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**GLOBAL PLATFORMS**  
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# THE YOUTH CIVIC AND POLITICAL MANIFESTO



## INTRODUCTION

# THE VOICE AND POWER OF YOUTH

In every era, young people have served as powerful catalysts for change and progress. Today, more than ever, youth hold an influential position in shaping societies, challenging injustices, and driving innovation. With our unique perspectives, energy, and determination, we are raising our voices to advocate for equality, environmental sustainability, political reform, and technological advancement. The world is beginning to recognise that the ideas, actions, and creativity of youth are not just important but essential in addressing the complex challenges of our time.

This manifesto is a comprehensive call to action for the inclusion, empowerment, and genuine participation of young people in civic and political life. It celebrates the unique perspectives, energy, and activism of youth, underscoring their crucial role in addressing modern challenges such as inequality, climate change, and technological progress.

The Manifesto highlights and calls for urgent action on global issues like unemployment, underemployment, poor education access and other public services, mental health crises, substance abuse, bullying, gender discrimination, exclusion from decision-making, violence, and lack of safe spaces.

The most significant source of frustration for youth is that, despite their large population, they are underrepresented in politics, face legal and systemic barriers, experience corruption and risk, and have limited influence in party structures and government policies.

The Manifesto demands that governments, political parties, the private sector, and communities ensure youth participation, provide decent jobs, support entrepreneurship, fight discrimination, and foster safe, inclusive environments for meaningful youth engagement.

Youth, through this manifesto, assert their demand for equal partnership, economic power, justice, recognition as leaders, safe spaces, and genuine involvement in policymaking and civic life.

Overall, the manifesto warns that ignoring youth voices and needs risks deeper instability and unrest. The manifesto insists that youth are current—not just future leaders and must be at the centre of solutions for sustainable development and social progress.

# THE STATE OF YOUTH

Youth continue to face challenges that significantly impact their lives and shape their futures. Globally, over 67 million young people are unemployed, and many more are underemployed or working in precarious, informal jobs. Limited job opportunities force young people into positions where their skills are underutilised, contributing to poverty and frustration.

Access to quality education remains out of reach for many. UNESCO reports that approximately 251 million children and youth are out of school worldwide[2]. Poor educational infrastructure, high costs, and sociocultural barriers such as child marriage or discrimination hinder learning, making it hard for young people to acquire the skills needed for today's workforce.

Mental health is another escalating crisis among youth. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that one in seven adolescents (aged 10–19) experiences a mental disorder. Depression, anxiety, and behavioural disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability in this age group. Yet, access to mental health services is limited or stigmatised in many societies.

Substance abuse and addiction also pose grave risks; the United Nations reports that over 13 million young people globally are suffering from drug use disorders, exposing them to health, legal, and social issues.

According to WHO[1], Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest proportion of young people aged 10–24, with early sexual activity, marriage, and the world's highest rate of adolescent births contributing to increased health risks. While the region's maternal mortality ratio has declined from 857 to 525 per 100,000 live births between 2000 and 2017, progress remains slow and uneven.

Family planning use has grown but remains insufficient, with only around half of women in need accessing modern contraception. Restrictive abortion laws in most countries result in unsafe procedures, contributing significantly (5.2–17.2%) to maternal deaths. Gender-based violence, including high rates of intimate partner violence and female genital mutilation, remains a serious problem in many countries. Achieving universal sexual and reproductive health and rights is vital to development and requires better policies, education, health services, and collaboration across multiple sectors.

Peer pressure and bullying, both offline and online, affect self-esteem and can lead to lasting trauma. UNICEF found that one in three students worldwide

Gender inequality and discrimination persist, particularly impacting young women and LGBTQ+ youth. Girls, for example, are more likely to be out of school and face early forced marriage still a reality for around 12 million girls each year, according to UNICEF

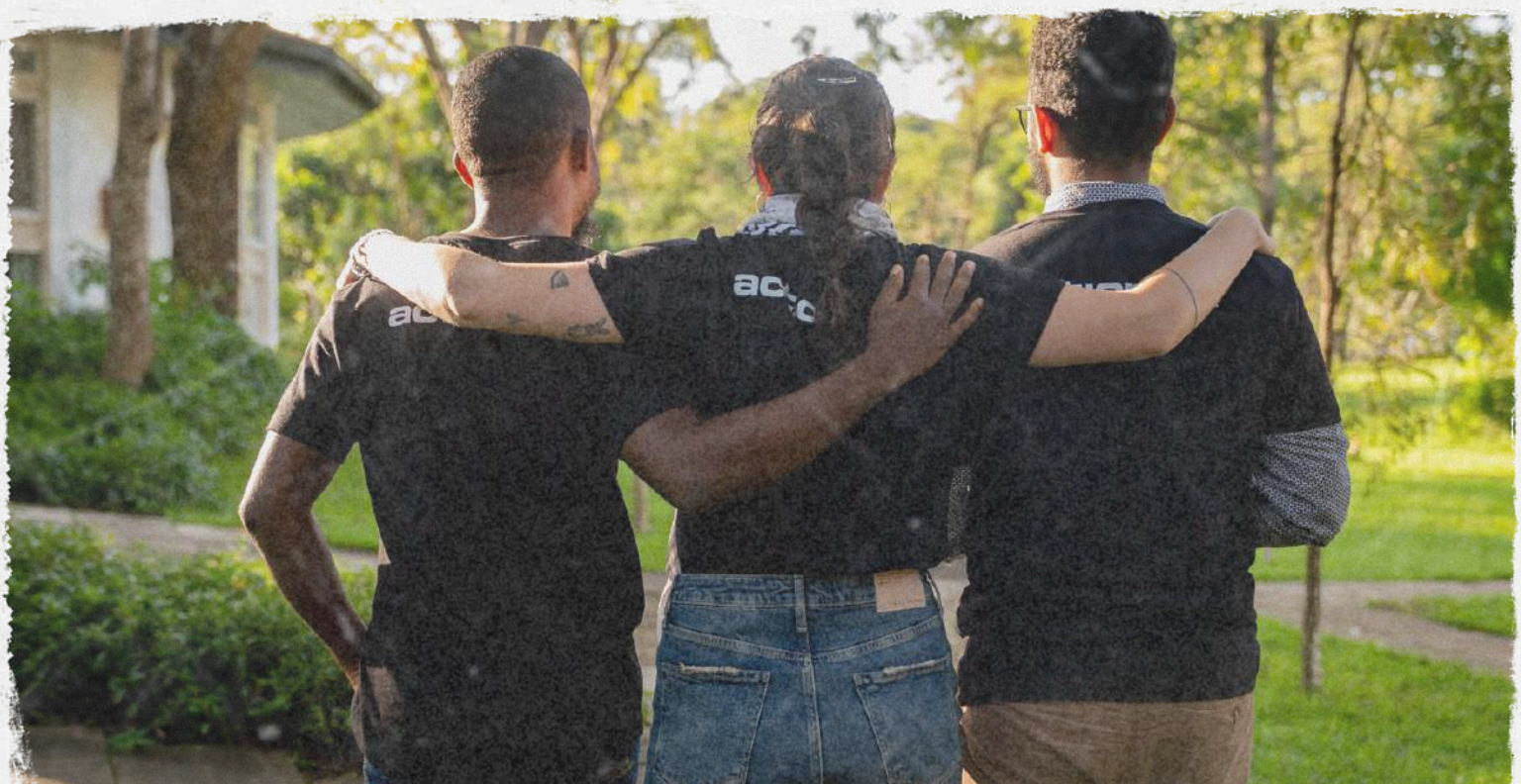
Young people are often excluded from key decision-making processes, even though those aged 10-24 or 15-24 make up roughly 16% to 25% of the global population, depending on the definition. Asia and Africa have the largest youth populations, and Africa is the youngest continent. The share of youth is generally decreasing as the older population grows, with nearly 90% of adolescents living in developing nations. Youth's lack of participation in political and economic spheres stifles their potential to drive change.

Violence and insecurity remain concerns, especially in conflict zones where youth can be both victims and perpetrators. Nearly 89% of all global youth homicide victims are males, creating a disproportionate burden.

Furthermore, healthcare and safe recreational spaces are frequently inaccessible, increasing vulnerability to disease and reducing overall well-being.

In the digital age, young people face significant challenges to their freedom of expression. Governments often employ broad censorship laws and sophisticated surveillance technologies, such as facial recognition and internet monitoring, to restrict and monitor online speech, making it difficult for youth to speak freely and anonymously. This environment fosters a “chilling effect,” where many youth self-censor or avoid controversial topics out of fear of repercussions. Online harassment and coordinated misinformation campaigns, particularly targeting minority and women activists, create additional barriers and risks for those wishing to speak out. Compounding these issues, many young people lack the digital literacy needed to understand or avoid the consequences of their actions in surveillance-heavy environments. Despite these obstacles, technology also provides opportunities, such as the ability to organise, mobilise support, and connect globally through social media, and tech-savvy youth often find creative ways to circumvent censorship. Ultimately, youth freedom of expression exists on a double-edged sword, where digital tools can both empower and endanger voices, underscoring the need for robust privacy protections, improved digital education, and international support for youth expression.

These statistics highlight both the severity and breadth of challenges young people face. Coordinated action by global leaders, communities, and stakeholders is essential to ensure a brighter, more equitable future for all youth.



# YOUTH FRUSTRATIONS IN CIVIC AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENTS AND PROCESSES

Globally, young people face multiple frustrations when trying to engage in civic and political life. Although they make up the majority of the population, for example, 58% of Nigerians are under 30 and in Africa, young people under 30 constitute 70% of the population, their presence is hardly felt in positions of power. In Kenya, only 6.5% of young people hold elective positions, despite 29% of the population being aged 18-35. Globally, youth under thirty constitute just 2.8% of the world's Members of Parliament, and 73% of upper houses have no MPs under 30.

Laws and policies continue to restrict young people's participation. Traditional political structures and internal party rules often fail to provide quotas or reserved seats for youth, further sidelining them. Additionally, patriarchal systems relegate young people to the role of campaign cheerleaders rather than decision-makers, and stereotypes continue to cast youth as inexperienced or unreliable.





Corruption is another major frustration. Youth encounter nepotism, sexual exploitation, and financial corruption while trying to engage in political processes. For example, the high cost of participating means that only a select few can afford to stand for election or engage deeply with political parties, effectively excluding the majority.

Youth participation often involves high personal risk. During the 2024 Gen Z protests in Kenya, at least 28 young people lost their lives, more than 3,000 were arrested, and 83 disappeared. In Nigeria, the End SARS protest led to 103 deaths and 1,500 arrests. Uganda also saw hundreds of disappearances and arrests in 2021 as youth actively participated in politics.

Youth activists in Tanzania regularly face intimidation, harassment, and arbitrary arrests, particularly when advocating for political reform, freedom of expression, or LGBTQ+ rights. Authorities frequently crack down on protests using excessive force, and activists are often subject to surveillance and trumped-up charges that can lead to lengthy detentions or unfair trials, as documented by Amnesty International

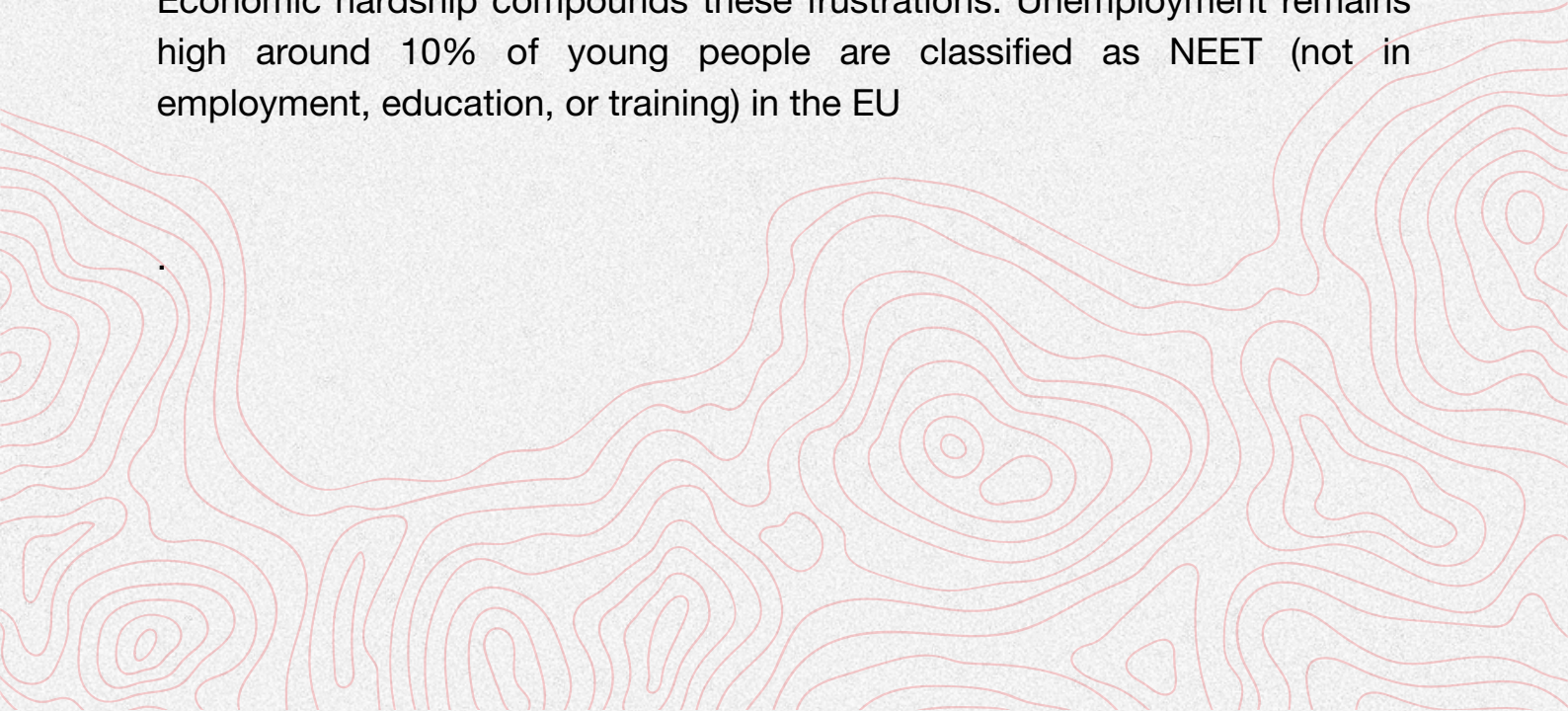
In Nepal, youth activists encounter arbitrary detention, police harassment, and threats of violence, especially during demonstrations or when posting critical views online. Although the country's constitution safeguards free expression, Amnesty International reports that authorities sometimes restrict these rights, using the guise of public order and increasingly invoking cybercrime laws to target outspoken young activists.

Myanmar's youth activists face extreme and life-threatening dangers, especially since the 2021 military coup. Amnesty International has highlighted the widespread use of violence, enforced disappearances, torture, and lengthy prison sentences after unfair trials. Young people engaged in pro-democracy protests and online activism are routinely targeted, making activism in Myanmar especially perilous.

organisations, and radical religious sects, negatively influence youth participation in democratic processes. These groups often employ manipulative tactics, such as misinformation, coercion, and ideological indoctrination, to dissuade young people from engaging in civic activities and, in some cases, to recruit them into anti-democratic causes.

Institutional bureaucracies and the commercialisation of politics further limit youth access, making participation daunting due to cost and complexity. Many young people are discouraged by the government's lack of responsiveness and its persistent disregard for constitutional and human rights safeguards.

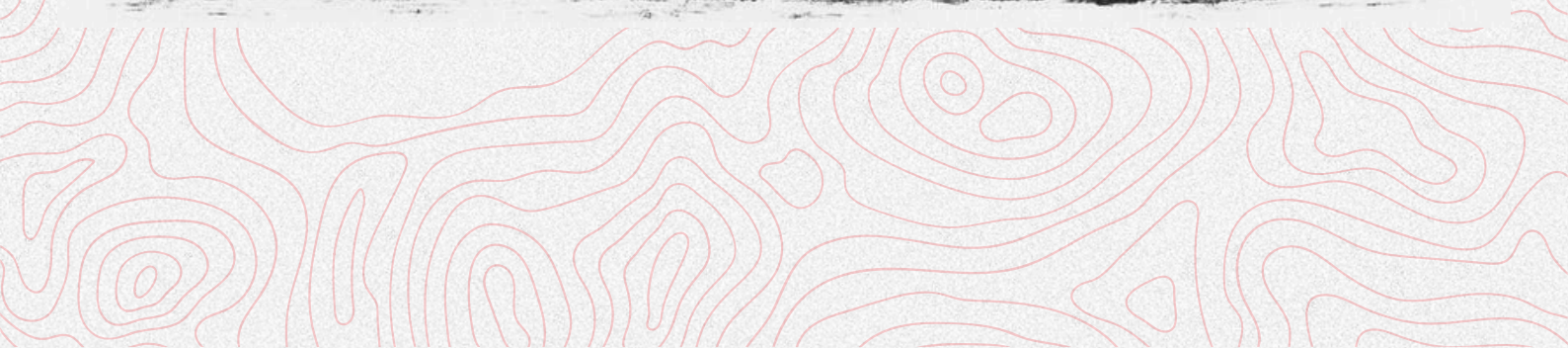
Economic hardship compounds these frustrations. Unemployment remains high around 10% of young people are classified as NEET (not in employment, education, or training) in the EU



Nearly a quarter of EU youth are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, issues that also affect access to housing, education, and healthcare. Mental health is negatively impacted, with half of young people reporting emotional or psychosocial problems in the past year.

Overall, young people remain deeply frustrated by being valued solely for their energy during elections, while real leadership opportunities, resources, and decision-making powers are reserved mainly for the older generation. This exclusion persists even though the United Nations recognise youth as “the backbone of society, a primary resource for development, and agents of social change, economic growth, and technological innovation.”

The continued neglect of these frustrations and unmet needs risks further unrest, migration, violence, and instability, underscoring the urgent need to include youth voices in civic and political life meaningfully.



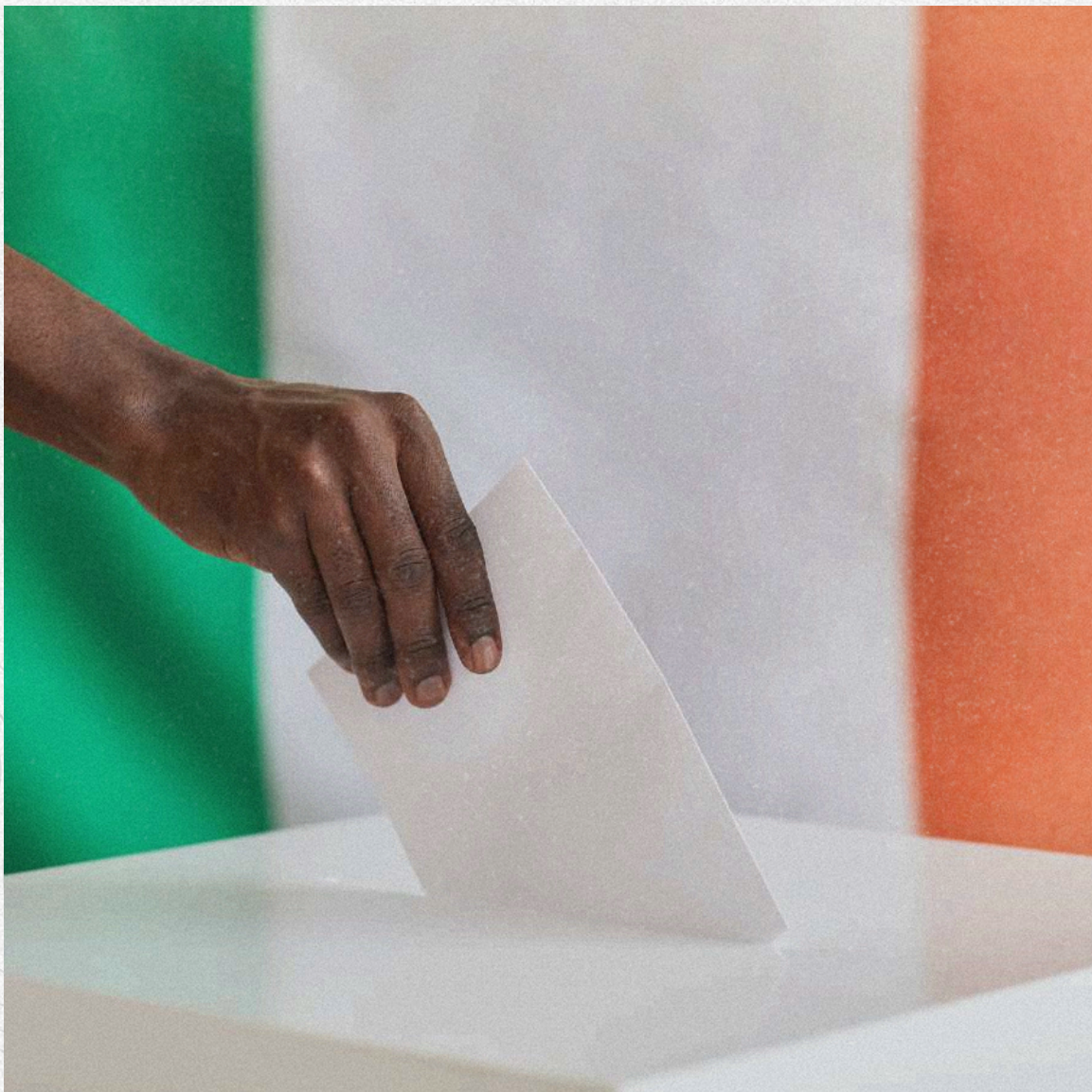
# WE ARE THE YOUTH AND **WE AFFIRM:**

- We are Equal Partners: We demand to be taken seriously, standing as equals in civic and political life. We claim our place as decision-makers, recognised not just as future leaders, but as leaders of today.
- We Seek Economic Power: We aspire for equal opportunities: decent jobs, entrepreneurship, and fair economic distribution. We deserve equal access to resources and the tools to create dignified lives for ourselves and our communities.
- We Stand for Justice: We champion societies built on equality, justice, the rule of law and human rights. We demand gender-transformative, participatory public services, and pledge to create communities free from corruption, violence, and discrimination.
- Our Voices Matter: We are key contributors to our world – not background supporters. We insist on being heard in policymaking, leadership, and in movements for change.
- We Deserve Safe, Inclusive Spaces: We envision and claim spaces that are free from violence and exclusion, where every young person is safe, respected, and supported – including support for our mental well-being and mentorship.
- We Drive Civic Engagement: We call for strong youth-led initiatives, backed by governments, media and communities. We want civic engagement that's accessible, safe, and open to all young people.
- We Champion Global Change: We act on climate change, break down intersectional inequalities, and fight for sustainable development. We affirm equality for everyone, regardless of gender, disability, race, or economic background.

# YOUTH KEY ASKS

In response to the many challenges and frustrations faced by youth worldwide, this manifesto sets out a clear set of “Key Asks,” which is a focused list of demands and priorities that must be addressed to ensure youth are truly included, empowered, and recognised as both current and future leaders. These Key Asks capture what young people need from governments, political parties, the private sector, and communities to thrive and actively contribute to society. They seek practical changes in policy and practice to create opportunities, guarantee rights, and offer genuine participation in decision-making.

By acting on these Key Asks, stakeholders will not only address urgent needs but also lay the groundwork for a more equitable, innovative, and just future for all.



# TO GOVERNMENT, WE ASK YOU TO

- Guarantee equal rights to participate in laws and policymaking.
- Create regular youth consultations, hearings, and forums.
- End corruption by enforcing strict anti-corruption measures
- Provide civic education that recognizes youth as full citizens.
- Recognize youth organizations as policy partners.
- Invite youth into committees, taskforces, and public dialogues.
- Reform laws to remove restrictive laws that limit freedom of expression such as digital rights and age barriers and consider youth quotas.
- Establish and fund youth councils or advisory boards at all levels.
- Mainstream youth perspectives in government sectors and policies.
- Appoint young people to advisory boards, delegations, and administration.
- Support youth-led initiatives with funding and policy partnerships.
- Reduce the cost of standing as candidates and have legislation that regulates and ensure transparency private financing in the electoral process.
- To create an enabling environment that promotes ease of doing business
- Treat youth as a core constituency, not just for campaign support.
- Ensure civic education and voter drives that empower young people
- Involve youth in real policy discussions and manifesto drafting.
- Nominate youth candidates and promote youth into leadership roles.
- Ensure youth wings have resources and actual influence within party structures.

# TO GOVERNMENT, WE ASK YOU TO

- Challenge internal ageist attitudes and value lived youth experience.
- Pair young members with mentors and provide decision-making power.
- Assign youth visible roles in campaigns, negotiations, and committees.
- Create decent, fair jobs and growth opportunities for youth.
- Invest in future skills (digital, green, creative), fund youth entrepreneurship.
- Include youth in decision-making, advisory boards, and governance.
- Support youth leadership and civic education initiatives.
- Practice non-discriminatory, inclusive, and climate-just hiring and policy.
- Promote digital safety and prevent manipulation or hate speech on platforms.
- Invest in youth-led social and climate justice solutions.
- Adopt ethical practices in the generation and dissemination of information through mass media and the digital space
- Treat youth as a core constituency, not just for campaign support.
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# OUR COMMITMENT STATEMENT

**We, the youth, wholeheartedly commit to acting for our present and future. We pledge to:**

- Pursue knowledge and stay informed, relying on evidence and verified information to challenge propaganda and misinformation.
- Participate boldly and responsibly in civic and democratic spaces, exercising our rights, raising our voices, and holding power to account, while using non-violent methods such as dialogue and advocacy.
- Proactively join and build associations, groups, coalitions, and networks to shape the youth agenda and amplify our collective impact.
- Develop practical skills, create opportunities, and strive for economic independence and personal growth.
- Forge alliances across generations, with the private sector, civil society, and governing authorities to strengthen youth representation and ensure effective policy development and implementation.
- Advocate against all forms of exploitation, discrimination, hate, and tokenism, while championing the rights and inclusion of marginalized groups.
- Monitor, document, and report on issues affecting young people, supporting evidence-based advocacy and accountability.
- Mentor, coach, and conscientize fellow youth, fostering a sense of agency, activism, and continuous development in our communities.



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