

# SHAPING OUR FUTURE CONFERENCE



Gemeente Utrecht



Vereniging van  
Nederlandse Gemeenten

In this declaration we highlight practical policy recommendations increasing the influence of youth in decision-making processes at all levels - in particular, empowered by local and regional governments. These recommendations are based on key takeaways of the Shaping our Future Conference organized in Utrecht on 12 June 2024.



1. INVOLVE YOUTH IN  
DECISION-MAKING

2. POLICY FOR TODAY, THE  
FUTURE & ELSEWHERE



3. HOLD GOVERNMENTS  
ACCOUNTABLE

4. PROVIDE FUNDING FOR  
YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

5. TRUST BETWEEN YOUTH &  
GOVERNMENT



6. CONNECT GENERATIONS &  
BACKGROUNDS

7. NEED FOR CAPACITY  
BUILDING



8. SCHOOLS & GOVERNMENT  
PREPARE YOUTH FOR FUTURE

9. DIGITAL & PHYSICAL  
INFRASTRUCTURE

## Background & objectives

The Conference was organized to gather and validate input for the Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments created by United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) António Guterres, to provide him with recommendations on local and regional governments' engagement in intergovernmental processes. The Advisory Group has provided inputs reflecting the local government constituency's priorities on all chapters of the draft UN Pact for the Future that will be adopted during the UN Summit of the Future in September 2024. It also worked on a global strategy for the engagement of local and regional governments in intergovernmental processes.

The conference brought together participants from around the world, including mayors and local elected officials, youth representatives, and students. Over the course of this one-day event, recommendations were made on how to further improve collaboration between local governments and youth, culminating in key takeaways on local and regional governments' role in democracy and inclusive governance. This document also builds upon the DeclarACTION that was issued by UN-Habitat in June 2022, which focuses on the responsibilities of youth, national governments, local governments and the United Nations, and was drafted in collaboration with the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments.

The takeaways of the Shaping Our Future Conference are aligned with the Advisory Group's recommendations to the UNSG on enhancing local and regional governments' engagement with the UN, based on their commitment to youth participation. Local governments have already taken significant steps that reflect many of these recommendations to enhance youth participation.

The close relationship that local and regional governments have with their citizens, especially youth, is a key reason their status as political actors with critical responsibilities in implementing global agendas should be more widely recognized. Through stronger engagement of local and regional authorities in intergovernmental bodies and processes, as suggested by the drafts of the Pact for the Future, local and regional authorities can contribute to the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals in ways that takes into consideration current and future generations and therefore build trust among all members of society.



## Recommendations



### **1. Involve youth from the outset of decision-making processes**

Inclusion of youth requires involvement from the start of the process to avoid missed perspectives and foster trust.

In order to make the policy-making process more inclusive, it is crucial that youth are heard at the outset of the process. Ways to do this are for example organizing consultation moments, improving accessibility to relevant information and appointing a youth council or representative.



### **2. Formulate policy that benefits society now, in the future and elsewhere**

All spheres of government should implement a generation test. This is an assessment that measures impact of policy on climate, public health, environment and economy. It assesses the impact of policies, now and in the future, here and elsewhere.

Policy is developed to improve quality of life of communities. To foster solidarity with future generations, local and regional governments are playing a key role in shaping governance. Furthermore, they are critical actors in improving management of the physical environment and support the provision of public goods that deliver equitably and sustainably for all. A generation test helps monitor and evaluate the process and future prospects of the SDGs.





### 3. Hold governments accountable to improve the policy process

Establish youth advisory boards to provide a direct channel for young voices that holds the government accountable for the quality of their policy process and its output.

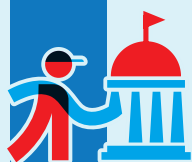
In order to create trust, governments on any level need to be held accountable - a whole-of-government approach is advised. Follow-up, monitoring, and evaluation are crucial in order to build trust and also help to avoid repeating the same issues later. As such initiatives are also considered at the national or supranational level, their recommendations should be openly communicated between all levels of governments to ensure coherent and transparent implementation. The relevance of accountability is seen on a supranational level as well, as a similar structure is also promised by the Commission president Ursula von der Leyen for her 2024-2029 mandate.



### 4. Provide funding for youth-led or youth focused organizations

Local and regional governments should initiate collaboration with youth, when decisions and policies will impact them. Effective policies include youth-directed budgets and financing youth-led or youth-focused initiatives should be prioritized.

In order to create more engagement with young people, it is important to reserve budgets and compensation for those with good initiatives and ideas to improve the quality of living for those in the local society.



### 5. Build trust between youth and government

During the conference, many young people pointed out they have a lack of trust in the public system. As the sphere of government closest to the people, local and regional governments are uniquely positioned to rebuild this trust by fostering meaningful and consistent engagement with youth. To achieve this, local governments must establish clear mechanisms for follow-up and feedback, show how their voices are heard and how this translates into policy.

Youth do not only need a seat at the table, but also want to see the actual results of their efforts. The trust that local governments can build, through their proximity and responsiveness, represents a crucial asset in bridging the gap between youth and public institutions. This underlines the importance of recognizing and integrating local and regional governments in global processes related to youth, as they can act as vital catalysts for inclusive governance and the strengthening of democratic systems.



### 6. Create connections between different generations and backgrounds

Local governments must facilitate physical meeting spots where people of all ages, genders, sexual orientations, ethnic backgrounds, or socio-economic status can safely get together, connect and share interests. Local governments can choose to either create a new facility, or improve existing ones, such as local sports clubs, music associations or libraries.



When people are unfamiliar with people from other social groups, this can create lack in common understanding and a gap in trust. To improve this, local governments are responsible for promoting local associations to be inclusive and safe, so people from all walks of life feel welcome. To ensure that inclusivity and diversity are prioritized when offering youth a seat at the table, an intersectional approach is indispensable. Youth from marginalized groups often still have limited access to these types of facilities and tend to be overlooked when organizing dialogues.

### **7. Focus on capacity building and mentorship**

**Local governments should support, facilitate and advocate for youth capacity development services, mentorship programs and curricula that foster a sense of global citizenship, and teach skills that are indispensable in the 21st century.**

School curricula predominantly focus on theoretical knowledge, whilst youth need to have a broad range of skills and competences to thrive in a world that is rapidly changing. Life skills such as media literacy, digital skills, and mental health are indispensable in the 21st century. Providing youth with opportunities to build these skills inside and outside formal education settings will prepare them better for the job market and life in general.



### **8. Schools and local governments must collaborate to prepare youth for the future**

**Local governments must support, facilitate and advocate for education that fosters a sense of global citizenship and create environmental and climate awareness among young people.**

Given the dramatic and accelerating changes the world is experiencing, education can play a crucial role through empowering individuals and society to adapt and thrive. Education can steer the world towards a more inclusive, livable and sustainable future. Local and regional governments can aid in this development through initiating and supporting local communities of learning.



### **9. Improve access to digital and physical infrastructure**

**All layers of governments must ensure that information, communication, digital and physical infrastructure is accessible and inclusive to a wide youth audience, making it easier for society to engage and participate.**

Being part of local society, means both being able to participate, being listened to, being communicated with in an enabling way, and also that the environment is physically navigable for all. Local and regional governments are key actors in reducing inequalities by ensuring universal and equitable access to public services.



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