

# Conclusions

YOUTH  
DIALOGUE  
FOR INCLUSIVE  
GROWTH

Towards a new vision  
for the public sector

Youth Dialogue with Ministers  
27 October 2015, House of Estates  
Helsinki, Finland

# Youth Dialogue for Inclusive Growth

The [Youth Dialogue for Inclusive Growth](#) gathered together youth representatives and Ministers to discuss how youth voices could be better heard during the policy-making process. The outcomes of the Youth Dialogue fed into the [OECD Public Governance Ministerial Meeting](#). Participants included youth representatives from Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Ireland and Tunisia, as well as Ministers and senior level representatives from Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, Ireland, Mexico, Morocco, Slovenia, Tunisia, Public Governance International and CIVICUS.

## Opening

Opening the Youth Dialogue, **Ms. Anu Vehviläinen, Finnish Minister of Local Government and Public Reforms** and Chair of the Public Governance Ministerial Meeting, noted that youth engagement was essential. “Young people do not have access to the same processes through which adults can influence and state their concern: young people in very few countries have voting rights under the age of 18, they do not have the power of commercial lobbies, or access to traditional media. This results in young people’s interests being often overlooked in favour of those more powerful groups in society.”



**Ms. Mari Kiviniemi, Deputy Secretary-General of the OECD** emphasised that while “youth are the best resource that societies can rely upon to address the challenges of the future, young people’s voices are not always heard in policy debates that shape their future, and there are few options for youth to engage and influence decisions.”



*“Where do we conduct civic education so that we teach youth how the system works and how they can influence it?”*

– **Jocelyne Bourgon, Moderator**

The youth dialogue entailed a lively and free flowing discussion, with many active young voices and frank responses from Ministers and senior officials. The discussion was moderated by **Ms. Jocelyne Bourgon, President of Public Governance International**, and opened with a presentation of the results of the national youth fora and engagement activities, which were carried out in 2015 .



Video messages from Germany and the United Kingdom underlined how Ministers could better engage with young people on the issues that matter to them.

*“Give youth the belief that their voice will have an impact”*

– **Robert from Germany**

# Youth and civic engagement

## Where are we now?

Ministers and Youth Representatives reflected on the current state of youth participation and engagement in civic life, including the barriers that remain. A key challenge raised by youth – as well as Ministers – was a lack of clear information or education for young people about how the political and decision-making systems work. Understanding where and how youth can participate is an essential part of ensuring youth voices have a valuable impact. However, more information about and a better understanding of current political and decision-making systems should be coupled with more adequate access to these systems.

“The young should be taught much more about the political system and provided with information about how to have an influence,” stated Jimi and Janne from Kuopio, Finland.

“We need to share the knowledge of how the systems are working and where and how youth can participate” said **Mr. Boris Koprivnikar, Minister of Public Administration, Slovenia**.

*“The freshness of the youth is something that the politicians need”*

– **Minister Boris Koprivnikar of Slovenia**



“Everybody says that the young should be heard but who is listening?”  
#GovMin15 [vm.fi/cn/article...](https://vm.fi/cn/article...)



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Yet the interest of youth to participate and influence decisions through the existing and often traditional institutions and channels – for example through political parties or voting – is changing. **Danny Sriskandarajah from CIVICUS** highlighted that often times youth would prefer to engage and mobilise their voice in more creative ways: “The challenge of where we are now is how do we build institutions – not just political or governmental institutions – that have caught up with the times in terms of how people are organizing and mobilising?” The Youth Representative from Ireland underscored that participation does not need to start at the traditional party level but can start in the community – where they spend their daily lives.

Enhancing the quality of exchanges between youth and politicians also emerged as a key issue. There is a need for better communication, so that both sides will be able to listen and understand each other’s point of view.

The discussion recognised the need to do more in terms of youth engagement, for both parties to make enhanced efforts and that there was still some distance to go.

## The current state of youth engagement in civic life

- **Youth have limited information on how to engage with civic life**, including how the political and decision-making systems work. A key message emerging from the youth engagement activities appears to be: “youth are interested, they just simply do not know how to get involved and how government works.”
- **Trust emerged as an important theme for youth**: youth feel that political and administrative leaders do not value enough youth engagement and contribution to policy development. Likewise, they feel that politicians are not truly listening to their voices.
- **There is a lack of existing structures in place** to encourage youth to participate and be engaged with civic life, such as youth parliaments, councils, and other participatory structures.

# Youth and civic engagement

## Where do we want to be?

During this session, youth called for more **channels that will allow for their voices to be heard**. Youth want to be connected to platforms that would enable them to take action on issues that matter to them. These include youth councils and youth parliaments, and also giving space to NGOs to enter and influence public debate. Youth asked for accessibility to these channels to be made easier and for structures to be youth-friendly.



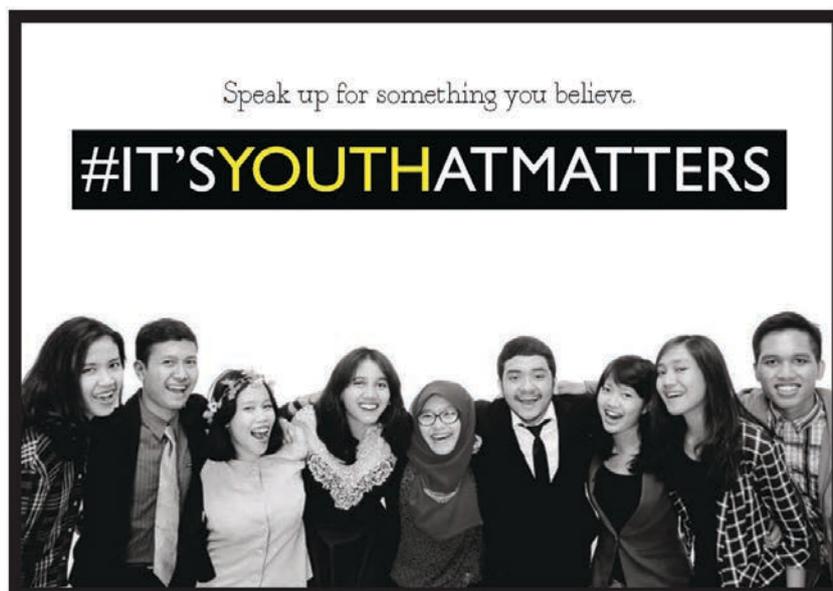
A Youth Representative from Ireland presented the **positive experience of youth councils** as bodies for local agencies and government to consult with youth. Comhairle na nÓg (local councils for children and young people) “enables youth to have a voice, and it goes further than having government officials listen, it goes a step farther to let the young people act,” said youth representative Murray from Ireland. The Czech youth representative noted that the youth engagement systems in her country could benefit from this model: “While youth organisations, youth parliaments, youth councils exist...politicians do not use these organisation to discuss key political or economic and issues with youth, do not listen to our ideas and do not consider us as a respectful partner to discuss these issues.”

The German Youth Representative also underscored that the Irish model would be welcomed in his country, as a similar system – that provides easy access to participation – does not exist.

A key question emerged around **whether these existing institutions meet the expectations of youth on how they wish to engage**. While countries may have youth institutions with similar names such as youth councils and youth parliaments, these were functioning in very different ways.

*“We need extensive and clear communication between decision-makers and youth, in all accessible ways, including social media, to spread the knowledge and possibilities for participation – not just to single individuals but also to youth organisations and to schools in a trustful, serious and respectful way”*

– Germany Youth Representative



One of the winning posters of the [OECD Poster contest](#). Artist: Assumpta Hanganararas, Indonesia

# Youth and civic engagement

## How will we get there?

In the last session, youth representatives and government officials **highlighted the role of traditional and new forms of media to promote two way communication** and transmission of government action, policies or information. Governments could develop new media centred on communicating with youth such as central youth websites or youth TV websites; yet improving accessibility of information and usability of government platforms could be a first step to improve communication with young people as well as all citizens. A good example raised by a youth delegate was a website to track and clearly communicate progress on political promises made by government.

Participants discussed the **importance and usefulness of social media** as a means for dialogue and communication between government and youth.

While many youth may now only get their news online and via social media, there is still an issue of equity among youth who have better access to digital technology. What is more, moving towards action, as opposed to using social media only as a means of one-way communication, was raised by a youth representative. “What comes after social media” said the youth delegate from Ireland, “it’s good and well to connect with youth through social media but without substance or actually moving toward action, and involving youth in implementation, how do you get them involved?”. Using a mix of media tools as well as other means would therefore be important to create an inclusive dialogue. NGOs were also highlighted as important vehicles to organise voice, spread information, promote change and act as an interest broker between youth and government.

*“Social media is partly an answer, but it is not the only answer”*

– Finnish Youth Representative

Participants underlined that **there is no single way: a variety of channels will need to be engaged for youth to have a voice and to influence decision-making**. Government has an important role to play by creating the conditions for and prioritising positive youth engagement, whether through a national strategy on children and youth engagement such as in Ireland or for example supporting the development a youth shadow cabinet in which Ministers debate with young adults, such as in Morocco. The German Youth Representatives underscored that governments should seek for continuous improvement in youth participation in decision-making, and that governments should endeavour to show youth the results of their efforts.

## A vision for the future

- **Youth considers school to play an important role in encouraging civic education.** They want to be given more choice to choose their own curricula and participate in schools life. Informal learning is seen as an opportunity to strengthen civic engagement.
- **Political leaders need to rethink youth engagement and take it seriously.** There is an expectation that leaders get more active not only by listening to youth needs but also participating in youth events and fora. In other words, leaders must be more accessible, speak a language youth can understand and discuss issues youth care about (e.g. employment and access to secure jobs). This also mean facilitating the creation of physical space for engagement including with youth organisations, such as parliaments, councils, and other participatory structures; and empower youth associations to play an active role as interest brokers.
- **Youth see technology as a powerful enabler of enhanced dialogue with government.** Social media and online platforms can be better used to inform youth and give them opportunities to participate and establish connections with youth organisations. Social media provides the ideal means to open up dialogues on issues that matter to youth such as environment protection, employment, immigration and voluntary services.

# Conclusions

During the last session, moderator Jocelyne Bourgon summed up the key take-aways of the Youth Dialogue:

- **Do not forget the traditional channels that work**

Ranging from active involvement in political parties to participation in government consultation processes, conventional approaches still offer important opportunities for youth to impact decision-making and should be used.

- **Include new channels and practices**

These offer promising opportunities to improve youth engagement and inclusion. Social media today offers a new means for youth and government to interact but it can also act as a powerful convening mechanism among youth in terms of communicating, mobilising and organising. Nonetheless, social media cannot be used as a substitute for extensive and systemic conversation between youth and politicians – a variety of environments and channels for youth to engage are necessary.

- **Mobilise NGOs**

NGOs act as an important channel to aggregate youth voices at the community level and to increase youth impact on decision-making. Empower youth organisations and associations to play an active role and interest broker. NGOs are equally important as a platform for youth to practice community engagement and involvement.

- **Communicate in clear language**

To have productive and interactive conversations, both sides need to use accessible, open and clear language. This also requires active listening on both sides.

- **Start local**

Local authorities are often where youth and citizens are closest to decisions and services. Community based youth organisations and local authorities are a good place to start in terms of youth engagement, where impact can be seen in daily life.



Ms. Jocelyne Bourgon, Moderator

## A call for action

- **Youth want government to create more opportunities to participate.** This can be accomplished by crafting and funding youth organisations, such as youth parliaments, participatory budgeting, centres, camps, and development programs. In addition, technology should be leveraged to reach more youth.
- **Increasing youth involvement in civic life will require reforming the civic education system** to create connections with practical engagement activities and teaching the value of participation.
- **Youth want politicians to actively involve youth in consultations and program design.** This requires having respect for the demands of youth and as well as providing information about where youth can get actively involved.

# Youth Dialogue for Inclusive Growth

## Roundtable discussions



## Family photo





MINISTRY OF FINANCE