



A global youth movement #ForYouthRights: challenges and next steps

1. Background

Between 5-7 November 2019, the European Youth Forum (YFJ), the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations (ICMYO), and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) co-organised the event “Mobilising the global youth movement #ForYouthRights”. The meeting brought together more than 20 youth representatives from Regional Youth Platforms (RYPs) and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations (INGYOs),¹ as well as OHCHR officers working at national and regional level,² to discuss current work and next steps to build a global movement #foryouthrights.

With this event, the YFJ, ICMYO, and OHCHR aimed to bring a global perspective to the youth rights discussion and engage young people and their representative organisations in the promotion of youth rights regionally and globally. More specifically, the event had three key objectives:

- **Building the capacity of youth organisations** to advocate for youth rights through engaging with regional and international human rights mechanisms;
- **Increasing the involvement of youth organisations** in youth rights discussions and human rights processes at UN level;
- **Providing a space to foster dialogue and exchange of ideas** between youth organisations and relevant youth rights stakeholders in the UN system, with a view to foster a closer cooperation.

This report provides an overview of the discussions held during the event, the main conclusions from the participants, and potential steps forward.

2. Introduction

In recent years, youth rights have attracted increased attention at UN level, both in New York and Geneva. The adoption of UN Security Council resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security in 2015;³ the recognition of the role of young people as “agents of change” in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;⁴ the publication of the 2018 UN Youth

¹ List of youth organisations present: European Youth Forum; International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations; Pacific Youth Council; Caribbean Regional Youth Council; Network of International Youth Organisations in Africa; Pan-African Youth Union; Foro Latinoamericano y Caribe de Juventudes; World Esperanto Youth Organisation; International Young Catholic Students; AIESEC; World Federation of the United Nations Associations; IMCS Pax Romana; World Alliance of YMCAs; World Organization of the Scout Movement; International Falcon Movement-Socialist Education International.

² List of OHCHR offices present: OHCHR Geneva; OHCHR Cambodia; OHCHR Pacific; OHCHR Central Asia; OHCHR ROMENA; OHCHR EARO; OHCHR Guatemala; OHCHR Mauritania.

³ United Nations Security Council resolution [S/RES/2250](#).

⁴ UN General Assembly (2015). [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).



Strategy - "Youth 2030: Working with and for young people";⁵ are evidence that youth is gaining momentum. Moreover, the work of the UN Youth Envoy has also played a fundamental role in raising the awareness of and advocating for youth rights.

Since 2016, furthermore, the UN Human Rights Council has increased its focus on youth, with the adoption of thematic resolutions on youth and human rights. It is one of these resolutions that mandated OHCHR to publish its 2018 report on youth and human rights,⁶ which identifies a number of key challenges that youth face by virtue of their age. And it is in the context of a renewed focus on youth that the 2018-2021 OHCHR Management Plan identifies young people as one of three spotlight populations, with the aim to place a greater emphasis on the human rights concerns of youth in their work.

These developments are encouraging as they show greater willingness to recognise the specific challenges faced by youth (as opposed to children, for example). However, a further change in narrative is needed to move from identifying issues to implementing action, and taking the necessary steps to address these challenges. To this end, a stronger cooperation within the youth civil society sector, and between youth organisations and institutions, is fundamental.

What are the necessary steps and conditions to create a thriving global youth movement #foryouthrights? How can youth organisations representing different regions of the world work together towards the same goal? How can cooperation between youth organisations and the UN be improved to give youth rights and youth-specific issues the visibility they deserve? How can this cooperation ensure that young people are not just engaged when relevant, but have their rights respected, protected, and fulfilled? How can the human rights pillar of the UN itself change and adapt to better cater for youth rights?

These are some of the questions we asked ourselves and participants during the "Mobilising the global youth movement #ForYouthRights" event.

3. Youth Rights: what & why

While "chronological definitions" of youth may differ,⁷ youth should be seen as a unique phase in one's life, a transition stage between childhood and adulthood, from dependence to autonomy. This transition can happen at different ages, depending on the social, cultural, and economic context, but the one key feature that characterises youth is that many young people face specific challenges in becoming independent and autonomous, and in accessing and enjoying their human rights. These challenges are further complicated by the fact that youth is far from a homogeneous group: accessing rights can present additional struggles when age is paired with other individual

⁵ United Nations (2018), [Youth2030: The United Nations Strategy on Youth](#).

⁶ United Nations High Commissioner For Human Rights (2018), [Report on Youth and human rights](#).

⁷ E.g. the UN defines youth as those persons between the age of 15 and 24. See <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/youth-0/index.html>

characteristics (e.g. as a young person's ethnic and religious background; socio-economic status; gender; sexual orientation; etc.).

A flexible age cohort and intersectionality are the defining characteristics of youth, what makes young people a cross-cutting age group, and what, at times, makes it difficult for their rights to be recognised. Nevertheless, the peculiarities of youth as an age-group should not act as an obstacle to their enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms. Rather, they should act as an incentive to protect young people in this transition stage.

Respecting, protecting and fulfilling youth rights means both ensuring that young people fully enjoy all of the human rights and fundamental freedoms that are already outlined by legislation at all levels. However, youth rights may also require establishing new rights and freedoms (e.g. right to a quality transition from education to employment), related to the age-specific needs of young people, if necessary, "in connection and in complementarity with the existing legislation on human rights, including social and civil rights".⁸

a. Youth Rights: challenges at global and regional level

So, what are the challenges that young people have to overcome? Some seem to have a global dimension. Indeed, while the intricacies of such challenges may depend on the specific context a young person finds themselves in, several are perceived as ongoing obstacles for young people at a global level.

Aside from age-based discrimination being perceived as a cross-cutting and overarching issue for all young people, entering the labour market is also a recurring challenge. Not only youth unemployment is on average higher than the unemployment rate for the overall population,⁹ but school-to-work transitions are increasingly longer, as young people are generally the first to pay the price for global economic and financial crises. Furthermore, precarious and low quality jobs, often taken up by youth, often result in barriers to accessing social protection systems (where these are available). Difficulties in entering the labour market increase the level of poverty among youth in all regions, which has a trickle down effect on young people's independence, autonomy and overall engagement in society.

Additionally, when it comes to youth rights, a key global issue can be identified in an increasingly shrinking space for civil society, including youth organisations. From obstacles to accessing funding, to lack of meaningful consultation and participation processes, to threats to human rights defenders, many youth-led organisations and movements struggle to thrive, with certain regions being more affected than others. Youth organisations are essential not only to foster young people's civic participation, as

⁸ European Youth Forum (2012), [Policy Paper on Youth Rights](#).

⁹ International Labour Organisation (2020), [Preventing exclusion from the labour market: Tackling the COVID-19 youth employment crisis](#).



they provide a space for information sharing, mobilisation, and awareness raising; but also to advocate for youth and hold institutions accountable for their human rights obligations. Limiting their capacity can negatively impact the lives of young people and on democracy more broadly.

At a regional level, the challenges and obstacles faced by young people change depending on the specificity of the geographical, political, cultural, social and economic context.

In the Pacific, due to the intrinsic nature of the region, climate change is a key issue, as climate displacement threatens the lives of young people and their families. Moreover, promoting youth and human rights often clashes with cultural beliefs, making it difficult to find a balance between advancing youth rights and respecting local traditions, which are still a fundamental societal component. Furthermore, youth-led organisations do not receive sufficient support, including financial, from public authorities. Lack of core funding results in reduced capacity to influence policies and processes relevant for youth. Lastly, youth organisations report that their involvement is often tokenistic, as the attitude from political authorities is not conducive to meaningful participation.

In African, the main challenges for youth include working towards a more equal society by tackling poverty and homelessness; and protecting fundamental freedoms, including by addressing hate speech and arbitrary arrests against those speaking up for youth and human rights. Aside from these challenges, two additional factors make the fight for youth rights increasingly complicated. On the one hand, widespread inequalities result in youth not being prioritised as a group. On the other hand, stereotypes and prejudices against young activists, at times perceived as disruptive and disrespectful of local traditions and social norms, also hinder progress. Civil society and youth organisations are sometimes perceived as a threat to existing systems, and youth participation can be politicised and viewed as representative only of a specific political perspective. This results in backlash towards independent youth and youth-led organisations, and hinders their work.

In the Americas and the Caribbean, lack of decent jobs, race-based discrimination, human trafficking, and gun violence remain key human rights issues that affect young people too. Advocacy for youth rights is challenging for grassroots organisations, as human rights defenders are often prosecuted by public authorities. Moreover, the precarious human rights situation in the region often prompts young people to attempt to illegally migrate in the United States, which in turn results in further discrimination suffered by young undocumented migrants.

In Asia, the challenges for young people and their rights are multiple. On the one hand, awareness among young people themselves about their rights seems to be lacking. On the other hand, an increasingly shrinking civic space and a disregard for civil and political rights from some governments, often result in reprisals against young human rights defenders. Moreover, accessing funding for democracy and human rights related

projects is becoming increasingly difficult, and it often requires meeting donors' expectations, and comply with heavy administrative and financial burdens, in order to receive grants.

Lastly, in Europe, young people face issues with accessing several of their rights too.¹⁰ The under-representation of youth in decision-making processes remains a key challenge, as there is a general lack of political will to remove the barriers (structural, legal, and financial) to young people's participation in political processes. Linked to this, the above mentioned shrinking space for civil society is becoming a serious concern for youth organisations. As for social rights, the transition from education to the labour market is increasingly difficult, youth unemployment remains disproportionately high, precarious and non-standard forms of employment continue to proliferate, negatively impacting on access to social protection and increasing inequalities. Lack of universal access to quality and inclusive education is also an issue. As is access to healthcare, with young people encountering obstacles in accessing health services, which are often unaffordable, and/or not sufficiently promoted. Furthermore, access to affordable and accessible housing is a challenge for youth in Europe. Young people are either discriminated against on the basis of their age, and are not perceived as "trusted" tenants; or, simply cannot afford to buy or even rent a property, and live independently.

b. Advocating for youth rights: challenges

Aside from barriers to accessing and enjoying individual rights, advocating for youth rights in itself presents its own challenges.

Youth organisations can and should play a fundamental role in ensuring that youth rights are in the political agenda, but their impact is sometimes limited. This is often due to a variety of interplaying factors. On the one hand, youth organisations don't always perceive themselves or are recognised by institutions as human rights stakeholders. Despite their work directly impacting young people's access to rights, this flawed perception of the nature of youth organisations may act as an obstacle to their engagement in youth rights advocacy at national and international level. On the other hand, an increasingly shrinking civic space presents additional challenges to the work of youth organisations, and is particularly damaging for youth.¹¹ Youth organisations, as advocates for youth rights, play a key role in advancing young people's access to and enjoyment of their rights and freedoms. Youth organisations amplify the voices of minorities and other at-risk groups by speaking up about the key issues they face, which otherwise wouldn't be as visible.¹² A shrinking youth civic space, therefore, negatively affects young people's economic, political and community engagement, and

¹⁰ See the [report](#) from 2018 Regional Consultation on Youth and Human Rights organised by the European Youth Forum and OHCHR.

¹¹ European Youth Forum (2020, upcoming), Safeguarding civic space for young people in Europe.

¹² Ibid.



subsequently the very stability of our societies.

One key symptom of the shrinking civic space for youth is the lack of adequate funding. In the Pacific region, for example, while there is a willingness on the part of development agencies to foster partnerships with youth organisations, funding is rarely provided for youth organisations to become active partners. This approach to participation means that young people and youth organisations end up playing a merely consultative role to validate the work of development agencies, without being able to become truly independent, self-sustained actors. While youth organisations should continue to be consulted, they should be further supported to work on youth: youth rights should be “by youth” rather than only “for and with youth”.

Lastly, another key challenge to advocating for youth rights in all regions is the lack of an ongoing, strong, and structural cooperation with international human rights institutions, such as UN bodies. Youth organisations and UN bodies work together on projects and initiatives, but such cooperation is often limited to single initiatives. For example, a stronger cooperation and coordination with OHCHR country and regional teams is seen as an important tool to ensure that more attention is given to youth rights and the work of youth organisations. However, this cooperation is often difficult to implement in practice: for example, in the Pacific, the OHCHR regional team overviews the human rights situation in 16 different islands - a geographical challenge that further complicates coordination efforts.

4. A (Youth) Rights-Based Approach: an overview

Aside from recognising the role of youth organisations as human rights stakeholders, tackling the shrinking civic space for youth, and strengthening cooperation between youth organisations and institutions at a regional and global level; the key ongoing challenge remains recognising young people as rights holders.

As youth rights are not necessarily recognised as such, youth does not always get the visibility it deserves in policies and legislation. When it comes to tackling the challenges faced by youth, the approach is often short-sighted. Instead of coming up with long-term solutions to ensure that youth rights are protected, respected and fulfilled; policies tend to focus on addressing short-term needs. The result is that, rather than tackling the root causes of young people's exclusion from society, youth policy measures at regional or national level are often merely reactive rather than proactive tools.

This is why one essential component of advocating for young people is represented by embracing and implementing a (youth) rights-based approach (RBA). The RBA is based on the principle that human rights are universal and inalienable, and that, as such, they constitute legally binding obligations. In turn, this means that States, officials and power holders can be held accountable, empowering people to claim their rights.

Already a well-established concept in international development, the RBA empowers young people to claim, exercise and defend their rights; it fosters the accountability of those duty bearers responsible for validating youth rights; and it actively works against the discrimination young people face, by shifting the focus from catering for individual or group needs to upholding universal rights and tackling structural injustices.

As youth is seen as a transition phase, covering a number of age ranges depending on the given approach, and intersecting with several other individual characteristics, young people struggle to be perceived as a group deserving specific attention, and, therefore, as rights-holders.

When it comes to specific instruments targeting youth, the situation differs at regional level. The 2005 Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Youth¹³ and the 2006 African Youth Charter¹⁴ represent the main regional instruments on youth rights: despite this, monitoring mechanisms are lacking. In the Pacific, a Youth Development Framework 2014-2023¹⁵ was drafted with the aim to support young people in the Pacific live safe and healthy lives in sustainable environments, and act as active social and economic participants in their communities. However, the Framework remains a soft law instrument. While Europe remains the only region without a youth specific instrument on youth rights, the 2016 Council of Europe's Recommendation on Young People's Access to Rights¹⁶ provides an important starting point for governments to better support young people and ensure their rights.

At international level, there is no legally binding instrument on youth rights. Indeed, while there are several international human rights law instruments protecting specific groups (e.g. women; children; people with disabilities; etc), and specific rights and fundamental freedoms (civil and political: as well as economic, social and cultural), there is no international convention exclusively focusing on the respect, protection and fulfilment of youth rights. By recognising young people as rights-holders, the UN Youth Strategy could have a positive impact if the implementation lives up to the ambition.¹⁷ However, on the one hand, the Strategy only covers the work of UN agencies, funds and programmes, and not intergovernmental bodies and processes within the UN. On the other hand, despite the adoption of such a strategy, many Member States still struggle to recognise young people as rights-holders.

This status quo at regional and international level poses two key challenges. First, different levels of protection in different regional contexts, paired with weak monitoring processes, and lack of coordination mechanisms between regional frameworks and international strategies (e.g. the UN Youth Strategy); negatively impact on the

¹³ Ibero-American Convention on Young People's Rights (2005), see <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4b28eefe2.html>

¹⁴ African Youth Charter (2006), see https://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/african_youth_charter_2006.pdf

¹⁵ Secretariat of the Pacific Community (2014), [The Pacific Youth Development Framework 2014-2023](#).

¹⁶ Council of Europe (2016), [Recommendation on Young People's Access to Rights](#).

¹⁷ European Youth Forum (2019), [Advancing youth rights and working towards a sustainable, peaceful and inclusive world with the United Nations](#).

effectiveness of these instruments. Second, the lack of an international overarching instrument on youth, forces youth-led organisations to find other pathways to advocate for youth rights.

5. Mainstreaming youth rights in the UN human rights system

Aside from strategic litigation, which remains a highly technical and largely unused advocacy tool in the youth field, one way in which youth organisations have tried to compensate for the lack of a comprehensive international convention on youth, is by mainstreaming youth rights in broader human rights processes.

The UN Human Rights system offers a number of mechanisms that can serve as tools to mainstream youth rights. While not youth-specific, these mechanisms apply to youth too, and therefore can be used to mainstream youth rights. These include human rights reviews carried out by the UN Treaty Bodies established to monitor the implementation of international human rights conventions; as well as peer to peer review processes such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). UN Special Procedures, moreover, can also represent an entry point to advance youth rights. Indeed, while there is no Special Rapporteur or Independent Expert on Youth, youth organisations can still engage with Special Procedures, either by submitting urgent appeals and communications, or setting up meetings when country visits take place.

Despite the wide range of mechanisms available, youth as a topic still struggles to get the attention it deserves. Recommendations don't usually cover youth rights: for example, during 1st and 2nd cycle of the UPR, out of the 60.000 recommendations that were made, less than 0.5% focused on youth. This depends on a variety of factors.

From the perspective of youth organisations, one crucial issue is that the UN Human Rights system tends to be inaccessible for them. Some of the key challenges include the following:

- Processes to provide input and information are too bureaucratic, and they do not cater for the flexibility that young people and youth organisations need.
- Taking part in these processes usually requires going through several technical documents and procedures, which may be too complex for the capacity of youth organisations.
- When opportunities for participation are provided for youth, previous experience is usually required. This acts as an obstacle for many groups of young people. Moreover, virtual participation is usually not allowed, resulting in an additional burden for youth (e.g. travel expenses and other participation costs).
- Information on how to engage and contribute doesn't always reach young people and youth organisations.
- Language barriers, lack of experience or knowledge, and fear of reprisals

represents other obstacles.

From the perspective of OHCHR teams working on the ground at national and/or regional level, challenges to working on youth rights with youth organisations include the following:

- Lack of cohesion in the youth sector means that it's a challenge for OHCHR to work with youth organisations as they lack coordination. This results in OHCHR encouraging other civil society organisations to highlight youth issues, but it's not as effective.
- Resources to work with young people and youth organisations at national level are lacking. Therefore this cooperation mainly happens in the context of specific projects or campaigns.
- Even when youth is engaged and cooperation happens, there are no systematic ways to store and keep data and information.
- It is difficult to ensure youth participation: when young people lack basic knowledge of human rights, it is very hard to involve them in taking part in human rights reviews at the top level.
- While some efforts are made to foster capacity building around the UN human rights system, the level of engagement remains low as the impact of these mechanisms is not clear, as there is a disconnect with the reality of youth organisations.
- There is no standard approach among UN stakeholders: not all agencies implement a RBA to their work with youth. Lack of coherence has a negative impact on the overall advancement of youth rights.

These challenges illustrate how, while important, mainstreaming youth rights can only be part of the solution.

6. A specific focus on youth: the way forward

To ensure better coverage of youth rights in human rights processes, a first essential step would, of course, be improving such mechanisms. To this end, some key recommendations include:

- Providing youth-friendly tools to build the capacity of young people and youth organisations to engage in human rights processes: for example, by training youth-led organisations in writing reports; by providing youth-friendly information.
- Investing in youth organisation and creating inclusive spaces for youth to participate meaningfully: for example, increased financial support to small NGOs.

- Improving the accessibility of UN human rights mechanisms to increase the level of participation of youth organisations.
- Ensuring that overarching human rights processes complement regional instruments and frameworks on youth, where relevant.
- Fostering the role of OHCHR, at international, regional and national levels, to support youth organisations in engaging with human rights processes.
- Co-creating rather than just receiving information and recommendations, by ensuring that youth organisations become the first point of contact on youth-related issues.
- Exploring how mechanisms for youth participation such as ICMYO the UN Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY), and regional platforms of youth organisations, can play a role in mainstreaming youth more effectively.

Beyond mainstreaming youth rights, youth organisations have been advocating for a more focused approach to youth at UN level. This could come in different forms, with varying levels of political feasibility. Indeed, the recently adopted UN Youth Strategy, by explicitly stating that the UN "recognizes young people as rights-holders", could give youth rights a new momentum and pave the way for new discussions around a specific instrument for youth, should Member States decide to move forward in such direction.

For years, the European Youth Forum and other youth organisations has been advocating for a legally binding instrument on youth rights - an international convention - with an accompanying monitoring mechanism. For youth civil society, such an instrument would fill in the gap in protection at international level, and ensure that governments and public authorities at all levels are held accountable for their legal obligations towards young people. While several attempts at proposing a youth rights convention have been made over the years, the political will from the side of Member States seems to be lacking.

Additionally, another proposal could be¹⁸ there could be a potential for the establishment of an "open-ended working group", tasked with drafting "international standards" on the human rights of young people. While this would not be a legally binding instrument, its soft-law nature could overcome Member States' scepticism, and could be adopted by consensus. Moreover, such an instrument could still establish a monitoring mechanism, and could be the pathway for additional measures in the future. For example, a similar path was followed for the rights of people with disabilities, which ultimately led to the establishment of a Special Rapporteur on Disability in 1994,¹⁹ and finally an international convention.²⁰

¹⁸ Imma Guerras (2019), UN sabbatical report - #foryoutright: what type of international instrument?

¹⁹ See

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/about-us/special-rapporteur-on-disability-of-the-commission-for-social-development.html>

²⁰ UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 24 January 2007, [A/RES/61/106](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/about-us/special-rapporteur-on-disability-of-the-commission-for-social-development.html).

An alternative to the above, as proposed by youth representatives and youth organisations, could be found in taking advantage of the possibilities provided by UN Special Procedures. Aside from further engagement with existing Special Rapporteurs and Independent Experts, one option would be to establish a Special Procedure on the human rights of young people. A Special Procedure mandated by the Human Rights Council, as opposed to the UN Youth Envoy, would act as a mandated structure within the UN Human Rights system, with a focus on youth rights.²¹ Should such structure not be feasible, given the increasing fatigue in creating new mandates, another option could be to broaden the mandate of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons,²² for them to work on age-based discrimination, rather than on a specific age group.

7. A global youth movement #foryouthrights: potential for cooperation

International frameworks and initiatives can play a relevant role in advancing youth rights. However, what is even more important, is that youth organisations at all levels (local, national, regional, and international) work together to build a truly global movement.

Over the years, civil society has played an active role in advancing the youth rights agenda by advocating for the fulfilment, recognition and advancement of youth rights. However, engagement from youth organisations in the youth rights debate can and should be improved; as can their coordination across regions. In this context, RYPs and INGyOs must lead the way in delivering capacity building, providing opportunities for exchanges, and building the bridge with institutional stakeholders.

While many are the obstacles that youth organisations face in their day-to-day activities, it is essential that spaces for cooperation are provided and fostered: establishing a global movement for youth rights takes time, but there are many steps in between to be taken.

The following are some examples of potential projects and initiatives across regions and cultures, as identified in the context of the "Mobilising the global youth movement #foryouthrights" event.

a. Cross-regional cooperation between RYPs

RYPs could establish a partnership to ensure an ongoing dialogue and exchange of information on specific topics and rights. This cooperation could take several forms. For example, RYPs could take advantage of UN-level processes such as the UPR to work together on raising awareness on the issue, and advocate towards Member States whenever a relevant country in one of the relevant regions is being reviewed. Along these lines, RYPs could support each other's advocacy and follow-up once UPR recommendations are published to ensure policy change happens.

²¹ See the [report](#) from 2018 Regional Consultation on Youth and Human Rights organised by the European Youth Forum and OHCHR.

²² See <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/OlderPersons/IE/Pages/Mandate.aspx>



Furthermore, RYPs could exchange good practices relevant to their respective membership. For example: the Pan-African Youth Union is developing a platform for young MPs from different political parties in Africa to establish a dialogue. Other RYPs could explore whether Party Political Youth Organisations in their own membership would be interested in developing similar platforms and cooperate with other regional counterparts.

b. Cooperation between INGYOs and OHCHR field offices

INGYOs could take advantage of their widespread membership to increase their cooperation with OHCHR offices at various levels. For example, INGYOs could reach out to their members and connect them to OHCHR colleagues at regional and national levels, possibly with the support of OHCHR's headquarters in Geneva, to develop toolkits (e.g. on the RBA and the UN human rights system), in a language that is modern, more accessible and youth-friendly.

This cooperation could also be extended to other areas, such as working together on the implementation of the UN Youth Strategy, or developing ad hoc campaigns and projects.

c. Cooperation between RYPs and OHCHR field offices

RYPs could join forces to share their perspectives and different levels of expertise on advocating for young people, to more effectively advance youth rights. Moreover, the involvement of regional OHCHR offices could provide support to organise physical meetings, and it could provide additional visibility to actions taken.

For example, should the Pacific Youth Council decide to develop a Pacific Youth Charter, cooperation could be established with other RYPs working in areas where regional youth frameworks already exist, for them to share their experience and lessons learnt on how to advocate for such frameworks. Moreover, other RYPs with an expertise on advocating for a RBA to policy making, could also be involved in the process to ensure that any new regional framework on youth is rights-based.

8. Conclusion

In the year that marks the 75th anniversary of the UN, it is essential that institutions, youth organisations and young people themselves start an open conversation on what is needed for youth rights to become a reality, and how the UN and its structures can foster this process.

From improving the inclusiveness, accessibility, and effectiveness of the UN human rights system, to strengthening the cooperation between youth organisations and young people across continents, the objective remains the same: creating a global movement for youth rights. This becomes an even more pressing priority as 2020 has been shaken with the outbreak of a pandemic that risks exacerbating already existing inequalities and the vulnerability of the least protected in society, including young people.

Of course, young people are one of the many groups to need protection and recognition. But then again, not only does youth include many other vulnerable groups (e.g. young women, young LGBT+ persons, young people with disabilities, etc.) but ensuring that young people can thrive in society also means supporting both present and future generations.

To achieve this, safeguarding the role of civil society, and fostering a thriving civic space at all levels is as foundational as the legal recognition of youth rights. Without conscious efforts to ensure meaningful youth participation and inclusive co-creation processes, it will be hard to achieve progress. Young people are more prone to support what they help create. Moreover, while there is no doubt that youth organisations represent the interests of all young people, it will also be key to involve unorganised youth, as their experience and understanding of what it means to be young is equally valuable.

An increased and truly participatory approach to youth at UN level, and an effort from the side of youth organisations to work more and better together, have the potential to counteract the growing mistrust in multilateralism, the worldwide rollback of human rights, and the overall questioning of the impact of intergovernmental processes in the UN.

9. Recommendations

To foster the development of a global youth movement for youth rights, and ensure that institutions can provide enabling conditions for the respect, protection and fulfilment of the human rights of young people, the following points should be implemented:

To increase youth participation:

- Institutions at all levels should ensure **transparency and inclusive deliberative processes**. Youth organisations and movements should be supported to systematically lead discussions on both the necessary enabling factors for full democratic participation, and solutions to youth-specific issues.
- OHCHR should provide **technical assistance and capacity building opportunities for youth representatives to improve their engagement with the UN human rights system**. Such work could be undertaken in partnership with Regional Youth Platforms and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations to develop accessible, youth-friendly material.
- Member States and OHCHR should provide **financial and logistical support to youth organisations and young people to foster their engagement in all stages of UN human rights reviews**.
- OHCHR and other relevant UN system stakeholders should **provide technical assistance and capacity building opportunities to national and local authorities** on developing comprehensive, rights-based youth policy. Such

assistance should also be provided to youth organisations and movements, to increase their capacity to advocate for youth rights.

- Institutions at all levels should ensure that **safeguarding a thriving youth civic space remains high on the agenda of policy makers**, as a key foundation of any democratic society.

To advance the youth rights at international level:

- The accessibility of the **UN Human Rights system should be improved to increase the level of participation of young people and youth organisations**. This should include supporting the participation of young people by adopting a youth-friendly, non- technocratic language, as well as addressing language barriers that might prevent participation.
- OHCHR should **promote meaningful, sustainable and accessible youth participation in human rights mechanisms**. UN Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures mandate holders should increase efforts to mainstream youth rights in their work. To achieve this, Special Procedures should meet with representatives of youth organisations or youth-led structures during country visits. UN Treaty Bodies could also further address youth-specific questions and include issues relating to youth in their Concluding Observations to Member States.
- The UN Human Rights Council to consider measures that would most effectively advance the rights of young people at the international level, such as:
 - **Consider initiating the process of drafting and negotiating a legally binding, international convention on the rights of young people**, with the involvement of civil society and representatives of youth organisations. This convention should be accompanied by a monitoring mechanism. As a first step towards this goal, the Human Rights Council should consider the establishment of a working group, with the participation of youth representatives, to **develop a non-binding international instrument, such as standards on youth rights**. Such an instrument could, for example, be accompanied by the establishment of a **Special Procedure on the human rights of young people**, such as an Independent Expert or Special Rapporteur.
 - Better mainstreaming youth rights through existing mechanisms, policies and programmes.
- Regardless of the measures chosen, attention should be given to ensuring that **overarching human rights tools and strategies complement regional instruments and frameworks on youth**, where relevant.

- **Increased dialogue between OHCHR headquarters in Geneva and country teams**, with the aim to foster a more coherent approach to mainstreaming youth rights in human rights processes.

To build a global youth movement for youth rights:

- Regional Youth Platforms and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations should continue their efforts to **provide spaces and regular opportunities for exchange between youth representatives from different regions**, with the goal to foster cooperation on an ongoing basis rather than ad hoc.
- OHCHR should establish an **ongoing cooperation with youth organisations and movements**, which should become the **first point of contact for any youth-related issue**.
- OHCHR should provide **technical, financial and logistical support** where possible, **to foster cooperation between OHCHR offices and youth organisations within and across regions**.