

Committee: Youth Assembly

Issue: Increasing youth participation in regional and international politics

Student Officers: Katerina Voutsas & Fedra Louloudopoulou

Position: Co-Heads

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear members of this year's Youth Assembly,

My name is Katerina Voutsas and I will be serving as one of the Co-Heads of the Youth Assembly in this year's DSTMUN. I have previously attended 4 conferences as a delegate and this one is going to be my first experience as a Student Officer.

First of all, I would like to reassure you that your decision to get involved in the exciting and challenging world of MUN is indeed wise. As you probably already know, the Youth Assembly differs from the regular MUN committees, since it is designed in a way that will facilitate first comers' smooth adaptation to the concept of MUN. Therefore, you should definitely take a look at the Youth Assembly manual and familiarize yourselves with the rules, so that you can be active during committee work.

This study guide is focused on the issue of youth political participation. It's undeniable that it is a matter that interests and concerns everyone, as it immediately affects not only us as teenagers, but also the world in which we choose to live in and our future. With the appropriate research, I am confident that you will all be able to participate because the Youth Assembly is all about expressing one's personal opinion. Of course, it's understandable to feel nervous at first, since some of you may not have had the opportunity to speak in public before, but my experience has shown that it all goes away after the first speech. So, don't hesitate!

Lastly, I would like to stress out the fact that this study guide may be a comprehensive report on the issue of youth political participation, but additional research is necessary. In case you need any clarification about anything, feel free to contact me using my email address katerina.voutsas2002@gmail.com.

I look forward to meeting all of you!

Katerina Voutsas

My name is Fedra Louloudopoulou and I too will be serving as a Co-head in the Youth Assembly of this year's DSTMUN. I have been involved with MUN for the past 3 years, while I have so far participated in 3 conferences as a delegate and this will be my first time serving as a Student Officer.

The idea of being a Student Officer fascinated me, as I believed it would allow me to see things from a different perspective and I am thus, really excited to be serving as a Student Officer in the Youth Assembly and for that, I wish to bring my current skills to our committee and help it roll as smoothly as possible.

I am aware that most of you, if not all, aren't that familiar with the MUN world, so I will do my best to ensure that this conference will be an unforgettable experience for every single one of you. Under no circumstances should you neither hesitate to stand up and express your opinion nor hesitate to communicate with each other and exchange your views on the relative matters. Our action papers, after all, will be a result of your cooperation.

I am looking forward to cooperating with you.

Fedra Louloudopoulou

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Active civil participation is considered to be the cornerstone of any democratic regime. This was initially acknowledged by the ancient Greeks, leading to the establishment of the first truly democratic institutions in ancient Athens. Every citizen felt the need to participate in the decision-making process regarding serious or less serious matters of the city by expressing their opinion or by undertaking leading positions. As societies evolved, people's political participation changed. While in ancient Athens it was feasible to require everyone's participation, today's democratic states can only be ruled by representatives elected freely by people. The need for participation, however, is still vital, in order for proficient leaders to be elected.

Political leaders are the ones who take all the decisions concerning a country's functioning and play a significant role in determining its future. However, a society's progress cannot be guaranteed unless the young people contribute to the governance and provide new and innovative ideas. Youth is often characterized as a society's future and this is obviously true. Young people are the ones who will inevitably have the duty to lead their societies in the years to come. Consequently, their view on matters should not be neglected but rather taken into serious account. Our era could be described as turbulent and highly unstable in comparison to the recent past. The young people, being aware that they are the ones who will be mostly affected by the continuous changes that occur, need to externalize their inherent passion in a productive way that will contribute to the improvement of the current situation. Unfortunately, not in every country is this youth's agony able to be expressed. Undemocratic regimes that still exist in many parts of the world limit significantly people's free will about their own future.

However, even though young people's participation is needed, it has been observed that they are not actively engaged in political activities. More specifically, according to a UN report about youth, political participation and decision-making, even though 1/5 of the world's population consists of young people, only 1.65% of the politicians are in their 20s and 11,87% in their 30s. This statistic represents the stereotypical view that politicians should be elected based on their experience, leading to young people lacking the chances needed to participate in formal political practices.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Youth

Youth is a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence and awareness of our interdependence as member of a community.¹

Politics

The activities associated with the governance of a country or area. Regional politics are related to the governance of a country or a specific part of a country. On the other hand, multiple countries are involved in international politics.²

Civic engagement

The individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern.³

Political party

A political party is an organized group of people with at least roughly similar political aims and opinions, that seeks to influence public policy by getting its candidates elected to public office.⁴

Generation gap

The generation gap is a situation in which older and younger people do not understand each other because of their different experiences, opinions, habits, and behaviour.⁵

¹ Unesco.org, Youth, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/youth/youth-definition/>

² En.oxforddictionaries.com, Politics, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/politics>

³ Apa.org, civic engagement, <http://www.apa.org/education/undergrad/civic-engagement.aspx>

⁴ Aceproject.org, Political Party, <http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/pc/pca/pca01/pca01a>

⁵ dictionary.cambridge.org, Generation Gap, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/generation-gap>

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

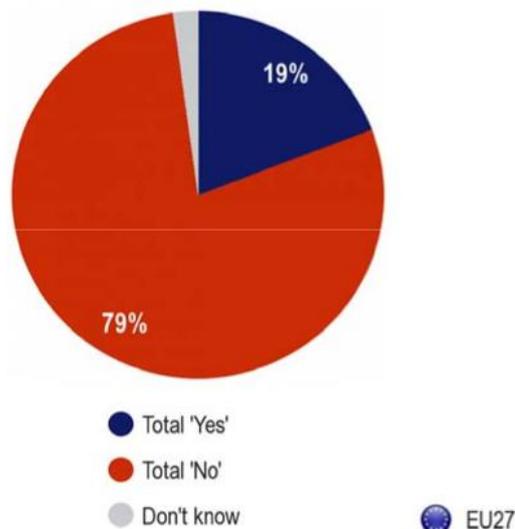
The issue of youth participation in politics is very wide and that's the reason why it might seem a little overwhelming at first. Below you may find some useful information that can guide you through your research and point you to directions that you perhaps hadn't thought of.

Aspects of the problem

Most of the people taking part in political parties are older than 40 years old because the emphasis is usually given in sectors such as experience, knowledge, and maturity, leaving young people's opinions inadequately represented. Taking into consideration the generation gap, we understand that the political parties, which are supposed to represent the people of the country, actually don't express the views of a large part of them – the young people.

The fact that very few young people participate in official political practices, such as political parties, indicates that the fresh ideas the youth may provide can rarely be shown this way. In other words, the youth lacks the means needed to express their opinions. That's the reason why attempts should be made and initiatives should be taken towards the development of alternative means through which young people's views can be expressed publicly.

Q2. Would you consider standing as a candidate in a political election at some point in your life?

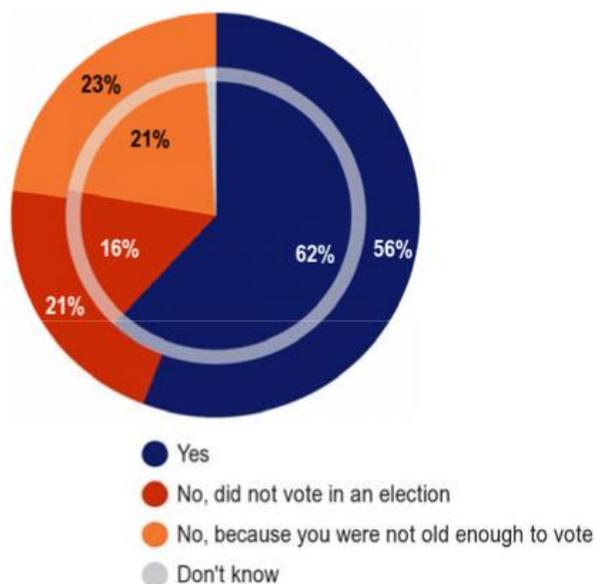


Base: All respondents (12,927)

#1 Percentages of people that would, wouldn't and don't know about whether they would stand as a candidate, European Commission, 2013

It has been estimated in a lot of countries that the younger citizens are the ones who mostly don't vote on political procedures including but not limited to elections. This indifference shows that young people lack the passion and the desire to resolve the current problems, either because they believe that their voices are not being heard or because they have lost faith in the political processes, something which can result from the numerous scandals that have emerged in the recent years. This situation should concern everyone because the adolescents of the present will be the leaders of tomorrow and no community can progress unless it is characterized by passionate leaders, who are determined to fix all problems.

Q1. During the last 3 years, did you vote in any political election at the local, regional or national level? If you were, at that time, not eligible to vote, please say so.



Inner pie : FL319a Feb. 2011

Outer pie : FL375 Apr. 2013

EU27

Base: All respondents (12.927)
 #2 Percentages of people that voted, didn't vote, didn't vote because of age restrictions and don't know at any political elections either in local, regional or national level, European Commission, 2013

Last but definitely not least, a common phenomenon is young people actually being unaware of some important crises that are going on around the world and have huge effects on millions of people's lives. This could be an important indication that the education the youth receives does not adequately provide them with the basic knowledge of politics, leading to them being not familiarized with this topic. This is totally unacceptable as if we don't know what the problem is we can't actually provide feasible solutions so as to fix it.

Benefits of youth participation in political activities

It is obvious that young people themselves will be benefitted from their involvement in political procedures. They will become, sooner or later, tomorrow's

leaders. Therefore, their participation in political matters will prepare them for the hard tasks they will have to undertake in the future. Moreover, since they will be aware that their voices can indeed be heard, the youth will also be encouraged to be more active in civic matters. Working together with older people, who have achieved a lot as politicians, is undeniably going to benefit many young people since the mentors' experience can guide them through their first steps in being more politically active. The knowledge that these people have gained is a result of a long-standing political engagement and therefore young people wouldn't be able to acquire it otherwise so quickly. Lastly, through their political participation, young people will interact with a lot of other people, leading to the enhancement of the social part of their characters.

However, the society as a whole has also lots to gain from the young people's contribution to the political stage. It's widely accepted that young people tend to view the world from a different perspective. That's the reason why they have unique ideas and can offer innovative and useful solutions, that few or no other people had thought of. Consequently, the involvement of the youth in political procedures may lead to the solution of significant problems because of the solutions they can propose.

Undemocratic regimes

Undemocratic regimes lack the institutions that guarantee all sorts of civil rights that are common in democratic societies. Due to the violation of certain human rights, such as the right to freely express one's opinion, young people don't have the opportunity to share their ideas and contribute to the country's governance. However, it's extremely important to notice that despite the harsh times in these countries, young people are often at the forefront of demonstrations demanding democratization and liberalization of their societies.

Consequently, what the youth can actually do is take action in order to trigger people's reaction to the current system and change it. This solution may not be a very peaceful one sometimes, but it has been observed that it's the one chosen by young people of different eras, whom all shared a common passion to be involved and to make their voices heard. In the past, there have been many instances in which young people were the ones to rebel, in order for a democracy to be established. One of the most well-known protests took place in Beijing. In 1989 more than 1 million people gathered in Tiananmen Square and demonstrated against China's communist leaders. Chinese troops soon arrived and fired against the protesters. The most famous footage of this protest are the videos and photos of a young man standing in the middle of the street and trying to block the tanks.

The aforementioned incident would have never taken place if the country's youth was indifferent to the political situation of their societies. Taking into consideration the lack of passion that characterizes today's young people, we should probably be concerned about what is going to happen in non-democratic countries,

if they don't claim the future they deserve, which includes them being able to participate actively in civic and political matters.



#3 The so-called "tank man" blocked the tanks for a few minutes on the 5th of June 1989

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Germany

According to a recent Global Youth Development Index (YDI), which evaluates each country's conditions and the opportunities it can offer to the youth, Germany was ranked as the best country for young people to live in. Despite the destructions caused by World War II and the consequent division until 1989, the German society has achieved miraculous development rates. At the same time, it set its priorities taking into serious account youth's concerns and interests. As a result, Germany offers excellent education and numerous opportunities.

Central African Republic

According to the aforementioned YDI, Central African Republic was ranked 183rd on the list. The African continent has suffered until recently the consequences of colonization and therefore societies are not as developed and mature as elsewhere. The Central African Republic is a typical example of the situation described, leaving little space for youth's development.

Youth Policy

Youth Policy is a think-tank created by a German non-governmental organization, called Democratie & Dialog, which focuses on young people and their civic development. Youth Policy's goal is raising awareness of the problems faced by the youth by producing reports that analyze a lot of national policies concerning young people. For instance, in July 2016, a working paper called Children, Young

People and Participation explores ways in which youth’s political and civic participation can be enhanced based on the already existing regulations. Furthermore, it presents uprisings and demonstrations that have taken place in non-democratic regimes and prove young people’s determination to fight for a brighter future.

United Nations Youth Associations (UNYAs)

UNYAs are Non-Governmental Organizations that are led entirely by young people and aim at educating the youth on the concepts of the United Nations. Moreover, through UNYAs young people have the opportunity to get participate in discussions concerning civic and political issues and make their voices heard. Activities, such as MUNs, also help the people involved better understand some political procedures.

United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD)

The United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development is a network that consists of all the UN bodies that are responsible for youth. The existence of such a network facilitates the collaboration and the exchange of knowledge between the different UN entities, leading to the achievement of better results concerning the development of young people.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of event
1945	Foundation of the UN
1946	Establishment of UNICEF
1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 21: everyone has the right to contribute directly or indirectly to their country’s governance)
1965	Establishment of UNDP
1966/1976	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 25: everyone has the right to vote and be elected)
1985	International Youth Year
1989/1990	Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12: every child who is mature enough to form his views on matters should be given the opportunity to express these views on issues that affect the child)

1998	Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups, and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Article 8: everyone has the right to take part in their country's governance)
2002	UN Special Session on Children

RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

International Youth Year (1985)

In 1979 the UN adopted a resolution that declared 1985 as the first International Youth Year, whose theme was Participation, Development, and Peace. In the framework of this initiative, the UN in cooperation with other organizations – including youth-led ones – organized activities that revolved around issues, such as but not limited to, implementation of new economic measures, world peace and the promotion of mutual cooperation between nations.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989/1990)

Thirty years after the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of the Child took place. The United Nations have realized that children, due to the fact that they haven't reached a certain maturity level, need special care. Consequently, this treaty protects the rights of children, so that their well-being is ensured and therefore they can grow into citizens of the international community. The 12th article of this convention states that "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child."⁶

World Programme of Action for Youth (1995)

Ten years after the International Youth Year, the UN General Assembly adopted an international strategy – the World Programme of Action for Youth. This strategy provides guidelines on how to improve young people's situation in a national and international framework. The World Programme of Action for Youth mainly focuses on 15 sectors, one of which is "Full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making".

⁶ Ohchr.org, Convention on the Rights of the Child ,1990/1990, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf>

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Analytical Paper on Youth Participation

This paper is the outcome of a close cooperation between the European Commission and the Council of Europe. It concerns the issue of people's, and especially youth's, participation in decision-making processes, while also presenting actions that the EU has already taken.

Eurochild

Eurochild is a group of European organizations that aim at protecting young people's rights. The members of this network cooperate by sharing information on the issues discussed and act by influencing national and European policies. One of the topics is "Child and Youth Participation".

Youth Atlantic Treaty Association (YATA)

The Atlantic Treaty Association (ATA) aims at informing the public about the role of NATO by organizing special events and cooperating with multiple organizations that share the same views as NATO. YATA is a separate part of ATA that is focused on bringing together young professionals and training them on international security matters so that they are able to shape the future of the institution.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Keeping in mind that this is the Youth Assembly, all proposed solutions should be in the form of youth initiatives, meaning should be actions that the young people are able to do by themselves.

Leveraging technology as a means to familiarize youth with the world of politics

Since the use of technology is widespread among young people, it appears as more probable for young generations to be informed via the Internet and therefore most initiatives targeting at increasing youth's interest in politics as well as their corresponding participation should be focused towards this direction. The majority of broadcasting networks are already present on the Internet and the social media providing an alternative to traditional methods such as reading a newspaper or watching a news broadcast on TV. Additionally, innovative ways of attracting even younger ages have gradually emerged. For instance, a group of professional journalists working voluntarily created a special web site where news is presented using simple vocabulary and difficult to understand notions regarding politics are explained in detail.⁷ This attempt familiarizes children of pre-adolescent age with international issues aiming at creating future responsible citizens.

⁷ <http://teachingkidsnews.com/>

However, young people not only are recipients of information but have turned out to become originators as well. Blogs and special web pages that are developed by youth facilitate the expression of their opinions on matters of their interest. This may well be the so much needed initial step towards making the youth's voices heard by the rest of the societies.

Taking advantage of the already existing opportunities

Even though young people should try to change the situation by suggesting new initiatives, they should also take advantage of the opportunities that already exist, which aim at empowering them and familiarizing them with political procedures. These opportunities include programs, which resemble political processes, such as but not limited to Model United Nations (MUN) or European Youth Parliament (EYP). Furthermore, the young people who have the ability to vote shouldn't abstain from the procedure, because in this way their views cannot be represented. Another great opportunity is the concept of student bodies, that exists in many schools, and gives students the chance to experience electing representatives, but also being elected. Lastly, there are a lot of youth organizations that young people can join and get involved in actions that will ensure their participation in civic and political matters.

Raising awareness on the issue and motivating organizations, governments etc to take action

Being a member of the Youth Assembly doesn't only give you the chance to propose actions that can be implemented by young people, but also contacting organizations and governmental bodies and motivating them to act appropriately. You can spread your message via a formal letter or by organizing campaigns aiming at raising awareness. The changes you can suggest can be relevant to education and official governmental practices. For example, a new class related to politics could be created or special workshops could be held on a regular basis. Both of these ideas aim at bringing students in touch with some major international issues and familiarize them with how governmental and international bodies and organizations function. The difference is that workshops could additionally teach the students some practical issues concerning their political engagement. One of the plenty ideas that can be suggested to governmental bodies, aiming at ensuring youth political participation, is for a quota of people under 30 years old in every political party or institution to be set. Moreover, a day dedicated to youth participation could be established. During this day young people should be provided with opportunities, such as attending lectures by politicians or generally anyone related to politics and workshops, where they can put everything they have learned into practice.

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