrictions on candidacy further limit their opportunities to influence decision-making directly.

## **5. The Digital Shift**

While youth are highly active on digital platforms, this engagement has not consistently translated into electoral participation. Social media can foster awareness, but it also contributes to information overload, disinformation, and fragmented discourse. Moreover, it often promotes instant expression over sustained political commitment.

### **The Democratic Implications**

The decline in youth electoral participation has far-reaching consequences for democratic systems worldwide. Firstly, it undermines political equality. If youth voices are systematically underrepresented, policymaking skews toward older generations, risking intergenerational imbalance and long-term policy short-sightedness.

Secondly, it reduces the legitimacy of democratic outcomes. Elections that reflect the views of only certain age groups cannot fully claim to represent the public will. Over time, this can deepen political alienation and foster a sense of exclusion among youth.

Thirdly, it threatens the stability and resilience of democratic institutions. A disengaged youth population is less likely to defend democracy when it is under threat and less invested in upholding its principles. Without broad generational participation, democratic institutions become more vulnerable to polarization, populism, and authoritarian drift.

Lastly, it affects the development of a civic identity. Voting is not just a right—it is a practice that connects individuals to the broader political community. When youth do not participate, they miss opportunities to influence outcomes, learn from experience, and shape collective decision-making.

### **Relevance to UNESCO's Mandate**

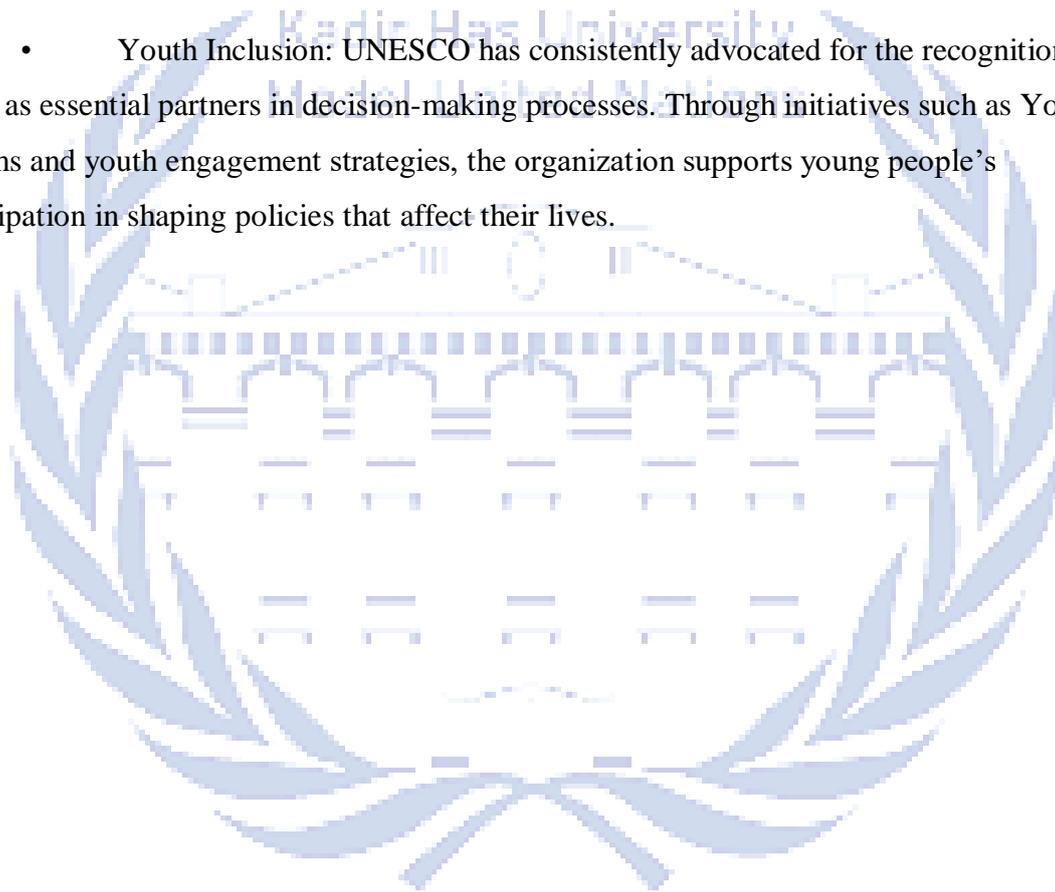
UNESCO, as a specialized agency of the United Nations, plays a critical role in promoting inclusive, participatory societies through education, cultural cooperation, and international

dialogue. The erosion of youth electoral participation touches on multiple aspects of this mandate.

- **Education:** UNESCO's work on Global Citizenship Education (GCED) seeks to equip learners with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to participate responsibly in democratic societies. Strengthening civic education is one of the most direct strategies for increasing youth engagement.

- **Sustainable Development:** Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for inclusive and representative decision-making at all levels. Encouraging youth to engage with formal political systems is necessary to fulfill this goal.

- **Youth Inclusion:** UNESCO has consistently advocated for the recognition of youth as essential partners in decision-making processes. Through initiatives such as Youth Forums and youth engagement strategies, the organization supports young people's participation in shaping policies that affect their lives.



## Historical Background to the Topic

Participation by young people in electoral activities has been a challenge for democratic institutions all over the world. Young people face a number of hurdles to full participation in elections, including legal barriers, unavailability of information, and underrepresentation in political institutions. These factors usually contribute to low youth participation rates in elections and a lack of representation in political office.

To counter these challenges, global frameworks have highlighted the importance of youth engagement in democratic life. The United Nations, for instance, has incorporated youth participation as an important aspect of peace and sustainable development. This prompted the adoption of Sustainable Development Goal 16, which aims at peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice for all, and the establishment of effective, responsive, and inclusive institutions at all levels. Youth engagement is regarded as pivotal for the accomplishment of these goals.

Identifying the need for collaborative efforts, the European Commission and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) created the Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance. In 2017, this collaboration resulted in the "Youth Participation in Electoral Processes – Handbook for Electoral Management Bodies." The handbook provides electoral management bodies (EMBs) with practical recommendations for youth engagement during elections, removing barriers to participation, and fostering an inclusive electoral process. It emphasizes the role of EMBs in formulating policies and programs that encourage youth involvement as voters, potential candidates, and electoral staff.

Governments have introduced reforms over time aimed at lowering the voting age, instituting youth quotas, and using technology to facilitate youth participation. These measures are designed to empower young people, restore trust in democratic institutions, and ensure that youth voices are heard during elections.

## Consequences of the Lack of Youth Participation

The low turnout of youth during the electoral process has consequences for democratic legitimacy and for development at societal level. When the youth are disfranchised or excluded from political activity, democracies lose touch with a majority of citizens' aspirations and concerns. Policy is then made without consideration for what future generations wish for and need.

One significant effect is a decline in faith in democratic institutions. When youth perceive that they are shut out of political decision-making, apathy, disillusionment, and even resentment of government institutions is a possible outcome. Such alienation expresses itself in many ways, ranging from declining voter turnout to less active citizenship and increased alternative or non-institutional forms of political participation, including some that are disruptive or anti-democratic.

In addition, without youth participation in political platforms, innovation and progress are stifled. Youth bring new ideas, new approaches to solving problems, and an inherent inclination toward technological and environmental issues. If their voice is eliminated, policy is less likely to be innovative or responsive to future challenges such as global warming, digital human rights, and education for all.

The lack of youth participation also supports exclusion patterns. If youth appear not to be represented or actively participating, then they will be less likely to become interested in participating in the future. It is a self-perpetuating pattern which helps create a generation gap and destroys solidarity among generations, making the government less effective.

Governments and electoral bodies, leaving young people out, undermine credibility in elections and citizens' perceptions of democratic processes as representative. In the longer term, it can lead to increased political instability, increased political polarization, and diminished capacity for responding to citizens' demands.

Engaging young people is more than an issue of representation—galvanizing young people is an issue of democratic institutions' renewal, relevance, and strength.

## Previous Actions Taken & Projects

International bodies, governments, and election commissions, throughout history, instituted programs that seek to advance youth participation in election processes and democratic decision-making. In recognition of political participation barriers among young people, a number of such programs attempted to remove structural barriers, enhance civic education, and provide opportunities for youth participation within decision-making.

### 1. International Frameworks and Commitments

The United Nations has been a driving force behind promoting youth participation. The endorsement of Sustainable Development Goal 16—to develop inclusive societies, ensure access to justice, and well-functioning institutions—has reaffirmed youth participation as a pillar of democratic development. The World Programme of Action for Youth and the UN Youth Strategy: Youth 2030, too, place emphasis on political participation.

### 2. The EC-UNDP Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance (JTF)

As a collaborative effort of the European Commission and the United Nations Development Program, the JTF developed EMB-specific guidelines and tools. In 2017, the Task Force published the "Youth Participation in Electoral Processes – Handbook for Electoral Management Bodies," a comprehensive tool offering best practices, case studies, and policy recommendations for integrating youth voters, candidates, and administrators into the process.

### 3. National Legislative Reforms

There are legal reforms within some states which serve toward increasing political participation among youths. Such reforms encompass lowering the voting age (such as Austria and Brazil's age of 16), establishing quotas among political parties for young people, and implementing laws of affirmative actions so that youth contestants are given an equal opportunity for seeking political office.

### 4. Civic and Voter Education Programmes

Governments and civil society organizations have put programs in place for increasing political literacy and civic education among young people. Interventions have varied from school-level curriculum improvement, voting education campaigns for first-time voters, and youth forums on democratic engagement.

5. Use of Digital Tools and Social Media Realising that youths are actively making use of internet services, election authorities made greater use of internet media platforms in order to target youths. Online campaigning, online registration, and two-way tools were being adopted for educating, engaging, and mobilising youths for participating in elections. These measures reflect increasing international agreement that young people need to be empowered and participate in democracy—not only as citizens who cast ballots, but also as change-agents and leaders. Ongoing dedication to these efforts is of prime concern for building solid and inclusive democracies.

### **International Frameworks and Agreements**

Youth participation in electoral processes is now commonly seen as a cornerstone of democratic stability and good governance everywhere in the world. A number of global mechanisms and programs have been established to respond to systemic youth exclusion from the political process and to engage youth meaningfully in setting both global and country agendas.

The United Nations Youth Strategy: Youth 2030 is a coordinated and participatory strategy launched in 2018 to bring UN system work into alignment with priorities and expectations of youth. Youth 2030 puts youth engagement in governance, decision-making, and civic life at the forefront. The strategy views youth as stakeholders and agents of sustainable development and as beneficiaries and contributors to the operation of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16), which requires peaceful and inclusive societies and effective institutions. The strategy promotes the inclusion of youth voice in public institutions and electoral systems and makes youth full and equal actors in the democratic process.

One of the greatest resources in favor of this global agenda is the Youth Participation in Electoral Processes – Handbook for Electoral Management Bodies (2017). The handbook, published by the UNDP and the European Commission's Joint Task Force, presents Electoral Management Bodies best practices and guidelines on youth participation challenges. The handbook outlines how to increase youth turnout at the polls, promote youth candidates, and involve youth in electoral planning and execution. The handbook has turned into a global standard against which states are urged to promote youth participation in democratic life. The

Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth Office was created in 2013 and represents the United Nations voice on youth issues. The Envoy gives voice to youth across the UN system and drives global and national policies towards youth participation in politics and civic action. The office supports the Youth 2030 strategy through resource mobilization and partnership towards electoral empowerment of youth in post-conflict and fragile contexts.

The Council of Europe's North-South Centre also plays an important part in such an international exchange. The Centre facilitates cooperation and networking among youth from the Mediterranean, Africa, and Europe in such forums as the University on Youth and Development. The Centre builds intercultural competences, democratic citizenship, and youth leadership and provides opportunities for youth to influence democratic processes at global and local levels.

Another prominent global movement is Youth Participation – Sustaining Peace. The movement is committed to the fundamental relationship between protecting the participation of youth and ensuring long term stability in democratic institutions. The movement has identified exclusion of the youth from politics as a cause of escalating conflict and social polarization. Through the involvement of youth in peace building and electoral systems, the movement makes democratic renewal and sustainable governance a reality.

Together, all of these agendas and norms validate that youth mobilization is less a matter of inclusion—it is a necessity of stable, fair, and peaceful societies.

## Questions to Address

- What policy reforms can be introduced to remove legal and administrative barriers that currently prevent young people from voting or running for office?
- How can national education systems be strengthened or redesigned to deliver more effective civic education and prepare youth for lifelong democratic participation?
- What institutional mechanisms can be implemented to ensure that political decision-making processes are more transparent and responsive to youth perspectives?
- In what ways can governments and electoral bodies utilize digital platforms to convert youth activism into tangible electoral engagement, while ensuring inclusivity and integrity?
- How can international organizations like UNESCO provide direct technical, educational, or financial support to Member States aiming to increase youth electoral participation?
- What collaborative efforts between civil society, political parties, and educational institutions can be launched to promote youth-friendly political environments?
- How can national governments identify and actively address the sources of political disillusionment and mistrust that discourage youth from engaging in formal electoral systems?
- What are the underlying social, political, and economic factors contributing to the generational decline in youth voter turnout across different democratic systems?

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