

ICLEI'S VISION ON YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN GLOBAL CLIMATE ACTION

SUBNATIONAL GOVERNMENTS AND NEXT
GENERATIONS ADDRESS THE CLIMATE
EMERGENCY TOGETHER



Today, facing the global climate emergency which is closely interlinked with the global acts crisis, it is clear that accelerating action across the board is the need of the hour. With several ongoing global crises, ICLEI - Local Government for Sustainability (ICLEI) takes action by supporting local and regional governments in 125 countries around the globe to accelerate localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to foster resilient, net-zero emission, nature-based, circular, equitable and inclusive development.

One thing is for certain - Leaving the Earth in a dire state, now or in the future, is not an option. Therefore, a strong legacy is necessary for today's children and the future generations to come. At present, more than [1.3 billion young people aged 15 to 24](#) live on this planet, and of this number, almost 85% live in the global South.. By 2030, 60% of this urban population will be younger than 18 years of age¹.

We acknowledge the diversity of young people and their needs across the different corners of the world. We recognize that this is one of the most vulnerable groups facing the impact of climate change and that they require a voice, a partner and immediate action to safe-guard themselves and their future. Thus, we reflect on three key questions: Where are we now? Where do we want to go? How do we get there? These questions guide ICLEI's approach in working with the youth in different cities, towns and regions around the globe.

Where are we now?

Our youth, representing the next generation of voters, workers, or leaders, are demonstrating their determination, their anger at lagging leadership, and their potential to engage in climate action. The youth is being heard in the climate debate at all levels, mobilizing millions of peers, creating world-wide movements that claim priority of climate action in political agendas, and demanding from governments at all levels to acknowledge and respond to the global climate emergency. Youth continue to champion the call to deliver on the objectives of the Paris Agreement of keeping global warming below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels.

A critical first step was recognizing the role of the youth in tackling climate change. In 2008, the UNFCCC Secretariat addressed enhancing effective participation of youth in climate change policy decision-making processes. From then to now, we have made huge strides in that direction.

One of the most remarkable advancements made in COP 26 is the mention of multilevel action in the [UNFCCC Framework - Glasgow Climate Pact](#). The Pact recognizes '*the important role of indigenous peoples, local communities and civil society, including youth and children, in addressing and responding to climate change, and highlighting the urgent need for multilevel and cooperative action*' and '*urges parties and stakeholders to ensure meaningful youth participation and representation in multilateral, national and local decision-making processes, including under the Convention and the Paris Agreement*'.

¹ Youth 2030: The UN Youth Strategy. Available at: https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/18-00080_UN-Youth-Strategy_Web.pdf

Further, the [Glasgow work programme on Action for Climate Empowerment](#) reaffirms 'the critical role of youth as agents of change, calling for further enhancement of youth participation in climate change processes and in unleashing the potential of Action for Climate Empowerment'.

There is a need and an opportunity for frank dialogue between subnational governments and the youth, something that is understood and underway. ICLEI strongly believes in this approach and here are some examples of how we put this in practice:

- ICLEI has started building a strong relationship with [YOUNGO](#), the Youth Constituency of the UNFCCC for children and youth, consisting of many youth-led organizations, groups, delegations, and individuals working in climate change-related fields. This is also linked to the role ICLEI plays as focal point of the LGMA constituency at the UNFCCC.
- By sharing good and best practices and creating spaces for discussion, ICLEI has been instrumental in inspiring and sparking this essential conversation across cities, towns and regions in its network, also with institutions and initiatives across the world. This was demonstrated through:
 - ICLEI creating many opportunities for dialogues, including a firm presence in Daring Cities 2021,
 - LGMA constituency's focal point participation in the ICLEI World Congress 2021-2022 in Malmö and,
 - most recently in [Daring Cities 2022](#).
- ICLEI is an official partner in the [Youth4Climate Initiative](#), launched by the Italian Ministry of Ecological Transition (IMET) and UNDP in May 2022.
- ICLEI Members have identified and implemented new ways to set ambitious climate and biodiversity targets, with well defined strategies to meet these that include the opinion and support of local youth. [Recife](#) (Brazil), [Bonn](#) (Germany), [Olympia](#) (U.S.A.), [Tirana](#) (Albania), [Lusaka](#) (Zambia), [Malmö](#) (Sweden), [Envigado](#) (Colombia), [Mount Barker](#) (Australia), [Turku](#) (Finland), [Bandung](#) (Indonesia), [Udaipur](#) (India), are but a few celebrated examples of such leadership and engagement.



Yet, we still have a long way to go and much more needs to be done. A [major message](#) shared by 12 University students participating in the ICLEI World Congress 2021 - 2022 in Malmö highlights that the youth is still not meaningfully included in most climate debates. They are invited (often very late in the process) mainly to play a consultative role, rather than a decision-making role. Further, their call for raising the climate ambition and faster climate action largely goes unheard. The risk of “youthwashing” making their presence more ceremonial rather than giving them the opportunity to substantially contribute to content, is high².

Where do we want to go?

Young people have the need, energy, creativity and motivation to drive change and improve their quality of life in the cities, towns and communities they live, study and work in. It should not be forgotten that they are agents of change, researchers, entrepreneurs, innovators and residents.

The Malmö Commitment highlights the importance of a just transition to a sustainable local economy, emphasizing the need to create decent employment for youth and women. *'These jobs should support new local economies that are productive and not extractive, that contribute to restoring and enhancing the environment, that manage climate risk, or are otherwise supportive of safe, healthy, sustainable communities and lifestyles.'*

New generations must be involved in critical decisions concerning their future and the future of their communities and need to be given an active and meaningful role in addressing the climate emergency as well as the environmental, cultural and social crisis. Youth messaging and priorities must be prioritized at local, national, regional and international levels/fora.

ICLEI envisions to embed the voice of youth in its own activities across [all five ICLEI pathways](#), mindful of local specificities, while supporting the next generation's role in the co-design of local implementation projects.

Young people should have a say on crucial strategies such as the local climate action plans, through appropriate governance structures and processes. Formal youth processes that feed into decision-making at the local level (City Councils), including through research need to be put in place.

ICLEI intends to upscale support for local and regional governments to unlock and embrace the constructive, creative potential of the youth, by meaningfully including their representatives as active participants in local climate action. One way to achieve this goal is for ICLEI to create a toolkit for youth on how to reach out to local government officials and for local governments on how to best engage and involve youth. In Annex 1 and Annex 2, more details are provided, highlighting examples of ICLEI's engagement with youth in climate advocacy and projects and initiatives.

² "Key message and impressions from the Student Ambassadors at ICLEI World Congress 2021-2022 in Malmö". Available at: <https://worldcongress.iclei.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Student-report-FINAL.pdf>

How do we get there?

ICLEI recognizes the valuable and creative contribution youth can make to climate and push for more ambitious climate commitments at the local level.

ICLEI encourages more youth engagement at local levels because we believe that a more systematic integration of youth perspective in the work of local administrators and decision makers is critical to help implement action at scale. By adding new perspectives from the technical, political, social and cultural angle, this cooperation secures a more democratic, inclusive and creative sustainable future, in line with the [Malmö Commitment](#).

ICLEI aims to enhance the participation of youth through their proactive involvement in the activities of local governments through three pillars: (i) **Advocacy**, (ii) **Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Development**; and (iii) **Governance**.

Advocacy

Advocacy is an instrument to call and push for more ambitious climate commitments, regulation, policy and accelerated joint action. In accordance with our mission to foster multilevel governance, ICLEI will continue collaborating with youth representative organizations such as YOUNGO, Youth7, the official G7 youth engagement group; and other regional youth organizations and networks in important international arenas such as the COPs, to affirm and acknowledge each other's importance in steering the path toward a sustainable future.

- ICLEI has taken significant steps in advocating for more collaboration with the youth. Building on the Bonn Climate Change Conference outcomes (SB56), ICLEI intends to actively engage the youngest in the Stocktake4ClimateEmergency through collaboration with the Local Conference of Youth (L-COY).



Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Development

This pillar focuses on activities relating to exchanging knowledge between formal and informal educational stakeholders including youth groups, schools and universities. ICLEI will strengthen its partnerships with relevant actors to contribute as well as amplify learning opportunities for young people.

- ICLEI deems it significantly important to encourage creating new job and training opportunities for young people especially in the local government offices and bodies. This will allow not only the youngest to learn from experienced local staff but also to actively contribute with new creative ideas and out-of-the-box perspectives in designing innovative solutions.

Governance

This pillar emphasizes empowering youth in decision making processes through youth councils to support policy makers in developing and implementing local climate action plans and ensuring representation of different youth groups such as the vulnerable and marginalized ones.

- ICLEI aims to support practitioners and decision makers in the integration of next generations into the design and implementation of local sustainability, resilience and climate policies. We urgently need to move to implementing concrete actions and youth should be actively engaged in that process.

Finally, aligned with ICLEI's five pathways of driving change, we acknowledge the need for a coordinated collaboration of youth engagement in areas related to sustainable development addressing all environmental, social and cultural crises. This includes (but is not limited to) biodiversity and nature conservation, water management, circular economy, social innovation, and food production systems. Briefs complementing ICLEI's work in different areas will follow this statement.



Annex 1: ICLEI Youth Advocacy Initiatives

A key focus area of ICLEI, as part of numerous activities and initiatives carried out at global, regional and country level, has been the connection of youth to our constituency- local and regional governments. Advocacy is conducted by sharing critical messaging at events and through publications.

Interesting sessions have showcased how local and regional governments are engaging the youth, also providing an opportunity to share, learn, exchange and reflect together on what works well, which challenges could be overcome, and where more intensified progress and efforts are needed.

Some highlights of ICLEI's interactions with YOUNGO since 2020 include:

- Daring Cities 2020 and 2021 Call to Action - participation in the opening session, resulting in the publication of the Daring Youth Statement
- 2021 COP26 - session at the LGMA multilevel action pavilion and EUROCLIMA pavilion
- 2022 ICLEI Malmö World Congress - intergenerational dialogue in plenary and focus workshop
- 2022 WUF11 - conversations and dialogues on youth engagement
- 2022 Daring Cities - participation in High Level Plenaries on Climate Justice with contribution to thematic sessions on energy and local finance

Moreover, ICLEI also partnered with other local, regional and national youth organizations as well as local governments and institutions to amplify the message and share experiences on the ground. This was the case for the pre-CO26 event "*Empowering youth for climate action*", organized with the City of Milan and the Urban African Youth Manifesto on Climate Change released in October 2021.

Among the latest initiatives, it is worth mentioning the innovation introduced by the City of Malmö and ICLEI in the last ICLEI World Congress 2021-2022 where 16 students from the Lund University, Malmö University, and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences participated in all the sessions, exchanging ideas and thoughts with participants from all over the world on their vision of a sustainable city. Key takeaways from these discussions, focusing on early engagement of youth in processes, multilevel governance and climate justice has been collected in the ICLEI World Congress 2022 Youth Report.



Annex 2: Selection of ICLEI’s Initiatives and Projects on Youth Engagement

ICLEI has been promoting youth engagement at the local level through projects and initiatives that it has been contributing to or promoting over the last 5 years.

Region of implementation	Name of the initiative/ project	Timeframe	Description
Global	GreenClimate-Cities™ Program	Ongoing	ICLEI’s global impact program is tailor-made for local and regional governments around the globe to address the global climate emergency. A key element is engaging with the youth in local climate action planning and implementation.
Global	Youth4Climate initiative	2022, launched in September	A global initiative, co-led by Italy and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to sustain long-term and meaningful engagement with the youth.
Africa	Urban African Youth Climate Change Manifesto	2021	ICLEI Africa, through alignment to the 2021 RISE Africa congress and together with relevant partners provided support to activation of the African youth voice in the urban climate discourse through the development of a youth manifesto for COP 26, and follow up engagements with their city leadership.
USA	Pennsylvania and Indiana Climate Action Cohort	Yearly	ICLEI supports university students in the process of developing greenhouse gas inventories and climate action plans for cities in the two states. In addition to this, ICLEI provides support in similar capacity to the states of Nebraska, Wyoming and Ohio.
Latin America	Youth Environmental Education Workshop	Yearly	Workshop for the International Environmental Education Day with participation of local youth leaders and organizations.
Latin America	Sustainable School Certification	Since 2021	Schools receive certifications for the implementation of sustainability actions with the participation of students and local communities.

Region of implementation	Name of the initiative/ project	Timeframe	Description
Latin America	Academic Immersion	Since 2019	University students supervised by a professor and ICLEI technical team develop academic research to address a challenge faced by a city.
Latin America	Ambassadors of Climate Justice	Since 2019	Children between 7- 12 are educated by young volunteers trained by Plant-for-the-Planet and ICLEI on Climate Justice. The children plant native trees at the end of their formation.
Europe	Nature-Based Solutions Education Network	2022-2025	With the objective of nurturing an NBS literate society, the project seeks to ensure free and easy access to NBS knowledge and resources for all.
Europe	Uplift	2020- 2023	European Project that sees the youngest working on housing, education and employment to shape local policies.
Europe	Cultuurcampus	2022-2025	European project on a new approach to education through the New European Bauhaus lens to transform the disadvantaged urban area in Rotterdam.
South Asia	Study on Young Children and Climate	January 2022 - July -2022	Engaging young children and caregivers in climate action domain in Indian cities
South East Asia	Youth Energizers: Student leaders as <u>champions of energy efficiency and environmental sustainability</u> in DKI Jakarta	2017-2021	The activity built capacity and raised awareness of the youth, specifically students in DKI Jakarta to become active and knowledgeable advocates of energy efficiency and conservation. It involved competition for 120 students and 24 teachers from 24 schools.
Multiple regions	Sound and Safe City (formerly SUEP)	2021-2024	In partnership with the Global Infrastructure Basel Foundation, the Safe Urban Environmental Program (SUEP) aims at a safe, solid, just and livable urban environment so that young people can unleash their full potential to become future agents of change.