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INTER PARES | Parliaments in Partnership

EU Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments

INTER PARES

Youth Strategy

2021

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Executive Summary

The INTER PARES Youth Strategy – *Bridging the Gap* is the conceptual and practical framework through which the INTER PARES| Parliaments in Partnership Project will support engagement of partner Parliaments with youth. The Youth Strategy is inspired particularly by the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the European Union Youth Strategy 2019 – 2027.

The Youth Strategy begins from the starting point that, across the world, young people are under-represented both as elected representatives in Parliaments, and in the policy debates that impact youth: whether those policies are specifically geared to young people, or affect the whole population. We seek to collect and share knowledge and innovation on parliamentary practices that can help bridge this gap and enable young people to engage with the life and work of Parliaments.

The Strategy is built on the principle of mainstreaming: that genuine inclusion means ensuring that young people's voices, needs and interests are considered throughout the policy process, including in Parliaments' work on legislation, government oversight, the national budget, and citizen representation. At the same time, we acknowledge that young people are diverse. We will make special efforts, including working with youth engagement experts, to ensure the voices of disadvantaged and marginalized youth are heard in parliamentary processes.

Young people are particularly affected by the impacts of both COVID-19, and climate change. Both the pandemic and climate change highlight structural development issues. The challenges and disruptions caused by both are also an opportunity to test democratic innovations to enable more flexible and inclusive decision-making.

INTER PARES' peer-to-peer approach is built on the engagement of our partners, including EU Member State Parliaments and partner Parliaments in particular, as well as experts and activists on youth issues as one of our priority cross-cutting areas). Implementation of this Youth Strategy is thus guided by a consultative Youth Working Group (YWG), composed of youth leaders and parliamentary staff in roughly equal numbers.

Our work to enhance youth inclusion will evolve through practice. At the outset, our plans include: peer-to-peer exchanges, networking, seminars, and dialogues; development and piloting of a Youth Parliamentary Academy; E-learning on Youth and Parliaments; and other knowledge products on parliamentary youth engagement.

INTER PARES is the European Union's flagship project to strengthen representative and inclusive democracy through support to the effective functioning of Parliaments in partner countries. It is funded by the European Commission and implemented by International IDEA.

1. Background, rationale and scope

Meaningful and sustained youth engagement requires that young people be involved in all aspects of policymaking and decision-making through mechanisms such as youth advisory boards for government entities, youth Parliaments, and regular meetings and dialogue with members of Parliament and local councils. – United Nations World Youth Report 2018

Democratically elected Parliaments are at the heart of representative democracy. They enact legislation, vote the national budget, oversee the work of government, and ensure that the voice of citizens is heard and represented throughout the governance process. To fulfil their democratic purpose, Parliaments must reflect their societies and the diversity within them, including but not limited to gender, age, and ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences. An inclusive Parliament not only represents society's diversity in its membership, but pays attention to the different needs and viewpoints of all segments of the population on an ongoing basis – and this includes young people.

Representative and inclusive Parliaments are not only central to democracy, but are also necessary for balanced and inclusive human development. Attaining the global Sustainable Development Goals requires effective parliamentary participation. Parliaments are the formal link between the people and the State. Their role includes listening to and incorporating the views and needs of the whole population throughout the policy cycle, including of course young people, a priority reflected in the European Union's Youth Policy and in *Youth 2030*, the UN Youth Policy (see UN 2018a).

As a key thematic area of the INTER PARES project, funded by the European Union and implemented by International IDEA, youth engagement with Parliaments helps contribute to sustainable development through strengthening our partner Parliaments' effectiveness and their democratic representativity. Our work to enhance youth engagement with Parliaments is guided by the principles of both the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the European Youth Policy.

1.1 What are the capacity gaps to be addressed?

Not only are few youth elected to Parliaments, youth voices are rarely heard in parliamentary hearings and other dialogues between MPs and citizens. This has a development impact, including the relative absence of youth voices in setting and monitoring policies to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (UN 2018b: 102).

Some countries have made strides in electing younger Members of Parliament and a few have even reserved seats for youth MPs. Many Parliaments have worked with schools and youth councils to organize successful youth Parliaments. INTER PARES seeks to build on these examples to focus on full-cycle involvement of young people in the work of Parliament and thus in democratic life.

We seek to build parliamentary youth engagement in collaboration with Parliaments, with youth representative organisations; with qualified youth workers; and with inter-sectoral and European Union-wide youth policy perspectives.

Quality youth engagement is developmental and recognises that the youth sector is diverse, and that reaching all the different segments of the youth population requires a range of connections and approaches. Young people tend to be relative newcomers when working with institutions including Parliaments, and tend not to form a discrete or homogenous interest group (significant numbers are not organized within any formal groups and associations). Few youth have significant financial or human / social capital to influence the policy process.

- This Strategy sets out INTER PARES' efforts to enhance information, knowledge and skills concerning: *youth policies and structures;* their integration in *the regular work of Parliament*; and *youth outreach/engagement* methods to achieve this.

1.2 What age-groups are involved?

Policy-making procedures tend to have been institutionalized without specific consideration of the rights of young people. For INTER PARES, youth participation is a matter of Parliaments' performance: their inclusiveness, policy responsiveness, accountability and legitimacy among the general public. INTER PARES stakeholders are concerned to approach the task in the same spirit as with any other under-represented social segment.

While the UN includes young people between the ages of 15-24 years old (extending in some countries to the late 20s or early 30s), the European Union defines young people as those up to 29 years old. When it comes to young parliamentarians, the IPU includes three thresholds: 30, 40 and 45 years old. In other words, 'youth' describes young adults, not young children: women and men of working or studying age, voting age, often with children of their own, and/or responsible for the care of older or disabled family members.

The specific status of youth, including those still under 18, as human rights-bearers with evolving capacities, is recognized in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989). Article 12 stipulates the right for youth to have their views considered in accordance with age and maturity. The INTER PARES Youth Working Group guiding our work in this area has members who are below the legal age of adulthood (often 18 or 21 depending on their home country), as well as others who are legal adults. Without being arbitrary in including and excluding youth participation at precisely 30 years, the Youth Strategy's primary focus is on young people between the ages of 15 and 30.

The youth age-range is relevant to social and economic policy not only as a *life-cycle* issue, but also as a *cohort* issue. Generations who are in secondary or tertiary education, seeking work or starting or caring for families have these experiences in a rapidly changing context; they are exposed to a particular mix of circumstances at any one time. The disruptions of

COVID-19 to education and employment markets (see Box 1) and to electoral cycles are a case in point. In economic downturns, unemployment climbs faster and higher among young people than among other workers.

Box 1: COVID-19 Impacts on young people

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020 provides a snapshot of some of COVID-19's actual and likely impacts on youth and development, among others:

- **Health**: If routine health care is disrupted and access to food is decreased, the impact on child and maternal health could be devastating in 118 low- and middle-income countries. Besides COVID-19 mortality itself, related service disruptions could cause hundreds of thousands of additional deaths from AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and neglected tropical diseases. Non-Covid vaccination programmes have been disrupted in around 70 countries. Further, many women and girls are choosing to skip medical check-ups for fear of contracting the virus, and global supply chain disruptions may also lead to tens of millions being unable to access contraception (UN 2020a: 28–30).
- **Environmental health**: The crisis poses a serious threat to the occupational safety and health of workers, a core aspect of decent work (UN 2020a: 40). Global gains in reversing child labour are likely to be reversed for the first time in two decades (UN 2020a: 3). In prisons worldwide, overcrowding is accelerating the spread of COVID-19 due to cramped quarters, and the frequent lack of protective gear and access to adequate health care (UN 2020a: 57).
- **Gender inequality and gender-based violence**: Lockdowns have confined many to their homes, sometimes with abusive partners, putting them at greater risk of domestic violence while a poll conducted in 17 countries shows that the majority of unpaid work continues to fall on women and girls (UN 2020a: 34–35). Studies from previous crises suggest that school closures and the economic downturn caused by COVID-19 may also increase rates of violence against children, as well as child marriage and early pregnancies (UN 2020a: 33).
- **Education and training**: As of mid-2020 more than 190 countries had implemented nationwide school closures. About 90 per cent of all students (1.57 billion) were out of school. The cost of fighting COVID-19 and the reduction in tax revenue caused by the economic downturn are likely to have a negative effect on education spending by governments and on global aid to education (UN 2020a: 33).
- **Digital divide**: At least 500 million children and youth were also without distance learning options. (UN 2020a: 32) Lack of access to computers and the Internet at home, as well as a low level of computer-related skills, put many already marginalized students at a further disadvantage. Most of the offline population live in LDCs, where only 19 per cent use the Internet, compared with 87 per cent in developed countries. (UN 2020a: 43)
- **Participatory planning:** The pandemic has made it clear that urban planning is crucial for better public health and for mitigating people's vulnerabilities to other hazards, such as natural disasters. As of May 2020, 154 countries had some form of national urban plan. Many national and city governments are now revisiting those plans to help prevent the next pandemic (UN 2020a: 47).
- **Social justice and inclusion**: The pandemic may be further entrenching existing patterns of discrimination and stigma, with reports emerging from many countries of discrimination against different groups. (UN 2020a: 44).

Young people tend to be early adopters of new technologies through small and micro-enterprises, in their social lives and in civil society campaigning. The UN World Youth Report 2020 identifies workplace democracy—such as in cooperatives and other social enterprises—as a testbed for youth decision-making and management skills (UN 2020b: 76).

- INTER PARES Youth Strategy is for and with young people aged 15-30, and for the parliamentary community. It supports building closer two-way interaction between young people and parliamentary stakeholders and processes.

1.3 What approaches with young people do not work?

To stop and start (and restart…) consultative processes can be counter-productive in parliamentary settings where accountability, transparency and legitimacy are paramount.

Rather than fragmented engagement, *Youth 2030*, the UN Youth Policy, refers to dialogue and consultation that is *continuous* and *structured*, *representative* and *democratic* (in respect of humanitarian, climate change and peacebuilding work under Priority 5). It also references 'young people's right to participate in public affairs, including elections, constitution-making processes, political parties and parliaments' (Priority 4) (UN 2018a).

It is important for youth to be engaged in their diversity, rather than through stereotypes, such as (a) marginalized or vulnerable; yet at the same time (b) a capable, post-dependent group keeping pace with social and technological trends; (c) inserted into processes without enough attention to whether positions are representative, technical, lay or professional; and at which point (d) 'representativeness' is reduced to the act of simply being young. Similarly, intersecting needs and capacities may be lost in the attempt to put a stamp on an under-recognized social group (to 'brand' youth positively). As in any movement for social inclusion, there are tensions and contradictions to work through. Like anyone in public life, young people can and should be challenged about what they know and who they represent, and on what basis – and they need to have ready answers.

The everyday structural and procedural barriers to youth policymaking within Parliament have often received little practical attention. Even when well-intentioned, misconceived attempts at involving youth can discourage or intimidate young people from further engagement.

- INTER PARES will leverage Parliaments' experiences through peer-to-peer international knowledge exchange to work in good faith with and for young people. In line with Youth 2030 and the EU Youth Policy, the aim is attainable, sustainable enhancement in Parliaments' engagement with young people.

1.4 How does INTER PARES approach 'Mainstreaming'?

INTER PARES *means 'between equals': equality between parliamentary peers, such as MPs—and also between staff—from participating Parliaments within and beyond the European Union. INTER PARES seeks to foster dialogue and supportive professional relationships on a peer-to-peer basis – an approach which is also applicable to international youth work. The UN Sustainable Goals call for political inclusion of all, irrespective of age or other status, implying respect for, mutual learning, and dialogue with young people as Parliament carries out its work.*[1]

Among development practitioners, there is consensus that effective development includes what the gender movement calls *mainstreaming*. INTER PARES mainstreams gender across its programmes in line with the EU gender equality strategy (European Commission 2020) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN 2017). A parallel mainstreaming approach is required to enable effective youth voice and representation in all governance processes. The importance of youth mainstreaming is underlined in the 2019 – 2027 European Union Youth Strategy (European Commission 2018).

The objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to which all 193 United Nations member states subscribed in 2015 can be achieved only through socioeconomic, civic, and political inclusion of young people. Table 1 shows how the themes of the European Youth Policy relate to all 17 of the SDGs, and their attainment through nationally tailored policies. As the table shows, youth are central to the achievement of the SDGs, whether implicit in numerous references to girls and women, secondary education, tertiary education, early and forced marriage, reproductive health, policy coherence and more, and explicitly in reference to youth employment and employability skills in SDG Goal 8 (UN 2017).

Table 1 also arranges the European and SDG policy themes according to the spectrum of parliament's youth engagement roles, from outreach and education through to passing macro policies that respond to youth needs. Parliaments are central to the realisation of the SDGs (see UNDP/IDB/GOPAC 2017). Through their legislative function, they ensure that an adequate legislative framework exists to meet each development goal. Through their budgetary functions they ensure that funds are in place and properly used for the programmes needed to attain each goal. Through their oversight role they follow government's work in planning and implementing effective development programmes. Finally, all those SDGs concerned with civic and political participation directly engage Parliament's fundamental role as a representative body under the rule of law. Genuine involvement of youth in each of these phases of the policy cycle is necessary for mainstreaming youth (and more broadly, the SDGs themselves) in national development.

[1] SDG 10.2: 'By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status' (UN 2017).

While the primary objectives of youth engagement in the policy process are to support responsive and effective programming, and thus contribute to democratic representation of the whole population, genuine engagement also help ensure not only that government programmes reach all segments of the population, but are *seen* as doing so by young people. Integrating youth perspectives across all parliamentary functions is of course a complex task for 'progressive realisation' (to borrow terminology from human rights). As with all other age groups, within the youth population there are wide divergences of advantages and disadvantages, including multiple (intersectional) disadvantage, particularly for example in residential, post/custodial, post-conflict and migration settings, and among social minorities. The voices of these groups, and policies that serve them, often lose out to others, or policies are designed without their participation, from the perspective that they represent a risk or cost – and otherwise overlooked.

Table 2 goes into further detail about multilateral commitments to youth mainstreaming and identifies INTER PARES' first areas of focus. As with mainstreaming of any issue, the scale of the task introduces an 'everywhere and nowhere' risk; this Strategy will build out from Parliament's existing points of strength and contact with young people which the Working Group have identified as being education and outreach, in the first instance.

- For INTER PARES with its parliamentary focus, mainstreaming is seen from the standpoint of Parliament's core functions *and* a commitment to involving young people internally at all project stages.
- As with the original formulation of mainstreaming at the international level with regard to gender (see UN 1997), mainstreaming is not merely a technical *means* but has among its *ends,* social justice and equality.

Table 1. UN and European youth themes: arranged by policy, outreach/education (and overlapping) competencies of parliaments

	Parliaments' oversight, budgetary, legislative and representative roles in Youth Mainstreaming ***Parliamentary outreach and education***			
Youth Policy Governance (Selected dimensions, EU Youth wiki)	▪ 1.6 Evidence-based youth policy ▪ 5.3 [Policies for] Youth representative bodies	▪ 1.4 Youth Policy Decision-Making ▪ 1.5 Cross-sectorial approach with other ministries ▪ 1.7 Funding Youth Policy	▪ 5.2 Youth Participation in representative democracy ▪ 5.4 Young people's participation in policy-making ▪ 5.7 "Learning to participate" [social and civic competencies]	▪ 5.8 Raising political awareness among young people ▪ 5.9 [Broadening participation through] e-participation ▪ 6.8 Media literacy and safe use of new media
United Nations *cross-sectoral* development goals (SDGs) relevant to youth (non-exhaustive)	▪ SDG 1.b on **sound policy frameworks** (pro- poor and gender-sensitive) for accelerated investment in poverty eradication ▪ SDG 10.4 on **fiscal, wage and social protection** policies for reducing inequality ▪ SDG 10.5 on **regulating global finance** ▪ SDGs 10.6 and 16.8 on developing country participation in **global governance** ▪ SDG 17.1 on domestic **resource mobilization** capacity ▪ SDG 17.14 on **policy coherence** for sustainable development ▪ SDGs 10.3 and 16b on **non-discriminatory laws and policies** ▪ SDG 17.18 on **disaggregated data** for policymaking	▪ SDG1 on **poverty** eradication, **social protection**, social floors and access to services ▪ SDG 1.4 on access to access to credit, inheritance, land and other forms of **property** ▪ SDG 5.5 on **women's participation and leadership** at levels of (political, economic, public) decision-making ▪ SDG 8 on sustainable **growth, full employment and decent work** ▪ SDG 11 on **inclusive and sustainable human settlements** including participatory planning, and rural/peri-urban/urban linkages ▪ SDG 16.6 on effective, accountable and transparent **institutions at all levels** ▪ SDG 16.7 on responsive, inclusive, **participatory and representative decision-making** at all levels	▪ SDG 10.2 on **empowerment and political (…) inclusion** of all irrespective of age/other status ▪ SDG 5 on **gender equality**, women/girls' **empowerment**; eliminating exploitation and all forms of **violence** against girls and women ▪ SDG 1.4 on **access to new technology** ▪ SDG 3.7 on **sexual and reproductive health** ▪ SDG 4 on education including 4.7 on **education for sustainable development (ESD)**, cultural **diversity** and culture's contribution; global **citizenship**, gender and human rights education. ▪ SDGs 12-15 on **sustainable consumption** and production patterns ▪ SDG 13.b on **capacity for climate change** planning and management including **youth and community focus**
SDGs' *sectoral anchors* relevant to youth (non-exhaustive)	➢ SDG2 on sustainable **food production** ➢ SDG 3 on **Health and wellbeing** (including 3.8 on access to healthcare, medicines and vaccines, 3c on health workforce, 3d on early warning systems)	➢ SDGs 8.5 and 8c on **youth employment** ➢ SDG 9 on **industry, innovation and infrastructure** ➢ SDG 16.2 on abuse, exploitation and all forms of **violence against children** ➢ SDG 16.3 on **rule of law and access to justice**		
UN Youth Policy anchors	***Protect and promote the rights of young people*** *(Priority 4)*	***Support young people's greater access to quality education and health services*** *(Priority 2);* ***decent work and productive employment*** *(Priority 3)*	***Foster continuous dialogue:*** *(…) consultation platforms for young people's contribution to peace, security, humanitarian and climate actions (Priority 5)*	

Table 2: Further detail on Youth Mainstreaming commitments (European, UN and Commonwealth)
INTER PARES emphasis (Youth workstream, first phase)

	← *Parliaments' oversight, budgetary, legislative and representative roles in Youth Mainstreaming* →			
Youth Policy Governance Structures and strategies; Current debates and reforms (Selected dimensions from EU Youth Policy wiki)	**1.6 Evidence-based youth policy:** whether and how factual information is used to develop analyses on the situation of young people, and support new policies **5.3 Youth representative bodies:** Policies, guidelines and rules that establish, regulate and support youth representative bodies to promote the interests of young people	**1.4 Youth Policy Decision-Making:** how policies for young people are formulated and by whom **1.5 Cross-sectorial approach with other ministries:** whether youth policies see the contribution of different ministries, so that the approach is comprehensive **1.7 Funding Youth Policy:** how youth policies are funded, also through the use of EU funds	**5.4 Young people's participation in policy-making:** if, how and to what effect young people participate **5.7 "Learning to participate" through formal, non-formal and informal learning:** How national policies foster the development of social, civic competences **5.9 e-participation** Measures aiming to broaden youth participation through the use of ICTs and social media	**5.2 Youth Participation in representative democracy:** the rights and duties of young people as voters; political representatives **5.8 Raising political awareness among young people** (…) knowledge of democratic rights and values **6.8 Media literacy and safe use of new media:** Measures to help young people develop media literacy and digital competences, as well as [safe use of ICTs]
European Youth Goals (cross-sectoral, extracts)	➢ Ensure **equality of all genders and gender-sensitive approaches** ➢ **A society in which all young people are environmentally active**, educated and able to make a difference (…) young people included in sustainable development policy-making (…) eco-friendly infrastructure ➢ Enable young people to fulfil their potential in **rural areas**.	➢ **Accessible labour market** (…) fair working conditions, working rights and living wage ➢ **Better mental wellbeing** and end stigmatisation of mental health issues (…) inclusive intersectional approach to mental health provision	➢ **Quality education and lifelong learning** (…) 'skills including critical and analytical thinking, creativity and learning (…) knowledge on political systems, democracy and human rights, also through community-based experiences ➢ **Space and participation** and autonomy [to] adequately influence all areas of society, decision-making; dedicated, youth-led spaces	➢ Better access to **reliable information**, supporting ability to **evaluate critically** and engage in dialogue (…) ability to recognise and report hate speech and discrimination… [educators] equipped with media and digital literacy skills
UN Youth Policy	**Protect and promote the rights of young people and support their civic and political engagement:** 'strengthened focus on young people experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination and abuse, as well as young people's access to justice' (Priority 4)	**'Mainstream:** (…) **engage and partner** with young people and their organizations, networks and movements, through formal and informal mechanisms and platforms to realize universal rights-based youth participation' (Priority 1); '(…) promote young people's **right to participate in public affairs**, including in political and civic processes, platforms and institutions at all levels, such as elections, constitution-making processes, political parties and parliaments' (priority 4)		**'Promote a deeper understanding of the youth-specific barriers and challenges** young people face in accessing their human rights (…) **human rights education** and training for youth, as well as global citizenship and sustainable development education (priority 4). Support and advance youth policy frameworks to **promote non-formal education** (Priority 2)
Commonwealth Youth Development Index (2016) 'domains'	**Political participation** [from 'ad hoc' to 'mainstreamed']: 'Promote partnerships, cooperation and capacity for more solid investments in youth (…) catalyse investment in youth'; Include young people and their representative associations at all stages of policy development and implementation'		**Civic Participation**: 'Build the capabilities and expand the choices of young people by enhancing access and participation in all dimensions of society'	

2. Strategic Environment: Parliaments and young people in the 2020s

Once again based on the principle of mainstreaming, INTER PARES youth strategy focuses (a) targeted attention to specific gaps; and (b) thorough-going attention to structural factors – in EU terms, the 'dual approach'[2], in common with European Union and UN approaches.

Parliaments are multi-functional institutions. They are hubs of a national community (and in the case of the European Parliament, the European community), issue and policy networks, legislative initiatives, scrutiny, leadership recruitment, media attention and convening power. They are generalist and specialist, representative of diverse people and places. Parliamentary staff play a fundamental role; ensuring the integrity and maintenance of the institutional framework for the performance of representative democracy, and thus, along with Members of Parliament, are essential partners in the design and implementation of INTER PARES global and national strategies and actions to strengthen youth engagement in democratic life.

Democratic Parliaments are, by definition, political institutions where decision-making occurs through the free competition of ideas and interests. Parliaments are naturally the object of lobbying for different perspectives. While much attention is correctly paid to the need for lobbying to take place transparently and free of corruption, the objective is not to stop different groups in society from advocating for their point of view. Rather it is to ensure that all citizens, organized voluntarily according to their common viewpoints, can present their perspectives and be heard by parliamentarians. This occurs through participating in formal parliamentary business such as giving testimony to parliamentary committees, through gaining support from one or more party political groups, and of course by meeting and trying to convince MPs individually. Providing young people with understanding and tools on how policy influencing works and can be conducted helps to make Parliaments more representative of different viewpoints.

At the same time, we must be careful not to treat young people as a monolith with a single perspective; the same as any other demographic group, they are divided in terms of interests, views, and needs. In all likelihood, their engagement will be through existing organized politics and interest groups which, naturally, compete as well as cooperate with one another. This is different from state-funded youth agencies in their capacity as partners in *delivering and communicating* government policies.

[2] 'Dual approach: Policies that strive to improve the lives of young people can never be limited to the field of youth itself. Therefore the dual approach agreed upon in the previous cooperation framework 2010-2018 is still indispensable as it aims to tackle youth-relevant issues on the one hand by mainstreaming initiatives across policy areas and on the other hand by specific initiatives in the youth sector.' (European Council 2018: 5).

The challenges in accessing disadvantaged groups and engaging them effectively in parliamentary work cannot be underestimated. INTER PARES recognizes that in conjunction with Parliaments and youth-led organizations, it will be important to collaborate with youth work professionals including through specialized civil society organizations[3], and to identify and implement effective approaches to engagement of disadvantaged youth as part of peer-to-peer approaches in partner countries.

- INTER PARES will assist participating stakeholders in assessing how diverse groups within the youth population can be practically engaged in parliamentary dialogue and decision-making.

2.1 How does INTER PARES relate to European Youth Strategy (2019–2027)?

…recognising that all young people are a resource to society, all policies and activities concerning young people should uphold young people's right to participate in the development, implementation and follow-up of policies affecting them (…) policies should be built in recognition of the changes brought about by digital communication affecting democratic and civic participation. – European Youth Strategy (Principle C)

INTER PARES embraces and is guided by the principles of the European Youth Strategy (EYS) in its work on youth parliamentary engagement. Meaningful participation is central to the EYS rights-based approach which INTER PARES aims to implement on a practical level.

Figure 1 indicates broadly how the INTER PARES strategy is oriented with regard to participation ('with' young people) versus public information ('for' young people); and in relation to the three themes of European Youth Policy: *Engage*, *Empower* and *Connect*.

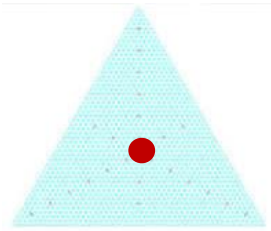
- *Fig 1.1* reflects demand for greater knowledge resources about parliaments (public information, instructional materials), also for this to be developed through action-oriented processes (experiential, reflective learning) and institutionalized links with the youth sector;
- *Fig 1.2* expresses the orientation toward practical decision-making processes with young people, making appropriate use of digital to bridge accessibility gaps.
- *Fig 1.3* emphasizes the importance of accessing knowledge and expertise in working with youth – including professional youth worker expertise - as an important support for effective youth parliamentary engagement; and
- *Fig 1.4* recognises COVID-19 and climate emergency as unprecedented global experiences upon which all participants can base meaningful knowledge exchange (see 2.2).

[3] See European Commission 2015: '…in most cases relationships between children and decision-makers are mediated by civil society organisations and other entities that accompany the children and facilitate their participation in these processes. They are considered to be important allies and intermediaries between young people and public administrations.'

Figure 1: INTER PARES and European Youth Policy themes

1.1 Strategy orientation

Integrating Youth Sector perspectives in public decision-making (national, EU and non-EU)

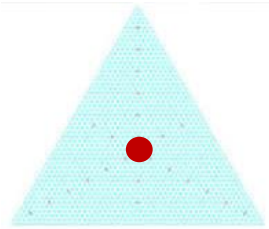


Informing participants (Parliamentary political systems)

Engage, Empower, Connect: European Youth Policy themes

1.2 Emphasis: "engage"

Engage ***Youth stakeholders in policy*** (all levels)

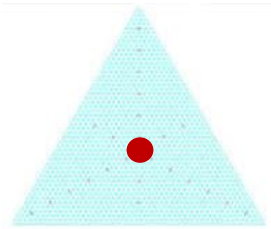


Participation and self-organisation (sub-national levels); inclusive democratic participation; citizenship education; learning strategies; 'learning to participate' opportunities; rights-based approach

EU Youth Dialogue; new, alternative and digital platforms of democratic participation

1.3 Emphasis: "empower"

Policy development for quality work with youth*:* training, legal frameworks, resourcing

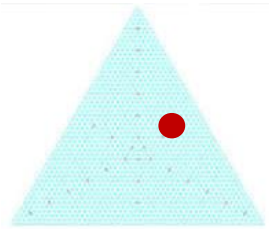


Grassroots youth work activities; ***European Youth Work Agenda****:* quality, innovation and recognition; youth organisations as sources of competences

Youth Contact Points for service delivery and information [parliamentary]; peer learning on financing youth work [parliamentary]

1.4 Emphasis: "connect"

Shared global experiences Climate Change; COVID-19*



Intra-EU solidarity initiatives (cross-border mobility, funding and harmonization measures); *Youth stakeholder engagement in design, delivery and evaluation of relevant EU-funded programmes*

Other youth and mobility issues, *including youth in rural areas and those with fewer opportunities*

*Not drawn from the European Youth Policy description of "Connect".

2.2 What common global challenges do young people face?

Across the globe, young people are being disproportionately affected [by COVID-19], particularly in the world of work. (…) Recovery packages must facilitate the shift to a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy and support universal access to quality public services.
– UN Secretary General António Guterres, SDG Report 2020

Climate Change and COVID-19 are worsening all kinds of inequalities, whether by direct public health, resourcing, informational or political pressures. At many levels, whether through disruption to education, loss of employment and income, or restrictions on in-person interactions, young people's lives have been particularly disrupted by the pandemic.

Even before the pandemic, the rate of in-work poverty globally among those aged 15–30 was already twice that among the rest of the workforce, a difference that decreased only marginally in the twenty years since 2000 (United Nations 2020a:24). The greatest threat to global employment since World War II, the pandemic is particularly affecting those in informal employment, self-employment, daily wage earners and specific sectors like tourism: all of which have over-representation of younger people. As with any structural adjustment, there are numerous potential age- and gender-discriminatory effects that Parliaments must anticipate, debate and monitor.

Yet at the same time, the operating environment for Parliaments, voters and civil society has also come under new direct (public health) and indirect pressures, most notably through states of emergency (International IDEA 2020a; 2020b). Through the social isolation and popular frustrations of lock-down, COVID-19 may have intensified political polarization and in some cases, extremism. Like climate change, the pandemic is both a spotlight on pre-existing, structural gaps in development and democracy, and an opportunity to reconfigure decision-making – to become more flexible and inclusive.

- While their strategic and practical needs will be impacted by COVID-19 in the coming decade, young people are at the forefront of global campaigns about the climate emergency and look set to remain so. Parliaments should engage with youth in tackling these challenges and empower young people by involving them in decision – making processes where their perspectives are at the forefront of the debate.

3. With and for young people: INTER PARES operational principles

INTER PARES work in this area is guided by a consultative Youth Working Group (YWG). The YWG is composed of youth leaders and parliamentary staff in roughly equal numbers. The skills pool includes expertise on research, debating, event management and informal education, including from national youth structures.

At the very least, youth engagement is a (small 'p') political issue because everyone is entitled to understand their aspirations according to their own beliefs and interests. Peaceful and creative conciliation between competing interests is needed, and this is precisely the role of Parliaments. At the same time, young people's views and values are in formation. They may wish to contribute to social dialogue from a more 'political' or 'non-political' point of view, as is their right.

The first principle is to engage with youth in ways that recognises and respects their multiple roles, perspectives, and interests in society and governance, and without pigeonholing them as only having a legitimate voice on 'youth issues'.

3.1 Peer to peer engagement

- The programme brings together young people, representatives of youth organisations and youth workers in the EU with peers in partner countries, through the peer-to-peer engagement model at the Parliament level between EU Member State Parliaments and partner Parliaments in emerging democracies
- The youth sector is a leader in informal education and can shed light on how we construct alliances for youth democratic development. This is about bonding, bridging and building links with parliamentary structures.

3.2 Demand driven

- INTER PARES youth strategy is developed in consultation with the YWG and implemented according to the knowledge and skills that youth and Parliaments in participating partner countries would like to exchange and build upon.

3.3 Action-oriented

- The youth strategy will underpin pilot peer-to-peer initiatives to engage youth in parliamentary work in partner countries, as well as producing open-access knowledge on parliamentary youth engagement (including an e-learning course)
- Our youth work will be integrated with other INTER PARES workstreams, in line with the principles of mainstreaming and cross-fertilisation of institutional strengthening.

3.4 Gender equality

- The project will pursue gender balance of participants and gender-sensitivity of discussion, as well as mainstreaming gender in the content.

3.5 Rights-based Approach (RBA)

- The project will respect the participation rights of adolescents (Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12) as part of a rights-respecting process summarised as PANEL: Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination, Empowerment and explicit Links to legal frameworks (both national and international).
- INTER PARES will adopt and publish a safeguarding policy.

3.6 Tailored modalities of implementation

- Participants will learn through the process which elements are most appropriate on a youth-led basis, which are for consultation, and which for co-creation.
- Decisions will be reached by a consensus-building approach, and with transparency in keeping with INTER PARES' Rights-Based Approach.
- INTER PARES peer-to-peer partnerships are demand-driven and country-led; youth-focused peer-to-peer work will equally be led by the expressed strengthening needs and requests of partner country actors.
- A wide range of media will be used, from social networks to educational drama techniques, (subject to public health conditions).

➢ All operational principles are in line with those for other INTER PARES workstreams, including the guiding role of the Working Group structure.

4. INTER PARES Youth engagement activities

The Youth Working Group (YWG) guiding the activities is itself an opportunity for participants to practice collaborative and intergenerational working.

4.1 Peer-to-peer exchanges, networking, seminars, and dialogues

- It is expected that all participants will wish to present on issues and engagement models of interest to them. Participants may also nominate others in their networks to contribute on identified topics of interest.
- Participants will also have opportunities to chair, facilitate and teach sessions as appropriate.
- INTER PARES will provide meeting support to ensure conversations enrich future programme work and sustain the network in the longer term.

- Youth peer to peer exchanges will enrich existing peer to peer partnerships in partner countries, allowing an opportunity for engagement with elected representatives and parliamentary staff, and ensuring young people's voices are heard in the process of parliamentary development

4.2 Youth Parliamentary Academy

- The Youth Parliamentary Academy is a targeted curriculum designed to give young people the foundations needed to better understand their parliamentary systems and the democratic processes and principles that underpin them.
- The YPA is designed to build the capacities of youth in two primary areas:
  - ✓ *Technical knowledge* of democratic principles, institutions and Parliaments
  - ✓ *Practical skills*, including but not limited to team building, writing, negotiating, analytical thinking, public speaking and debating.
- To incorporate the 'PANEL' approach: Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination and explicit Links to Legal standards, both national and international: the elements of a human-rights based approach to development.
- Depending on the public health situation, will be implemented in virtual, hybrid, or in-person format.
- An empowering space for young people from a range of national, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

4.3 E-learning

- With co-writing/editorial support from INTER PARES, youth participants are invited to collaborate on an e-learning course on parliamentary engagement with young people.
- The course places Parliament and young people in the twin contexts of democracy and sustainable development; the intention is to shift conceptions of what constitutes "youth sector/issues" to leverage more resources and achieve deeper societal engagement.
- Sustainable investments in youth require cross-party trust and buy-in. As with other INTER PARES workstreams, content is aimed at politically neutral parliamentary staff among others.

4.4 Publications

- Requested products (besides the e-learning course) so far include a checklist for Parliaments undertaking outreach with young people.

- Table 4 may provide some starting points for parliamentary stakeholders (parliamentary staff and parliamentarians and youth workers) to produce templates for youth mainstreaming planning and documentation.
- The YWG are invited to share print and online resources they have found valuable, and to identify gaps in the market, as the basis of publication proposals to be taken forward with INTER PARES.
- Resources on the progress of best practices within and outside the project will also be made available on the INTER PARES website.

5. Conclusion: a community of actors

'Mainstream: (…) engage and partner with young people and their organizations, networks and movements, through formal and informal mechanisms and platforms to realize universal rights-based youth participation' – Youth 2030 (Priority 1)

Promoting young people's participation in parliaments is a matter of both inclusive democracy and sustainable development. Currently, the task suffers from two-fold exclusion: socioeconomic (on the part of young people), and institutional – when it comes to the personnel, knowledge and practices that constitute high quality youth engagement. These practices include informal education and outreach, digital engagement, participatory decision-making, active labour market interventions, investments in culture, social scientific evidence-gathering, and so on.

The SDGs also mark an era when many more actors are taking an interest in various elements of sustainability,[4] in no small part due to the dynamism that young people bring to civil society and online campaigning. Digital transition has placed new pressures on the democratic process and its tasks—both positive and negative—among them, action on climate change and COVID-19. It has accelerated flows of democratic awareness and cooperation within and across borders. The challenge now is to establish closer connections between these vibrant social actors and channels of elected representation, legislation and oversight. Also to reach out to all those young people whose lived experience is under-represented in the policy discourse. The promise is new communities of practice and renewed, resilient democracies.

[4] By contrast the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs 2000-2015) for example did not have a peace and justice pillar, did not mention culture for development, and did not mention youth employment.

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