

# Political Participation and Civic Engagement – an overview of key issues facing youth

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# Initial remarks

- **Who are young people?**
  - ✓ Agreement: 15-24 years of age
  - ✓ 1,5 billion people
- Question that arises is:
  - ✓ **Is this group in a position to exercise their Political Participation and Civic Engagement rights like other groups?**
  - or
  - ✓ **Are there circumstances that make it advisable for a process of specification of youth rights regarding Political Participation and Civic Engagement ?**

# Process of specification of rights

- International Bill of Human Rights (UDHR + 1966 Covenants)
  - Specification of **serious violations**: racial discrimination, enforced disappearances, genocide
- Specification concerning **groups of people which were in a situation of structural vulnerability regarding the respect of their rights**:
  - ✓ Structural vulnerability derived from **personal characteristics** (children, elderly)
  - ✓ Structural vulnerability derived from **context** (migrant workers, indigenous peoples)

# Main issue:

- Are young people (15-24) in a **situation of structural vulnerability in the exercise of their rights of Political Participation and Civic Engagement**, derived either from their personal characteristics or from social, economic and / or political structures, **which require the adoption of specific measures** to avoid their discrimination and to ensure equality in the exercise of their rights?

# Or on the contrary?

- Do the characteristics of this group of people and their status in society **not allow us to identify any particular problems in the exercise of these rights?**

# What it is the Political Participation and Civic Engagement?

- **Political participation can be defined as the process by which individuals, communities and social actors get involved in public policies that affect them and elect the representatives that they believe will make it possible (the right to vote and the right to stand)**

**“Experts”: young people have no interest in participating.**

# But...

- Political participation goes beyond the exercise of the right to vote and stand
- New forms of participation:

ICTs are changing traditional forms of mediation between citizens and their representatives and the influence of participation in public policy :

- a) They have deepened into the different influences of participation: vote 'volatility', greater capacity to form new organizations, ad hoc groups and candidate vulnerability.
- b) The likelihood of citizen influence in politics has increased and substantially improved: opinion surveys, analysis of 'trends' and adherences, adherence to different causes, mobilizations, fundraising in support for proposals and

- The young people are prominent actors in new forms of political involvement, leading to specific demands through social movements under different patterns.
- It has been the young who have initiated and led these forms of participation.
- Then young people do want to participate politically. They show it with facts



- Process of "aging" of political parties = rejection of the young to the ways the political field is structured ?
- It's not just political participation, but it is also social commitment.
- Separation between traditional structures and new social manifestations of the participation of the young

# A non-representative survey conducted among my students (all aged between 18 and 25 years) last week

What are the barriers that you find to channel your participation and manifest your social commitment? :

- they do not feel represented by politicians;
- they do not see young people on the electoral programs to feel identified with,
- they do not participate in the youth section of political parties because they feel too "directed" by adults;
- they feel they are silenced;
- they perceive many prejudices from adults towards them and that adults often catalogue them as anti-establishment, violent, etc.

# it was also unanimous:

- they increasingly relate to each other through social networks, looking for common interests and creating "virtual organizations";
- they care to engage in causes when they consider them just through actions that might be effective in the short term,
- although they do not like the society in which they live, they do not aspire to a revolutionary change, but to be accepted by it and gradually work to change what they can or they wish to be changed

# How to change this reality?

A. The empowerment of the young in the exercise of their rights

A. A specification process of youth rights:

1. To gather the values, aspirations and demands with which young people identify with: the right to identity and non-discrimination due to any reason, including sexual orientation, the right to conscientious objection, participatory democracy, the right to the environment, the right to peace ...
2. Measures should be taken to remove existent barriers to the full political participation and social commitment of the young (including the possibility of positive discrimination)

C. A profound study, geographically and culturally representative on the obstacles faced by young people in the exercise of their rights

Thank you very much for your attention

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