Youth Breakfast 2026 - Let's talk youth!

Key takeaways

Problems we face

In a first step, key problems for meaningful youth inclusion were identified using three guiding questions:

- *How are young changemakers included in policymaking and decision-making processes in your home country?*
- *What are some good practices from your country for meaningful youth inclusion?*
- *What struggles do young changemakers experience in their work?*

Key problems mentioned were

- Disregard for youth input
- No / very little political education → especially regarding options for action
- A small number of young people representing a big and diverse group → does not accurately reflect youth diversity
- Inconsistent youth consultations

Disregard for youth input

While youth voices are frequently being heard, they are often not taken seriously. This is particularly evident when comparing the high volume of youth resolutions and organisations and the actual lack of concrete public policies or governmental actions put forward. Not feeling respected or taken seriously by governments or by the system leads to political withdrawal of young people, which further reinforces their underrepresentation politics.

No / very little political education

The absence of institutionalized political education in many countries leaves many young people feeling distant to the political system. Furthermore, they often struggle to find the practical tools to channel their drive for change into effective action. This results in high voter abstention and general political disinterest amongst the youngest group of voters.

No authentic representation of youth

Nobody ever asks diplomats to represent the people of their country – they represent its government, are typically highly specialized and can rely on an extensive expert network, surveys and statistics to support their statements. Youth Representatives often lack the resources necessary to support their positions. Due to these limitations, current youth representation often struggles to reflect the full diversity of young people.

Inconsistent youth consultations

This issue is related to the one mentioned above: Real representation is nearly impossible with irregular, incomplete, or vague youth consultations. Such inconsistencies undermine inclusivity, high-quality and diverse representation, and makes youth representation lack legitimacy.

The path forward

In a second step, creative solutions for more meaningful youth inclusion were formed along three guiding questions:

- *How can government officials ensure a meaningful, long-lasting inclusion of youth voices in their work?*
- *What role can young activists take on when fighting for social justice? How can youth voices lead to more inclusive policies and practices?*
- *How can youth strengthen their networks and how could government officials and NGOs assist in maintaining them?*

Key solutions mentioned

- Political education – but through competences, not only institutions
    - Teach students active citizenship
        - empower students in school contexts
        - catalyze drive for action into impact
- Institutionalize youth engagement through youth councils and youth consultations
- For youth representatives: more capacity building for more meaningful engagement
- More flexibility in conferences → creates more accessibility
- Universal definition of youth

Competence-based political education

If you want to change systems and societies, the entry point is education. Beyond just introducing institutions, political education should teach youth the instruments to navigate political spaces. Competences like public speaking, negotiating, researching for projects, campaigning and pitching ideas. By empowering students to shape their own school environments, kids are taught active citizenship and see the impact their voices can have. Creating opportunities for participation means demonstrating the resonance of your actions possible, if motivation for change is catalyzed and encouraged through systematic inclusion of students' voices.

Institutionalizing youth engagement

Institutionalizing youth engagement is the key pillar of meaningful youth inclusion. It requires creating youth councils whose resolutions are systematically included in policy making, along with regular youth consultations that serve as the basis for all parliamentary work and a close and consistent collaboration with youth – be it in schools, with youth-led NGOs or other youth organisations in the country. Providing this institutionally guaranteed space allows young people to use their resources for effective work rather than constantly fighting for a "chair at the table".

Capacity building for youth representatives

Of course, youth delegates can not meaningfully contribute to highly technical discussions without prior training. Therefore, capacity building programmes that are both topic specific (according to the conference attended / the department or ministry involved in the work) and focused on competences like negotiating and UN language are crucial for a meaningful contribution of youth representatives in negotiations.

Make conferences more accessible
Young people engaged in politics often don't lack motivation, but financial resources and time. Opening conferences, discussions and negotiations to online participation makes said events more accessible for young people in rural areas or on tight budgets. The youth breakfast was open to online participation, which made it possible for an Israeli youth delegate living in Israel as well as for people with long commutes to the city to participate in our discussion and share their insights.

Universal definition of youth
Last but not least, establishing a universal definition of youth is crucial for actual *youth* involvement. Depending on a country's definition of youth, a 35 year old can still become a youth delegate. Without a clear standard, representation can become misleading, making it difficult to accurately advocate for the intended group.

In conclusion, moving beyond advocacy toward the institutionalization of youth engagement (through regular youth consultations and youth councils) as well as enforcing political education is essential to fight tokenism. The most important game changers for achieving meaningful youth participation are:

1) **Youth councils** whose work is formally recognized and respected.
2) **Regular youth consultations** that lay the foundation for parliamentary work.
3) **Comprehensive political education** in schools alongside extensive **capacity building** for youth engaged in national and international politics.