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*EU Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments*



# PARLIAMENTS AND YOUTH: TOWARDS IMPACTFUL ENGAGEMENT



*In July 2024, INTER PARES | Parliaments in Partnership – EU Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments and the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan organized a youth engagement workshop with youth representatives and parliamentarians from Uzbekistan who were joined by their colleagues from Cyprus, Czechia, Germany and Slovakia. That candid discussion and exchange of youth engagement strategies serves as the basis of these key insights.*

## YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN PARLIAMENT: A SHARED OPPORTUNITY

**Mr. Peter Plenta**

State Advisor, Parliamentary Institute, National Council of the Slovak Republic

*"It might not seem obvious, giving young people opportunities to directly influence legislation or even the constitution, but with the rise of social media creating new opportunities, and given the state of our democracies, in my eyes this is a really important area for parliaments' investment."*

Effective youth participation starts from the premise that young people can make valuable contributions to society and have the right to help shape the laws and policies governing their society. Whatever the challenge, young people should be listened to and have a voice in crafting solutions.

What can parliaments do to bring more young people into their work? How can the engagement of young people translate into meaningful input in decision-making?

Discussions among INTER PARES partners offered these eight principles for parliaments to consider as they work towards the meaningful engagement of young people in their work. These are not context specific initiatives or activities, but rather proposed ways of thinking about and acting on present opportunities.

### REFLECTIONS ON KEY TERMS

When exploring youth participation, it is important to be explicit about intentions and expectations. **The terms – representation, engagement and participation – describe related but distinct relationships between young people and their parliament.** Those distinctions have important implications for the why, how and who of youth participation:



#### REPRESENTATION

Representation is a core parliamentary function. Members of Parliament (MPs) represent the interests and views of young people, just as they do others. In the words of Hannah Pitkin, **they make them 'present' in parliament even when they are 'absent'.**



#### ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is **an umbrella term** that covers the different types of activities and approaches parliaments can employ to connect with young people. Engagement is typically divided into 5 categories: information, education, communication, consultation and, finally, participation.



#### PARTICIPATION

Participation is a specific form of engagement. Participation means young people take part in **formal political processes**: voting, joining a political party, or contributing to the day-to-day work of the parliament (e.g., submitting a statement to a committee hearing). Participation is therefore part of engagement. Participation is the most challenging area of engagement, and the one with most opportunity for growth.

For more on this, please consult the INTER PARES **e-learning course on Youth Participation: Pathways for Parliaments.**

## 1. Write a new narrative: young people as game changers

### Mr. Alisher Sa'dullayev

Senator, Member of the Committee on Youth, Culture and Sports of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis;  
Director of the Youth Affairs Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan

*"Instead of looking at young people as a disadvantage or problem, we started to look at them as an investment. We see them as agents of change."*

As of 2020, more than 1 in 2 people worldwide are aged 30 or younger (UNFPA). Africa remains by far the youngest continent, with 40% of its population under the age of 15 and 12% between the ages of 18 and 24 (Statistica). Europe remains the 'old' continent, with only 16% of people between the ages of 15 and 29 (Eurostat).

No matter the proportion of youth within the population, the underlying challenges for developing, enacting and monitoring effective policies in support of young people are similar: how to identify and maximise young talent, how to source and support ideas and innovation, how to ensure young people are able and willing to contribute to society.

The single most important building block in tackling these issues is **to adopt a narrative that embraces young people's potential**. This narrative can foster specific strategies based on the premise that youth are not only a group that is to be helped, but as a group that can help.

### Mr. Nikolas Christofi

Co-founder of Youth Parliament in Cyprus

*"Our aim is to include young Cypriots in decision making structures to give them a permanent space for expressing their opinion, help them understand concepts such as democracy, dialogue, freedom of expression and many others, and minimise the gap between young people and technocrats."*

## 2. Recognise, prioritise and promote young people

Recognising, prioritising and promoting the engagement of young people must be a **distinct area of focus for parliaments**. As parliaments play a critical role in youth participation in decision-making, specific efforts to bring young people into parliamentary work are necessary.

### Ms. Shaknoza Joldasova

Chair of the Youth Parliament at the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan

*"Seventy percent of all comments and suggestions [on the revised constitution] were provided by young people. When the first draft was developed and during public consultations, young people's comments were outlined, they could see that their comments were being considered and discussed. That was a really important initiative."*

**Mentoring** is generally viewed as a particularly valuable strategy. In Uzbekistan, Members of the Youth Parliament in both chambers are 'paired' with a Member of the Senate or the Chamber, giving them direct access to senior decision-makers and providing them with consistent opportunities for learning, guidance and networking. Members of the House and Senate Youth Parliaments who have been mentored will build on the experience, with several of them considering further political engagement.

### 3. Understand young people in their diversity

Effective and sustainable youth participation **demands a nuanced understanding of who and what we mean by ‘young people’**. It is important to recognise that there is no ‘one’ profile: young people differ across age groups, gender, geography (in particular, urban versus rural), ethnic background, socio-economic status and so on. As a result, the respective opportunities and challenges they come across will also differ. Of course, many young people combine various characteristics; a young woman from a rural community, or a young person with a disability, for example.

To ensure that young people of all backgrounds are reached and enabled to engage in parliamentary debate and decision-making, this diversity should be better understood by parliaments. Youth bodies or research institutions can provide parliaments with important information on the lived realities of young people.

#### Mr. Alisher Yunusov

Deputy Director of the Institute for the Study of Youth Issues and Training of Prospective Personnel of the Republic of Uzbekistan

*“The core objective of the Institute for the Study of Youth is to analyze and better understand the issues faced by young people. We look, for example, at trust in government institutions among young people, at how globalisation affects their lives, and of course at youth participation.”*

### 4. (Re)connect with young people

#### Mr. Peter Plenta

State Advisor, Parliamentary Institute, National Council of the Slovak Republic

*“For me, the ideal model is one where politicians listen to experts and to young people. The decision [on who to consult] ultimately is theirs, but it should be an informed one, and young people should be part of that.”*

Parliaments are constantly assessing and reassessing how they connect with young people. Traditional methods - websites, parliament visits, guided tours - may be kept but updated, while a host of more recent initiatives - youth parliaments and social media - are added. Managing a full array of options is challenging, especially for smaller administrations that lack the necessary staff, but even a small team can make parliament interesting and engaging for young people.

#### Mr. Josef Sučík

Public Outreach Specialist, Department of Communication and Education, Parliamentary institute, Czech Chamber of Deputies

*“At the end of my tour [for visitors to the parliament], I want everyone to have learned something they didn’t know before, to find it all a bit more interesting - and maybe to have even had some fun. With that, I also achieve my second goal: making people realise they have a responsibility in choosing who will represent them after the next elections.”*

A key point is that whatever initiative or opportunity is offered should be **tailored to young people in approach, content and tone** as much as possible. This can be done by asking them what they would need or want to see (e.g., through an open evaluation of available tools), by engaging expert staff (e.g., those with a youth engagement or teaching background), and/or by building or working with existing structures and organisations, especially at the local and regional level.

**Ms. Nina Ritz**

Coordinator of Youth Participation Programs, the German Bundestag

*"In Germany, youth associations („Jugendringe“) in every state act as the parent organisation of youth clubs of all kinds (e.g. sport clubs, young firefighters, religious youth groups). In addition, those parent organisations have a representative body at the federal level (the “Bundesjugendring“) to lobby their interests in politics."*

## 5. Meet young people where they are

Participation is a two-way street. In the case of young people, who may lack the means, skills or opportunity to make their way to parliament or to engage in complex, technical conversations, parliaments should go beyond opening their own doors, to reach out and meet young people where they are, both in person and online. **In person**, this may include visits to constituencies or regions distant from the capital, or regular exchanges with state or youth organisations that are locally or regionally anchored. Digital tools can support the coordination and collection of data from such engagement initiatives.

**Mr. Behzod Tukhtamurodov**

Chairperson of the Youth Parliament at the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan

*"We [Members of the Youth Parliament] have quarterly meetings with the Chair of the Senate. At our last meeting, more than 1,200 young people joined us online and offline. That way we could hear directly from them."*

**Online**, any meaningful conversation on youth participation must consider the prevalence of **social media** in the life of today's young people. Many MPs and administrators are comfortable with social media; investing in a strong, dependable social media presence is indispensable for both individual MPs and parliament as an institution. Rather than seeing this as 'the' way for parliaments to engage with young people, it can be framed as 'a' way, a starting point that can lead to more meaningful and 'long form' exchanges.

**Ms. Shaknoza Kholmakhamatova**

Member of the Science, Education, Culture and Sport Committee Member, Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan

*"MPs must represent the people: You have to share your initiatives, what problems you are trying to resolve. To get answers to these questions, we use social media such as Facebook, Telegram, Instagram - you name it, I use it. I have my personal channel on Facebook and Instagram and I'm following up with many constituents myself. Whether we discuss regional problems, infrastructural problems, educational challenges or employment challenges, women, housing, etc., all these matters and issues are being discussed using social media platforms. Sometimes it's easier to obtain information not using official channels, but more informally, using simple language. For younger generations, doing this will increase awareness of our laws and will motivate them to participate in the activities of our Parliament. This is why I do it and why I call on everyone to be more active and better presented on social media."*

**Ms. Nina Ritz**

Coordinator of Youth Participation Programs, the German Bundestag

*"Recently, and after quite some resistance, the Bundestag has joined several social media platforms. We are now present on Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, WhatsApp and some other smaller channels. The aim is to reach young people via social media by providing neutral information about political issues, promoting political debate and helping young people to form their political opinions in posts and reels that correspond to their habits of informing themselves."*

## 6. Invest in civic education

The importance of civic education remains a recurring theme. Meaningful youth participation is simply not possible if young people are not aware of what parliament is, what it does or should do, and what opportunities exist for them.

Questions are often raised about who **should be responsible for civic education** (government, parliament, individual schools) and - closely connected - to **how it is best delivered**. Concerted and sustained effort should be made to teach young people about their political system and rights, using age-appropriate methods.

### Mr. Nikolas Christofi

Co-founder of Youth Parliament in Cyprus

*“Cyprus has just elected a 23-year-old YouTuber [Fidias Panayiotou] as a Member of the European Parliament. He originally started campaigning in the social media by encouraging young people to register and vote but ended up being elected himself. This case might push political parties to evolve but also to advocate for high-quality civic education programs at schools from an early age.”*

## 7. Institutionalise youth participation

A critical building block for youth participation is the adoption of constitutional, legislative and institutional frameworks that recognise the role of young people as citizens and that embed youth engagement and voice. Examples include the recent constitutional amendments in Uzbekistan to more explicitly recognise and target young people, and the German Bundestag’s Children’s Commission as a pathway for the direct participation of children and young people in parliamentary work.



### Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Article 79.

*“The State shall ensure the protection of personal, political, economic, social, cultural and ecological rights of young people, and encourage their active participation in the life of society and the State.”*

### Ms. Nina Ritz

Coordinator of Youth Participation Programs, the German Bundestag

*“The Children’s Commission is a subcommittee of the Committee on Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth or short family affairs. Last year it was chaired by Amelia Fester, who was the youngest Member of Parliament to be elected to the Bundestag at the age of 23. During her time as chair of the Children’s Commission, she only invited young people under the age of 27 or even children to the Commission as experts on children and youth issues. That is real participation.”*

Likewise, substantive training or internship programmes help ensure young people and their ideas find their way into parliament.

### Mr. Peter Plenta

State Advisor, Parliamentary Institute, National Council of the Slovak Republic

*“Our internship programme has seen 700 successful graduates over 26 years, including (former) MPs, the current head of presidential administration, MEPs, and administrators. We give young, talented people the opportunity to work in our institution, alongside our staff and experts, where they are able to learn about and influence policies and legislation. It also means that all of us - Members and staff - are used to seeing young faces and working with young people.”*



## 8. Sustain a 'new normal'

Making youth participation work is essentially about offering young people meaningful opportunities to contribute to the work of parliament that are **endorsed by senior decision-makers in the institution, that enjoy sufficient practical and financial support, and that are sustainable in the long run.** As these changes become more commonplace teething issues can be expected, and practices should be revised as needed, especially in light of feedback from young people, Members and staff.

### Ms. Shaknoza Kholmakhamatova

Member of the Science, Education, Culture and Sport Committee Member, Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan

*"Together with the Youth Parliament, we [in the Commission on Science, Education, Culture and Sport] provide recommendations relevant to young people. We have done that for over 30 legal documents this term and we will continue to do this."*

In Uzbekistan, it has become common practice for draft legislation to be shared with the Youth Parliaments for their feedback.

### Ms. Shaknoza Joldasova

Chair of the Youth Parliament at the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan

*"Can you imagine a young person aged 18 to 30, for example, commenting directly on draft laws? It's an excellent opportunity for them. Their suggestions may not be developed in full compliance with legal techniques, sometimes they're verbal or just voiced during meetings, but later those proposals are finalised jointly with the Members."*

Ultimately, **effective youth participation requires a shift in norms**, not just protocol or practice. This takes time. As more and more parliaments bring more and more young people into their visiting centres, their committees and plenary meetings, and their administrations, mutual understanding and trust can build, and genuine dialogue can develop.

## Additional resources

INTER PARES E-learning course on [Youth Participation: Pathways for Parliaments](#)  
INTER PARES [Youth Explorer: a Self-Scan for Parliaments](#)



## SPOTLIGHT ON YOUTH POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN UZBEKISTAN

Where Europe faces an ageing population, Uzbekistan is one of many developing economies to face a youth bulge. Sixty per cent of its population is under the age of 30, a number that is projected to grow in the years to come. In the next 15 years, these young people will become one of the largest labour forces Uzbekistan has ever had, presenting the country with a unique opportunity ([UNICEF, 2020](#)).



### Constitutional and legal framework

**Ms. Dilnoza Kattakhanova**

Deputy Director of the Agency for Youth Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan

*“Youth has been one of the national priorities for Uzbekistan since 2016. In recent years we have adopted more than 100 acts and laws on young people. We now have an overarching Youth Policy, and we have repeated references to young people and to this Youth Policy in our new Constitution.”*

Uzbekistan is building a constitutional and legal framework that explicitly recognises and seeks to support the rights and protections of young people. This includes a focus on their role as citizens and their opportunities for participation in public and political life.

#### **Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Article 79:**

“The State shall ensure the protection of personal, political, economic, social, cultural and ecological rights of young people, and encourage their active participation in the life of society and the State.

The State shall create conditions for intellectual, creative, physical and moral formation and development of young people, the exercise of their rights to education, health care, housing, recruitment, employment and recreation.”

1 May 2023

Source: <https://lex.uz/docs/6451070>

#### **Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan On State Youth Policy, Article 6:**

“State, territorial and other programmes are developed and implemented in order to create the necessary conditions to provide social support for young people, protect and implement the personal, political, economic, social and cultural rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of young citizens, increase their role and activity in public life, and foster a healthy and harmoniously developed young generation.

Adopted by the Legislative Chamber on 12 August 2016, approved by the Senate on 24 August 2016

Source: <https://lex.uz/docs/3026250>





## Meeting young people where they are: the mahallas

With the adoption of the 2023 Constitution and the 2016 State Youth Policy, youth participation has become central to the country's development goals. Young people are considered to be game changers: investing in their participation is a national priority. This is translating into a growing range of initiatives that invite and institutionalise political participation at local, regional and national level.

The foundation is laid in at the local level, where communities - known as mahallas - have seen the establishment of a system of youth leaders. Mahallas are the first level of the social and political structure of society, both representing the autonomous organization of citizens, and they can also be charged with certain governance tasks according to the Mahalla law. Youth engagement here has proven critical. Each mahalla has one or more youth representatives who receives a salary and who helps to identify and solve the challenges young people face. A digital platform collects all information, allowing for easily updated reports. This way, policy makers have access to the necessary details and can (re)consider what is needed on a year-by-year basis.

### Mr. Alisher Yunusov

Deputy Director of the Institute for the Study of Youth Issues and Training of Prospective Personnel of the Republic of Uzbekistan

*"Working with youth representatives at the mahalla level enables us to better analyse the problems faced by young people from the lowest level to higher levels, and we can find solutions to those problems."*

Connecting with young people at the local level makes it easier to understand, and respond to, the diversity of their experiences. Giving young people ownership of these initiatives further facilitates conversations and connections that would be difficult without such 'natural' interlocutors. Young people with disabilities, for example, are consulted to better understand their needs and then offered appropriate education opportunities, training, employment and so on.



## Parliamentary mechanisms

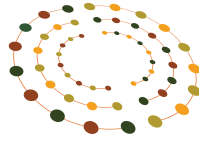
The Senate and the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis play a critical role in delivering on these ambitions. Both house a committee on youth, thereby ensuring that this area of work receives due attention:

The mandate of the [Commission on Youth Issues of the Legislative Chamber](#) is "to assist in implementing the state policy on youth consistently and effectively, providing comprehensive support for youth, protecting their rights, freedoms and legitimate interests." The Committee analyses gaps and develops recommendations for the improvement of the policy framework related to youth issues and in ensuring the implementation of international agreements in this field.

In addition, the Oliy Majlis accommodates two uniquely designed youth parliaments. Across both Chambers, 250 young people are selected for a two-year term as 'youth MP': they are paired with a Member of the Legislative Chamber or the Senate and are invited to actively participate in, and contribute to, the work of the institution. Youth MPs have no formal decision-making power, but they are considered an integral part of the parliamentary process.



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**Mr. Behzod Tukhtamurodov**

Chairperson of the Youth Parliament at the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan

*“As a Youth Parliament we have a direct line to some 20 Ministries and agencies, all of which we have met with. We also work with the Senate Committees, in particular the Committee on Science, Youth, Culture and Sport. We are engaged in oversight and in the development and discussion of legal documents. This kind of participation improves the image of young people and allows us to contribute directly.”*

Over the coming years, these initiatives will be evaluated, expanded and fine-tuned as needed. The Senate and the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis welcome further exchanges on this subject.



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This paper originated in a workshop organised by INTER PARES and the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan on 9-10 July 2024. Representatives from the Senate and Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis and youth representatives from Uzbekistan were joined by their colleagues from the Czech Republic, Germany, Slovakia and Cyprus, to share their established and emerging youth engagement strategies.

INTER PARES | Parliaments in Partnership – the EU’s Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments expresses its sincere appreciation for co-organizing the event to:

- The Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan chaired by **H.E. Tanzila Kamalovna Narbaeva** for hosting this workshop.
- The Chairperson of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis **H.E. Ismoilov Nuriddin Muydinkhnovich**.
- The **European Union** which provides all of the funding for INTER PARES.
- **International IDEA** which hosts and delivers the INTER PARES project.
- The distinguished Speakers and Moderators of the Workshop, and all those who contributed to the successful organization of the event, including:

**Ms Diloram G. Tashmukhamedova**, Senator, Deputy Chairwoman of the Committee on Youth, Culture and Sports of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis;

**Mr Alisher Sadullaev**, Senator, Member of the Committee on Youth, Culture and Sports of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis, Director of the Youth Affairs Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan;

**Mr Odiljon Iminov**, Senator, Chairperson, Committee on Science, Education, and Healthcare of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis;

**Mr Valiyev Mukhammad**, Chairman of the Youth Commission of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis;

**Ms Shaknoza Kholmakhamatova**, Member of the Science, Education, Culture and Sport Committee of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis;

**Mr Valisher Davlyatov**, Deputy Director of the Parliamentary Research Institute under the Legislative chamber of the Oliy Majlis;

**Ms Dilnoza Kattakhanova**, Deputy Director of the Agency for Youth Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan;

**Mr Alisher Yunusov**, Deputy Director of the Institute for the Study of Youth Issues and Training of Prospective Personnel of the Republic of Uzbekistan;

**Mr Behzod Tukhtamurodov**, Chairperson of the Youth Parliament at the Senate of the Oliy Majlis and its members - Ms Laylo Aslonova, Ms Khushnuda Raupova, and Mr Mehroj Mahmudov;

**Ms Shaknoza Joldasova**, Chair of the Youth Parliament at the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis;

**Mr Josef Sučík**, Public Outreach Specialist, Department of Communication and Education, Parliamentary institute, Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic;

**Ms Nina Ritz**, Coordinator of Youth Participation Programs, the German Bundestag;

**Mr Peter Plenta**, State Advisor, Parliamentary Institute, National Council of the Slovak Republic;

**Mr Nikolas Christofi**, Co-founder of Youth Parliament in Cyprus.