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Title	Supporting youth civic engagement: Supranational and national policy frameworks in comparative perspective
Author(s)	Chaskin, Robert J.; McGregor, Caroline; Brady, Bernadine
Publication Date	2018-04
Publication Information	Chaskin, Robert J. , McGregor, Caroline , & Brady, Bernadine. (2018). Supporting Youth Civic and Political Engagement: Supranational and National Policy Frameworks in Comparative Perspective. Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland Galway.
Publisher	UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland Galway
Link to publisher's version	<a href="http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/media/unescochildandfamilyresearchcentre/J4445---58606-NUI-Engaging-Urban-Youth-Policy-Report_v6.pdf">http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/media/unescochildandfamilyresearchcentre/J4445---58606-NUI-Engaging-Urban-Youth-Policy-Report_v6.pdf</a>
Item record	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10379/7439">http://hdl.handle.net/10379/7439</a>

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# Supporting Youth Civic and Political Engagement: Supranational and National Policy Frameworks in Comparative Perspective

BY

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APRIL 2018



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 661541.

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Any citation of this report should use the following reference:

Chaskin, R.J., McGregor, C. and Brady, B. (2018) *Supporting Youth Civic and Political Engagement: Supranational and National Policy Frameworks in Comparative Perspective*. Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland Galway.

ISBN: 978-1-905861-49-1

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# Acknowledgements

We would like to sincerely thank colleagues who assisted in the policy analysis including Kayleigh Murphy, NUI Galway, Grace O Shea, NUI Galway, Ariel Maschke, University of Chicago and Charlotte Sall, University of Chicago. Thanks also to our colleagues Dr Eoin O Sullivan in Trinity College Dublin, Professor John Pinkerton in Queen's University Belfast and Dr Kalbir Shukra, Goldsmith University for their assistance in advising on and reviewing the policy document. Sincere thanks also to colleagues in the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre especially Dr John Canavan, our internal reviewer and Professor Pat Dolan, our project mentor.

# 1. Introduction

Over the past half-century, and particularly since the adoption of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), there have been both increased attention and shifting policy orientations towards children and young people globally and in specific nation states.<sup>1</sup> This has included an agenda that moves beyond a narrow focus on basic survival, protection, and remediation to a more holistic focus on the 'whole child', promoting young people's personal and social development and addressing their connections to the world. Emphasis has also been placed on recognising young people's potential for agency and contribution to society, as well as their right to participation, civic engagement, and influence. This shift is also reflected in scholarship reconceptualising childhood as more than a period of transition to adulthood. Rather than viewing children and youth as passively shaped by the socialising influence of, for example, families and schools, childhood is now seen as a status in itself in which young people are active contributors to their socialisation and to the world (Wyness, 2012; Archard, 2004; James and Prout, 1997).

Along with this focus on young people's rights and potential as contributing members of society has come significant concern about the extent to which young people are in fact *engaging*, and about how best to support their engagement. This is particularly true with regard to young people who live in circumstances of disadvantage, are from marginalised backgrounds, or may be excluded or alienated from their communities, key institutions, and society at large. For disadvantaged young people in their teens and early twenties, especially urban youths and those from ethnic minority backgrounds, such disenfranchisement is often reinforced by negative media portrayals and punitive policies that treat these young people as threats to be controlled rather than as young people with the agency and potential to contribute positively to society.

The current focus on seeking to foster young people's positive engagement in society is likely informed by several factors. First, forces of globalisation, urbanisation, economic restructuring, and important demographic trends – especially increasing diversity and mobility – are changing the face of communities in many parts of the world, shaping new circumstances to which young people must respond, and providing new challenges and new opportunities for action. Second, the youth population is a sizeable component of this demographic picture, particularly in developing contexts and in many disadvantaged communities in the global north. Third, debates about the current state of community and democracy are raging in many quarters, along with arguments about, for example, the role of social capital and social exclusion and the ways in which state, market, and civil society actors may contribute to (or undermine) community, address disadvantage, and promote well-being.

Successfully engaging young people in the institutions that shape their lives and the communities in which they live and building their capacity as social actors can be a critical factor in their positive development as individuals. It can also enhance their role as active citizens and promote their positive contribution to these same contexts and institutions (Flanagan, 2013; Sherrod, Torney-Purta, and Flanagan, 2010; Yates and Youniss, 1999; McLaughlin, Irby, and Langman,

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<sup>1</sup> The UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1959; the UNCRC was presented for states to sign and ratify 30 years later and has subsequently been ratified by all member nations with the exception of the United States, which signed the convention but has not ratified it.



1994). Effectively engaging young people, however, can be challenging. This is particularly true of those from disadvantaged backgrounds – those most affected by structural factors of inequality, disadvantage, and discrimination – regarding their engagement in community action and participation in political and democratic processes. Such participation concerns engaging young people as *citizens*, both civic and political actors with autonomy and capacity to identify issues and priorities, deliberate and advocate for addressing societal problems, and contribute to the common good.

Partly in response to these circumstances, a number of policy frameworks have been developed at both the supranational and national (and in some cases local) levels. These frameworks argue for the importance of young people's civic and political engagement, their active participation in political processes, and the need for policies, services, and institutions to take young people's perspectives into account in establishing priorities and shaping provision. They also seek to *promote* the engagement of young people in particular ways. As one policy document states it, the intent is to 'develop and advocate on the concept of youth civic engagement, its impact on youth and community development and its correlation with democratic consolidation and social innovation' (UNESCO, 2014: 14). Beyond such advocacy, policy frameworks may also endorse or establish specific mechanisms to support greater inclusion and participation of young people.

This report examines some of the central policy frameworks – at the supranational level and at the national level in three jurisdictions: England, Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland<sup>2</sup> – that argue for and seek to promote young people's civic and political engagement. It provides a comparative analysis of these frameworks, seeking to tease out common and divergent assumptions, emphases, and approaches and to draw from this a set of conclusions and their implications for research, policy, and practice.<sup>3</sup> The analysis focuses on the following questions:

- What are the key assumptions behind policy frameworks that are meant to promote youth engagement? What are the rationales for promoting engagement, what kinds of 'engagement' are looked for, and why?
- What are the key historical, contextual, and contemporary trends and considerations that have shaped the development of these policies, and how do they respond to these considerations?
- Who are the young people these policy frameworks seek to engage, and how are young people characterised in these frameworks?
- What are the major strategic approaches to encouraging young people's engagement? What are the goals, objectives, and outcomes they seek to accomplish?
- What roles are the state, supranational bodies, and civil society organisations meant to play and through what practical strategies (programmes, processes, supports, activities)?

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<sup>2</sup> National policies in England are often framed more broadly to embrace the entire United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland), but because of the nature of devolved government, UK component states often shape their own policies specific to their jurisdiction, even if Westminster policies are also enacted there. The National Citizens Service, for example, a UK policy to promote citizenship among secondary-school-aged young people that is part of our review, is being implemented across the UK including Northern Ireland, but Northern Ireland has developed its own set of policies related to the promotion of youth engagement that are much more central to the implementation of this policy agenda there. We refer to UK policy that is not specific to component jurisdictions as English policy to highlight this distinction.

<sup>3</sup> This report is part of a broader study, *Engaging urban youth: Community, citizenship, and democracy*. The project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 661541.

## 1.1 Sources, Methods, and Structure

The analysis took place in 2016–2017 and is based on a review of policy framework documents and reports from United Nations, European Union, and national government sources in the three focal countries. This report was written to inform a broader study, *Engaging urban youth: Community, citizenship, and democracy*, that includes empirical research focused on three cities – London, Belfast, and Dublin – including interviews and focus groups with policy professionals, leaders of youth organisations, front-line youth workers, and young people themselves (see Chaskin et al., 2018b). We focus on supranational policy frameworks from the UN and EU because of their role and influence in shaping discourse internationally through advocating for innovation, and providing models of action for member states. These organisations also currently place significant emphasis on the issue of youth engagement. The three focal states provide a useful cross-national comparison. They have a historical relationship with one another and provide both similarities and differences in terms of governance, policy orientation, demographics, and connection to the kinds of global trends outlined above. Each country has also recently developed policy frameworks and mechanisms focused explicitly on youth engagement, with both similar and divergent intent and focuses.

After a broad scan and summary of relevant policy frameworks relying on web-based research and informed by key-informant recommendations, we selected up to six policy framework documents and reports at each level. The selection of policies is by no means comprehensive, but is meant to be illustrative of the policy ideas and arguments being promoted at the supranational and national level as described above. The criteria for selection were grounded in an effort to represent some of the most current and generally recognised policies with an explicit focus on youth engagement in these contexts.<sup>4</sup>

These documents provide the basis for a more in-depth content analysis and comparison. This involved a full reading of each document and a thematic analysis across them. Each document was uploaded into NVivo, a qualitative software analysis program, and coded in an effort to identify and facilitate comparison across policy documents and contexts around several key themes. These themes included:

- The rationale for and expected outcomes of youth engagement strategies
- The influences and circumstances that informed the development of the policy frameworks
- Perspectives on young people represented by the frameworks
- Conceptualisations of citizenship, civic engagement, political engagement, participation, and democracy and their relationship to young people
- Strategies and mechanisms invoked to promote engagement
- The relative roles of state and nonstate actors in policy development and implementation.

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<sup>4</sup> There are a number of other policy frameworks that focus on youth and include emphasis on young people's participation in decision making or the importance of providing opportunities to engage them in civic and/or political action towards promoting active citizenship. Some of these frameworks were informed by consultation with young people. Some focus on the importance of engagement and consultation within particular services or institutions (e.g., young people in care, in schools, or with the justice system); others (such as Youth Matters [2005] in England) focus on youth engagement more broadly; others have been superseded by more recent policy frameworks.

The remainder of this report is organised in two sections. The first gives an overview of policies that focus explicitly on children and youth and are relevant for understanding contemporary policy frameworks that seek, at least in substantial part, to promote the civic and political engagement of young people. It provides brief summaries of the key contemporary policies at each level that are the focus of our thematic analysis. The next section provides a comparative analysis of these frameworks, organised thematically. Our overall aim is to provide an analysis of the content of the selected policies and to highlight major themes, issues, and challenges that arise from them. While our intent is not to provide an in-depth critical review per se, we will take the opportunity in the analysis and conclusion to raise questions and highlight issues of concern that informed the empirical research which followed this analysis (see Chaskin et al., 2018c).

## 2. Overview of Selected Policy Frameworks

Policies explicitly concerning children and youth began to be developed in many Western democracies in the 19th century. For the most part, these initially focused on specific issues (e.g., education), responded to specific problems (e.g., child labour or domestic abuse), or attended to specific periods of a child's life (e.g., school-to-work transitions). The development of policy frameworks oriented more holistically towards child and youth well-being and the importance of young people's connection to and participation in civic and political life began to emerge in the middle of the 20th century, although earlier efforts emphasising citizenship, volunteerism, and civic engagement were advanced in the voluntary sector, including the rise and (in some cases international) growth of organisations like the YMCA and Scouts (Davies, 2009).

In this section, we first provide an overview of selected supranational frameworks from two sources: the UN and the EU. We then provide an overview of national-level policy for three selected jurisdictions: the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and England.

### 2.1 Supranational Frameworks: United Nations and European Union

At the supranational level, an explicit focus on the importance of young people's participation and citizenship rights was first articulated in the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959, which led, 30 years later, to the UNCRC, entailing a formal commitment on the part of member states to establish mechanisms and report on progress towards ensuring a set of codified rights of children and young people.<sup>5</sup>

The 54 articles of the UNCRC articulate both a range of fundamental rights and the responsibilities of states (and a set of implementation measures) to ensure their achievement. The rights that are articulated focus on what are sometimes referred to as the 'four Ps': protection of children against discrimination, neglect and exploitation; prevention of harm to them; provision of assistance for basic needs; and participation by children in decisions that affect them.

#### 2.1.1 UN Policy Frameworks

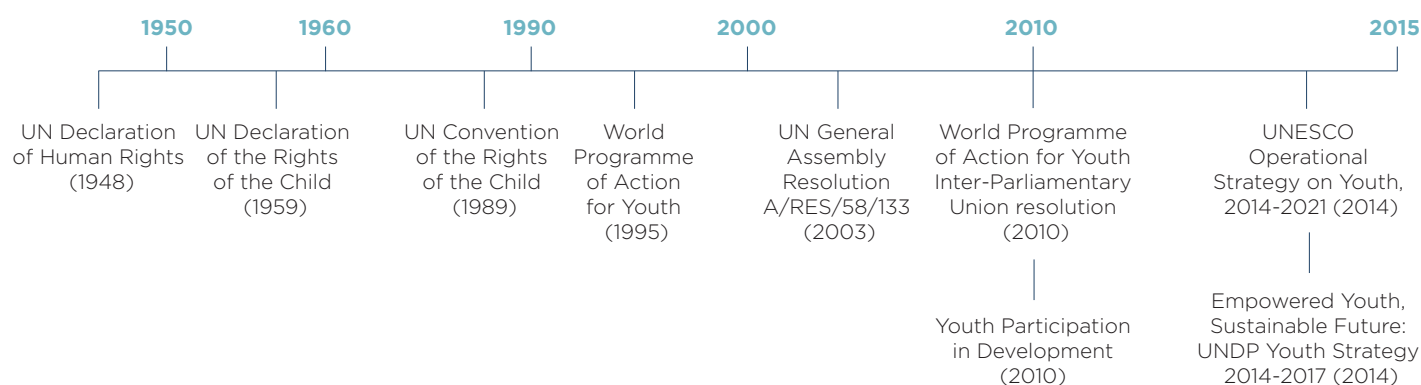
Following the ratification of the UNCRC, a number of other policy frameworks, reports, and resolutions have been developed by UN agencies and through UN General Assembly resolutions (see Figure 1 for a timeline of selected policy frameworks and actions).<sup>6</sup> For example, the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) was adopted in 1995 and identified 10 priority areas to address the challenges faced by young people as the new

<sup>5</sup> Limited attention specifically to children's rights was earlier included in Articles 25 and 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948. These Articles refer specifically to children's right to special care and assistance, social protection, and free and compulsory education.

<sup>6</sup> The figures that follow attempt to provide an illustrative map of the progression of policy development at each level. They are not meant to be comprehensive, and the starting point for each differs based on when policies specifically focused on children and youth, and related to issues of youth participation and engagement (either directly or by serving as a foundation for later engagement-oriented policies), were first introduced.

millennium approached, and it was subsequently updated and expanded in 2010 (United Nations, 2010). The UN General Assembly also adopted a series of resolutions on policies and programmes involving youth – 32 between 1978 and 2017 – and UN agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme and UNESCO, have formulated specific strategy documents and policy frameworks focused on promoting the well-being and engagement of young people.<sup>7</sup>

The UN policy frameworks we include in our analysis are the most recent (2010) *World Programme of Action for Youth*, UNESCO's *Operational Strategy on Youth 2014-2021*, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Youth Strategy 2014-2017, Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future*. Each of these frameworks sets forth a set of principles, priorities, and outcome objectives for young people in response to current circumstances and the success or limitations of prior efforts. Priority areas generally cover a range of aspects of young people's lives, such as education, employment, health, and gender equality. Each framework also emphasises the central importance of young people's participation in and contribution to civic and political action, as well as the need to actively promote their engagement as full and effective members of society.

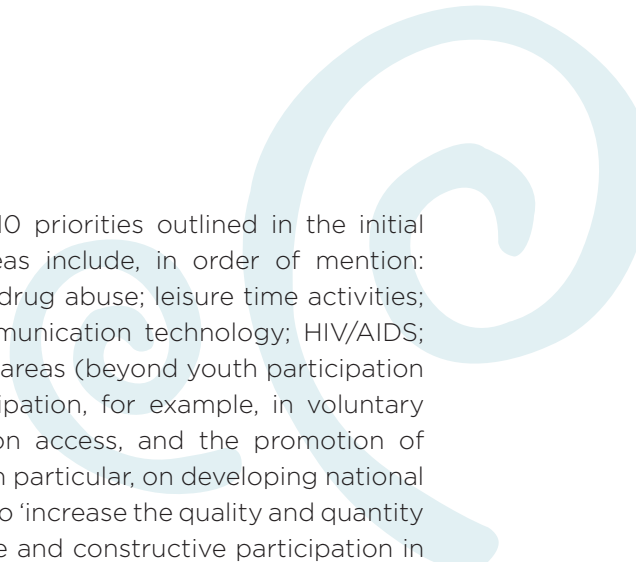


**Figure 1: Selected Timeline of UN Policy Frameworks and Resolutions**

Even where a policy framework casts a particularly wide net in outlining priorities and identifying target groups, the focus on youth participation and the rationale for their engagement is generally argued to be foundational to both the process towards and the likelihood of reaching other goals. *WPAY*, for example, identifies 15 different priority areas for action, among which youth participation is listed tenth. But the document emphasises participation as undergirding the programme as a whole:

The capacity for progress of our societies is based, among other elements, on their capacity to incorporate the contribution and responsibility of youth in the building and designing of the future. In addition to their intellectual contribution and their ability to mobilise support, they bring unique perspectives that need to be taken into account. Any efforts and proposed actions in the other priority areas considered in this programme are, in a certain way, conditioned by enabling the economic, social and political participation of youth, as a matter of critical importance (United Nations, 2010: 42-43).

<sup>7</sup> A list of UN youth resolutions and hyperlinks to the resolutions themselves are accessible at [www.un.org/development/desa/youth/publications/youth-resolutions.html](http://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/publications/youth-resolutions.html).



WPAY's 15 issue areas represent an expansion from the 10 priorities outlined in the initial framework document published 15 years earlier. The areas include, in order of mention: education; employment; poverty; health; the environment; drug abuse; leisure time activities; girls and young women; participation; globalisation; communication technology; HIV/AIDS; armed conflict; and intergenerational issues. Many of these areas (beyond youth participation itself) include an explicit focus on young people's participation, for example, in voluntary community services, environmental protection, information access, and the promotion of peace, security, and reconciliation. The document focuses, in particular, on developing national capacity to address these issues and on the role of the state to 'increase the quality and quantity of opportunities available to young people for full, effective and constructive participation in society' (United Nations, 2010: 3).

The *UNESCO Operational Strategy on Youth 2014-2021* broadly focuses on youth well-being and integration, seeking to 'create an enabling and rights-based environment where youth prosper, exercise rights, regain hope and a sense of community, and engage as responsible social actors and innovators' (UNESCO, 2014: 5). Participation is central to achieving these goals, which are to be pursued through support for three 'complementary and transversal axes of work' (UNESCO, 2014: 8). The first axis focuses on engaging young people in the formulation and review of public policies that affect them, including those focused on education, employment, social development, democratic representation, scientific innovation, culture, and sports. The second axis concerns building young people's skills and capacity for making a successful transition to adulthood, including a focus on literacy, mastering of STEM fields (with emphasis on young women), incorporating rights and citizenship education into state education systems, and promoting quality health education. The third axis focuses on youth participation and engagement in civic action, democratic processes, and social innovation. Youth participation is meant to be promoted at various levels (from the local to the global), promoting youth leadership and enabling young people to 'to express themselves, understand their rights and responsibilities and play an active role in democratic processes, including through [information and communication technology], youth media or forms of cultural expressions' (UNESCO, 2014: 14).

The *UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-17: Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future* outlines three outcomes, ten principles, and a four-pronged approach to meeting its goals. The outcomes focus on young people's economic empowerment, their civic engagement and participation in political processes and decision-making, and their contribution to 'resilience building', particularly in contexts of conflict or in response to disaster. The guiding principles emphasise human rights, gender equality, sustainability, national leadership, participation and volunteerism, fostering innovation and the intergenerational sharing of information, promoting cross-national cooperation in the global south, and 'working by, with and for young people' (UNDP, 2014: 2). The rationale for promoting youth engagement is both rights-oriented and pragmatic:

When young men and women understand their rights, they can become empowered to engage in civil society, public service and political processes, at all levels. They need to know the channels through which they may exercise their civil and political rights and contribute to decision-making processes that impact their lives. Channels for engagement include formal political processes such as youth advisory boards at the local level, youth parliaments or shadow councils at the national level, and engagement with United Nations processes at the global level, for example (UNDP, 2014: 3).

### 2.1.2 European Policy Frameworks

In addition to these frameworks, which are global in scope, supranational policy frameworks have been developed focusing specifically on Europe and the contemporary circumstances facing young people living in, or migrating to, countries in the European Union. (See Figure 2 for a timeline of selected policy frameworks and actions).

Like those promoted by UN agencies, European policy frameworks focus broadly on young people's needs and circumstances, including an emphasis on education, employment, health (and well-being more broadly), and 'empowerment', and emphasise the importance of young people's participation in civic and political processes. European frameworks also tend to emphasise the importance of efforts to promote social inclusion, especially in the context of rising inequality and demographic diversity. Our thematic analysis focuses on three contemporary frameworks: *An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering*; the Council of Europe's *Enter!: Access to Social Rights for Young People from Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods*; *The European Union's Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy*; and the *2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the Implementation of the Renewed Framework for European Cooperation in the Youth Field (2010–2018)*.

*An EU Strategy for Youth: Investing and Empowering* follows on a series of policy discussions and resolutions, including the 2001 white paper 'A New Impetus for European Youth'. This paper emphasised the importance of promoting young people's participation in 'active citizenship', promoting voluntary activities, and developing a greater understanding of young people, including increasing information about youth as well as facilitating access to such information to and for young people themselves. The paper informed a European Parliament declaration, in 2008, to 'devote more attention to youth empowerment in EU policies' (European Parliament, 2008). The *EU Strategy* responds to this agenda by emphasising a dual approach. The first focuses on *investment* in policies and opportunities to improve the well-being of young people. The second emphasises *empowerment*, focusing on mobilising young people to contribute to societal advancement and to 'EU values and goals' (European Union, 2009: 4). The strategy emphasises three broad goals: creating opportunities for youth in education and employment, fostering solidarity and social inclusion, and both improving access and promoting participation of young people in society more broadly. The emphasis on participation explicitly includes both civic and political participation, and is informed by a recognition of the difficulty of this task, particularly with regard to marginalised youth:

Full participation of young people in civic and political life is an increasing challenge, in light of the gap between youth and the institutions . . . particularly regarding support of youth organisations, participation in representative democracy or 'learning to participate'. Policy-makers must adapt to communicating in ways receptive to young people – including on civic and European issues – particularly in order to attract unorganised or disadvantaged youth (European Union, 2009: 8).



**Figure 2: Selected Timeline of European Policy Frameworks and Resolutions**

The *EU Strategy* places particular emphasis on the role of voluntary action. This includes the importance of promoting opportunities for and engaging young people in volunteer activities that contribute to their personal development and to social cohesion. It also includes an emphasis on the voluntary sector more broadly and the role that non-governmental organisations – especially professional youth workers – can play in providing leisure activities and delivering non-formal education, skill building, and opportunities for engagement that can contribute to young people's path to employment, inclusion, and the transition to adulthood.

Like the *EU Strategy*, the Council of Europe's *Enter!* emphasises the importance of youth work and non-formal education and places an even more specific emphasis on marginalised youth – especially those living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and from ethnic minority backgrounds and experiencing social exclusion. Explicitly grounded in a human rights framework, *Enter!* spearheaded a set of policy recommendations to promote the social inclusion of disadvantaged youth and their role as 'active citizens'. These include a focus on foundational aspects of their living conditions, an emphasis on addressing segregation and discrimination, and investment in opportunities for young people's active participation and effective integration in society, including through consultation and in decision-making processes regarding policies that affect them. Such consultation could be facilitated through public and youth forums and social media as well as in non-formal education and youth organisations.

The third policy framework we focus on is the *Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy*. This most recent version of the *Erasmus+* strategy was updated in response to the economic crisis of 2008. Again, the principal focus is on 'disadvantaged' youth, defined here more broadly to include those facing a range of 'exclusion factors and obstacles' (European Commission, 2014: 7). In response, *Erasmus+* promotes opportunities for youth participation in cross-national exchanges with one another through involvement with youth organisations, taking part in volunteer opportunities across Europe, and initiatives that bring young people from two or more countries together to work on an effort in response to challenges in participating youths' communities. It also emphasises the role of professional youth work and youth organisations, seeking to build their capacity through training and networking opportunities for professional youth workers, through structured dialogue between youth organisations in the voluntary sector and policymakers, and through cross-sectoral partnerships.



Finally, we include the *2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the Implementation of the Renewed Framework for European Cooperation in the Youth Field (2010-2018)*, which provides an evaluation of progress made towards goals set by the EU and EU member states (including through several of the schemes outlined above) and a set of recommended actions for 2015-18 in response to this, focusing on issues of employability, inclusion, and participation.

## 2.2 National Frameworks: the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and England

Policy frameworks for promoting the civic and political engagement of young people and emphasising their active participation as citizens and in the social, economic, and cultural life of their communities have also been developed at the national level. We focus on three countries – the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and England – that have had a specific focus on youth engagement and citizenship in recent years. The three jurisdictions have a shared and sometimes contentious history and operate within similar political systems while embracing somewhat different strategies towards this agenda. In addition, they respond to somewhat different contextual realities and challenges.

The Republic of Ireland, for example, is among the most ‘youthful’ states in the European Union,<sup>8</sup> and has been energetic in pursuing national policies concerned with children and youth, including a strong emphasis on youth participation and consultation in policymaking, since the launching of the comprehensive, cross-ministerial National Children’s Strategy in 2000. Although experiencing increasing demographic diversity due to international migration, Ireland is still relatively homogeneous. But globalisation and the economic growth and development of Ireland prior to the 2008 global recession, from which the country is re-emerging with relative success, have also led to increasing inequality and shaped the nature of opportunity and dynamics of exclusion for working-class youth. Northern Ireland is (along with Wales) the poorest of the states in the United Kingdom (McGuinness, 2016), hit hard by deindustrialisation in the later 20th century. Although the degree of ethnic diversity and changing demographics is similar to that in the Republic, the history and current (post-conflict) state of sectarian tensions and the complexity of political identity created by being on the island of Ireland but part of the UK continue to influence youths’ experiences, orientations to citizenship, and opportunities for participation. In England, a larger country with a more prominent role on the global stage, the impacts of globalisation on young people’s circumstances and their relation to civic and political action are yet more keenly felt, further informed by significant ethnic diversity, especially in the cities. The outcome of the 2016 referendum for the UK to leave the EU (known as Brexit), as well as a rising concern about Islamic radicalisation and the dangers of future terrorist acts, further complicate these dynamics and condition young people’s opportunities for and orientations to civic and political engagement. These dimensions of commonality and difference inform our rationale for selection of these three countries for analysis, which together provide a useful comparison for exploration.<sup>9</sup>

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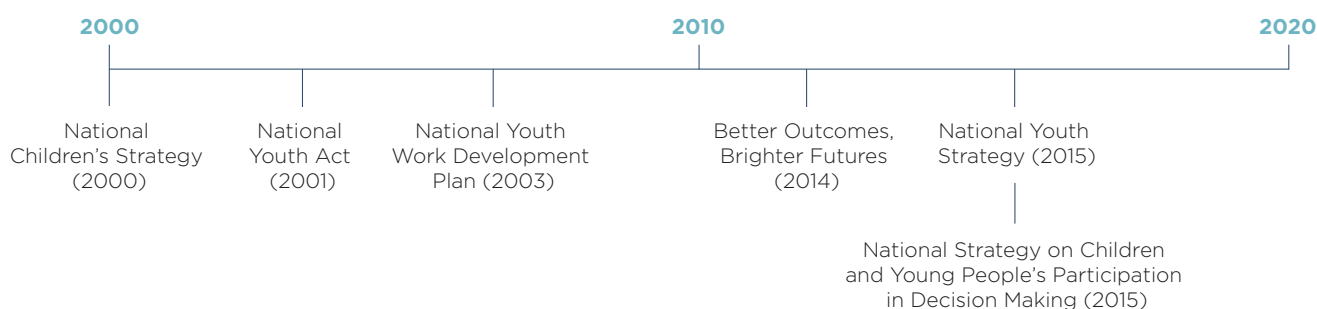
<sup>8</sup> The Eurostat (2015) report *What it means to be young in the European Union today* found that Ireland had the largest proportion of children under 15 (22%) in 2014 compared to the EU average of 15.6%.

<sup>9</sup> The larger study of which this report is a part focuses more specifically on a city in each country – Dublin, Belfast, and London – which allow us to explore the relationship between policy ideas and provisions and their implementation and influence on the ground in specific urban contexts, which are the sites in which the dynamics of globalisation, population diversity, and economic change are thrown into clear relief.

### 2.2.1 Republic of Ireland

Over recent decades, discourse on children's rights, participation, and citizenship have been prominent in child and youth policy in Ireland. (Figure 3 provides a timeline of selected policy frameworks and actions.) In partial fulfilment of its obligations under the UNCRC, which Ireland ratified in 1992, the Irish government published the landmark *National Children's Strategy* in 2000, a 10-year strategic plan for children in Ireland. The Strategy was based on a 'whole child perspective', which 'recognised the capacity of children to interact with and shape the world around them' (DoHC, 2000: 10). It outlined three national goals for children: that children will have a voice, that children's lives will be better understood, and that children will receive quality supports and services. A series of measures were outlined to realise the goal that children will have a voice. This included new mechanisms for participation by children in matters which affect them, ensuring that children are made aware of their rights and responsibilities and targeting additional resources and supports to enable marginalised children to participate equally.

In keeping with the whole child perspective, there has been a significant emphasis on coordinated approaches to children and young people's policy and service provision since the publication of the *National Children's Strategy*. A Minister for Children and Youth Affairs was appointed and a full government department, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), was established to spearhead and coordinate child and youth policy across government departments. The *National Children's Strategy* also provided for the creation of a range of new structures and measures to achieve greater participation among children and young people, including Dáil na nÓg (National Youth Parliament) and Comhairle na nÓg (local youth councils). A Children's Ombudsman office was established to promote the welfare and rights of children, investigate complaints from children on issues that affect them, consult with children on issues of importance to them, and advise government on issues of significance to children.



**Figure 3: Selected Timeline of Republic of Ireland Policy Frameworks and Schemes**

Developed as a successor to the *National Children's Strategy*, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2014–2020)* outlines the government of Ireland's current agenda to improve outcomes for young people aged 0–24. The strategy's vision is 'for Ireland to be one the best small countries in the world in which to grow up and raise a family, and where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential' (DCYA, 2014: 20). The strategy focuses on the five national outcomes the government identified for all children and young people. These are that young people:

1. are active and healthy, with positive physical and mental well-being
2. are achieving their full potential in all areas of learning and development
3. are safe and protected from harm
4. have economic security and opportunity
5. are connected, respected, and contributing to their world (DCYA, 2014: xiv).

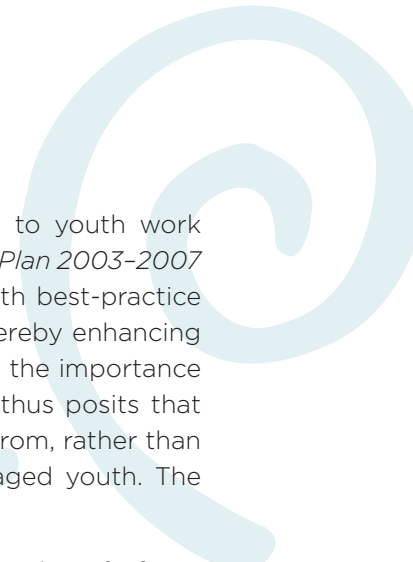
For outcome 5 (connected, respected and contributing to the world), the strategy describes its key aims for children and young people: To have a 'sense of their own identity ... free from discrimination'; to have 'positive networks of friends, family, and community'; to be 'civically engaged and socially and environmentally conscious'; and to be aware of their rights and be responsible and respectful of the law (DCYA, 2014: 6).

Based on these aims, the strategy outlines a series of government commitments. These include supporting youth organisations to provide safe, supportive, and developmental opportunities for young people; and promoting and recognising young people's active citizenship and engagement in democratic processes, social and environmental activism and innovation, volunteering, and social entrepreneurship. There is also a stated commitment to ensuring that Ireland's laws, policies, and practices are compliant with the principles and provisions of the UNCRC and to providing children and young people with access to a remedy if there is a breach of their rights.

The aims and desired outcomes of the *National Youth Strategy (2015–2020)* are directly in line with those outlined in the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* policy framework but are focused specifically on young people up to the age of 25, with particular emphasis on the 10–25-year age group. In terms of youth engagement, objectives include an emphasis on supporting youth autonomy, fostering active citizenship, and strengthening youth voices through political, social, and civic engagement.

The *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making (2015–2020)* is a policy framework developed by the Department for Children and Youth Affairs to ensure that young people across Ireland are enabled to participate in their communities and have their voices heard. Participation is defined as 'the process by which children and young people have active involvement and real influence in decision-making on matters affecting their lives, both directly and indirectly' (DCYA, 2015: 20). The objectives of the strategy include increasing young people's participation in local communities, the education system, the health and social services, and the court and legal systems. They also include the provision of age-appropriate methods of participation as well as guidelines for those working with young people in encouraging and enabling their participation.

Youth work is a key mechanism through which many of the goals of the national strategies just outlined are to be realised, particularly those related to participation, civic engagement, and recreation. While the state has become more involved in enacting legislation and policy and providing funding support for the sector, youth work in Ireland continues to operate primarily in the voluntary sector (Powell et al., 2012), led by a number of large voluntary bodies, including Foróige, Youth Work Ireland, and the National Youth Federation, as well as a range of smaller-



scale organisations. *The Youth Work Act 2001* provides a legislative basis to youth work practice in Ireland and was followed by the *National Youth Work Development Plan 2003–2007* (Department of Education and Science, 2003), which aimed to enhance both best-practice standards in youth work provision and the evidence base for youth work, thereby enhancing outcomes for children and young people. The Development Plan emphasises the importance of taking a positive (versus problem) orientation towards young people. It thus posits that youth work should be supported as something all young people can benefit from, rather than emphasising support for remedial services specifically targeting disadvantaged youth. The Development Plan sets out four broad goals:

1. to facilitate young people to participate more fully in, and to gain optimum benefit from, youth work programmes and services
2. to enhance the contribution of youth work to social inclusion, social cohesion, and active citizenship in a rapidly changing national and global context
3. to put in place an expanded and enhanced infrastructure for development, support, and coordination at the national and local level
4. to put in place mechanisms for enhancing professionalism and ensuring quality standards in youth work (Department of Education and Science, 2003: 17).

### **2.2.2 Northern Ireland**

In Northern Ireland, the Department of Education holds overall responsibility for the Youth Service, and most of the developments of the current policy frameworks for youth engagement and participation have developed within this context. One of the first explicit attempts to address the issue of youth involvement in civic and political life in Northern Ireland came with the publication of the 1979 Department of Education circular on youth engagement. The circular highlighted the importance of youth involvement, establishing the Northern Ireland Youth Forum and a system of local youth councils explicitly intended to provide a platform for young people's representation in civic affairs. The Youth Forum, still in existence, operates mostly in relation to the Department of Education but also has wider connections in the political system. Since 2016, the Department of Education has also taken over the Children and Young Person's Unit, which was formerly part of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. (See Figure 4 for a timeline of selected policy frameworks and actions in Northern Ireland.)

To understand the nature and intent of policy specific to youth civic and political engagement in Northern Ireland, we focus on three government policy frameworks (*Our Children and Young People; Priorities for Youth; and Together: Building a United Community*) as well as two NGO plans that are central to understanding efforts to engage young people in Northern Ireland (the *Northern Ireland Youth Forum Strategic Plan 2011–2014* and the *Youth Action Northern Ireland Strategic Plan*).

*Our Children and Young People: A Ten-Year Strategy for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland 2006–2016* was significant in developing a strategy specifically focused on child and youth engagement. It provides the context and backdrop to the other main policies developed relating to youth participation over the past decade in Northern Ireland. The strategy highlighted various challenges facing young people and committed to a series of pledges addressing those challenges. It also outlined a framework against which to measure

outcomes and progress towards its goals: that children will be healthy; have the opportunity to enjoy, learn, and achieve; will live in safe and stable circumstances; will experience economic and environmental well-being; will contribute positively to community and society; and will live in a society that respects their rights. Underpinning these goals are a set of explicitly stated values, including that children and young people should be active participants in society and that children should be entitled to both adult protection and have opportunities to exercise their independence (OFMDFM, 2006).<sup>10</sup> Following on from this, the Children and Young People's Strategy Team at the Department of Education has been working on a new Children and Young People's Strategy 2017–2027, which was in consultation phase until March 2017 and is expected to be formally issued in 2018.<sup>11</sup> The new Strategy makes a yet more explicit commitment than preceding policies to the value of children and young people contributing to society. For example, of its eight high-level aims, the sixth is that children and young people have the chance to make a difference to society.<sup>12</sup>

*Together: Building a United Community* was developed during the period of implementation of the 10-year strategy. It provided the framework for government action in tackling sectarianism, racism, and other forms of intolerance while seeking to address division, hate, and separation. The framework outlines how government, community, and individuals should work together to build a united community and achieve change, with a particular focus on children and young people, shared community, community safety, and cultural expression. One key strategy was to get 10,000 young people who are not in education, employment, or training (so-called 'NEETs') a place on the new United Youth volunteering programme. United Youth offers young people structured employment, work experience, and volunteer and leisure opportunities along with a dedicated programme designed to foster good relations between and a shared future for young people growing up in Nationalist and Republican communities. In relation to children and young people, the key aim is 'to continue to improve attitudes amongst our young people and to build a community where they can play a full and active role in building good relations' (NI Executive Office, 2013: 4). Focusing on action at multiple levels (from the education system to neighbourhoods to workplace settings), the framework emphasises the contribution of young people to society and the need to encourage young people to be 'the leaders of tomorrow' (NI Executive Office, 2013: 21).

Finally, *Priorities for Youth: Improving Young People's Lives Through Youth Work* focused on the budget period of 2013–2016 for implementation. The document sets the overarching policy framework for the future delivery of youth work services. The principles of the policy are that young people's participation should be embedded in the delivery of youth work services.

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<sup>10</sup> In 2016, the functions of the unit were moved from the office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to the Department of Education.

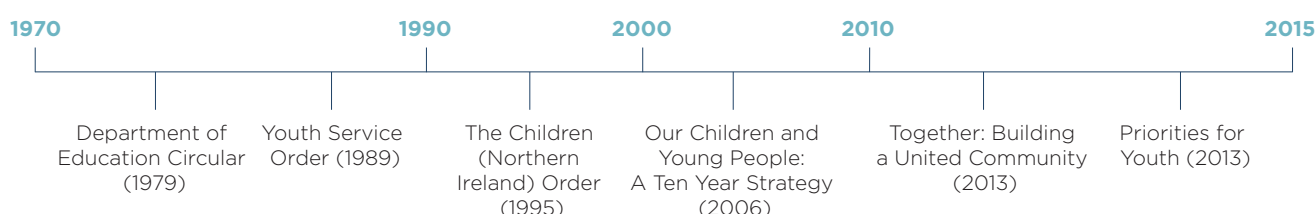
<sup>11</sup> The Children and Young People's Strategy Team works in cooperation with Executive departments, agencies (such as children's authorities) and other organisational stakeholders, and children and young people in Northern Ireland and is responsible for developing an overarching NI Executive Children & Young People's Strategy that aims to improve the well-being of children and young people across eight distinct high-level strategic outcomes. It also works in conjunction with children's authorities and children's providers, monitors and reports on adherence to the Children & Young People's Co-operation Act (NI) 2015, and monitors and reports on adherence to the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

<sup>12</sup> According to the Department of Education: 'the aim of the new Strategy is "to work together to improve the well-being of all children and young people in Northern Ireland – delivering positive long-lasting outcomes." The draft Strategy has been developed in the context of the Children's Services Co-operation Act (NI) 2015, which places a duty on the Executive to adopt a strategy to improve the well-being of children and young people. The Act defines the well-being of children and young people against eight parameters, including physical and mental health; living in safety and with stability; learning and achievement; economic and environmental well-being; the enjoyment of play and leisure; living in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted; the making by children and young people of a positive contribution to society; and living in a society which respects their rights. The draft Strategy seeks to achieve positive outcomes for children and young people that align with all eight parameters in the Act' ([www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/children-and-young-people](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/children-and-young-people)). In March 2018, a summary report of responses to the consultation was made available online with a view to the final strategy being published to follow. See [www.education-ni.gov.uk/node/32976](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/node/32976) for consultation summary responses.

Youth work, the document argues, should ‘complement’ the education curriculum, providing the opportunity for young people to ‘develop their personal and social skills’ (DE 2014: 1). The policy explicitly connects with the overall Department of Education policy and vision for young people and the UNCRC.

Youth Forum’s mission is to support young people in their personal development and, through this, help them contribute to the development of their communities. Emphasising a rights- and needs-based approach, the concept of participation is central to the work of the Youth Forum. The Forum defines participation as ‘a situation of empowerment – where young people are proactive in the decision making process’ (Northern Ireland Youth Forum, 2011: 6). Participation is seen as a ‘specialised discipline’ that needs to be delivered in a way that is ‘meaningful and enjoyable for young people’ and through which ‘individual needs and aspirations of young people are the starting point . . . to engage young people in a process of issue-based participative practice’ (Northern Ireland Youth Forum, 2011: 5).

The second relevant NGO framework is the *Youth Action Northern Ireland 2013–2017 Strategic Plan*. Youth Action is a membership-based, regional youth organisation that works to help young people fulfil their potential in improving their own lives and their communities through the promotion of equality, peace-building volunteering, participative democracy, and leadership development. The strategic plan outlines several goals, including reducing inequalities faced by young people in Northern Ireland, increasing their levels of political engagement, and increasing their levels of resilience.



**Figure 4: Selected Timeline of Northern Ireland Policy Frameworks and Schemes**

### 2.2.3 England

The voluntary sector in England has a long history of engaging with young people, with a particular focus on working-class youth and those in poverty. From the mid-19th century, voluntary sector organisations like Boys Clubs, the YMCA, and (later) Boy Scouts and Girl Guides sought to engage young working-class people in voluntary participation in recreational and non-formal educational activities, often emphasising the importance of youths’ contributions to club governance through their participation in deliberation and decision-making (Davies, 2009). Formal state policy focused on youth and youth participation, however, would not receive significant attention until the mid-20th century.<sup>13</sup> (See Figure 5 for a timeline of selected policy frameworks).

<sup>13</sup> More omnibus policies placed at least a degree of focus on participation as well, in keeping with the participatory expectations outlined in the UNCRC. The Children Act (1989), for example, focused on promoting child welfare, responding to child abuse and neglect, and establishing expectations for their care and protection by the state but included provisions to ensure that children’s views and wishes be taken into account in decisions that affect them. Provisions emphasising the importance of consultation and incorporating the perspectives and priorities of children and youth in the context of the institutions with which they interact (schools, juvenile justice, child welfare, etc.) were reinforced and expanded in subsequent versions of the Act and in a range of other legislation from that time forward.

The British Youth Council was established by the Foreign Service in 1948 in connection with the World Assembly on Youth held in London the prior year. It became an independent non-governmental organisation in 1963, and today it focuses on engaging young people to participate in networks, training, campaigning, and consulting with policymakers at both national and local levels, including through local youth councils and in the UK Youth Parliament, mechanisms analogous to those described in the cases of the Republic and Northern Ireland, above. Several local authorities have also more recently established Young Mayor programmes, in which young people are elected by their peers, through school-based campaigns, to serve as their representatives in the local authority.<sup>14</sup>

A broader policy interest in youth engagement also came into focus in the 1960s, when a national policy framework to support youth work was proposed by the Albemarle Committee. The committee's recommendations emphasised the importance of a Youth Service that made facilities and opportunities available to all youth 14 to 20 years old to contribute to their voluntary 'association, training and challenge' and gave the impetus for, among other things, promoting the professionalisation of youth work and establishing partnerships between local authorities and voluntary sector youth service providers (Davies, 2009). In the 1970s and 1980s, state support for youth work waned, and in addition to fiscal retrenchment led to an increasing focus on targeting 'at-risk' youth and those experiencing, for example, unemployment or involvement in child welfare or criminal justice systems. The Labour government under Tony Blair took a more comprehensive approach to youth policy, though it continued to emphasise, if not exclusively, the role of youth work in contributing to remediation, especially for young people who came to be labelled as NEETs, a focus that retains its priority status today in both England and Northern Ireland. Policy under Labour, however, also reemphasised the importance of youth participation and influence on service provision decisions and priorities, and noted such engagement as critical to achieving the broad outcomes laid out in the comprehensive policy framework represented by *Every Child Matters*, presented to Parliament in 2003.

Our thematic analysis focuses on four policy frameworks: *Public Service Agreement (PSA) 14: Increase the Number of Children and Young People on the Path to Success*; *Positive for Youth: A New Approach to Cross-Government Policy for Young People Age 13 to 19*; *National Citizen Service*; and the *Prevent Strategy*.

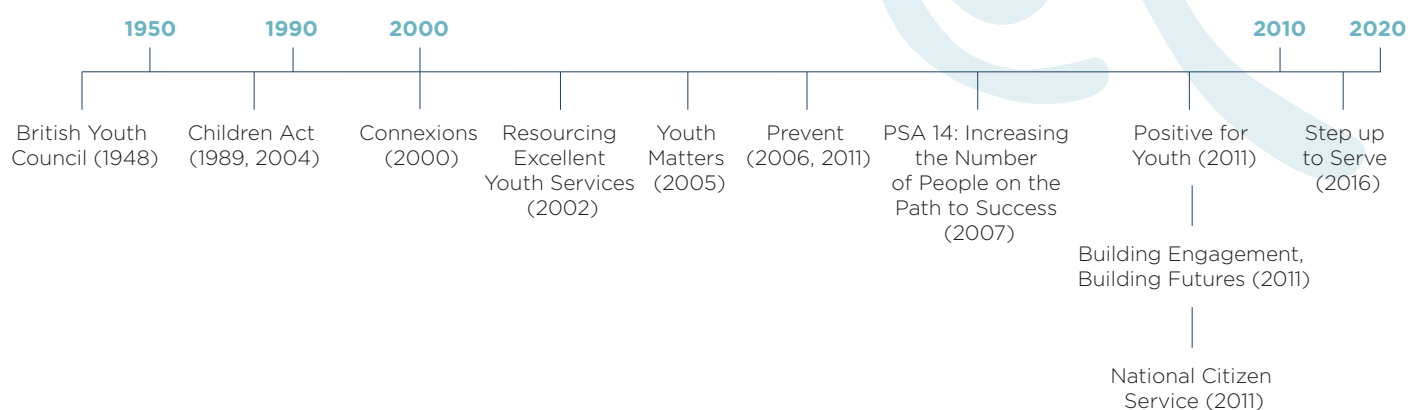
Published in 2007 under a Labour government, PSA 14 outlines government actions (in partnership with a broad range of local agencies and providers) towards realisation of the goals outlined in *Every Child Matters* and those specified in *Aiming High for Young People: A Ten-Year Strategy for Positive Activities*, published by the Department of Children, Schools and Families that same year. These are that young people will 'be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and achieve economic well-being' (HM Government, 2007: 3) and that they will succeed in education, participate in activities that build resilience and social skills, and contribute to society to bring about change (DoCSF, 2007: 8). In addition to specifying government actions, the PSA outlines a set of indicators with which to assess progress towards these goals. These include indicators focused on increasing participation in education, employment, and 'positive activities' that contribute to their resilience. They also include a focus on reducing negative outcomes (especially regarding substance abuse, early pregnancy, and crime). To reach these goals, the PSA notes

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<sup>14</sup> Young Mayors generally act in an advisory capacity, along with a small council of their elected peers, representing the interests and priorities of local young people to the Mayor of the local authority for which they were elected, but in some cases they are provided with small budgets that allow them to launch and manage specific programmes or campaigns. See for example Shukra, 2017.



the importance of ‘embedding and building on strategies to empower and secure the active participation of young people and their families in the commissioning, designing and delivery of services’ (HM Government, 2007: 7) and stresses that ‘every Local Authority should have systems that enable the views of young people and families and carers to shape local services at every level’ (HM Government, 2007: 13).



**Figure 5: Selected Timeline of English Policy Frameworks and Schemes**

*Positive for Youth* was published in 2011 alongside another policy framework, *Building Engagement, Building Futures*, the focus of which was on educational attainment and vocational skills in response to the large number of NEET youth between the ages of 16 and 24. *Positive for Youth* proposes a more comprehensive, cross-sectoral strategy for promoting young people’s successful transition to adulthood (including through education, employment, preventive health services, youth crime prevention, and out-of-school opportunities), and explicitly emphasises the importance of giving youth ‘voice’ in the decisions that affect them and supporting mechanisms that support their engagement:

A cornerstone of this statement is the engagement of young people in local democratic processes – so that young people have a sense of belonging, communities become stronger, and locally offered services have the best chance of making an impact (HM Government, 2011a: 1).

Achieving the participatory goals of the strategy relies in large part on financial support to the British Youth Council to engage young people on advisory councils, review boards, and the UK Youth Parliament. The strategy also emphasises the importance of promoting local partnerships, supporting community organisations and youth workers, and promoting opportunities for education, training, social development, and volunteerism among young people.

Along with *Positive for Youth*, the emphasis on volunteerism and its relationship to promoting active citizenship among youth is at the centre of the *National Citizen Service*. A centrepiece of the coalition government’s ‘Big Society’ under David Cameron, the scheme has been institutionalised in the creation of the publicly funded *National Citizens Service Trust*. NCS is focused on promoting opportunities for young people (generally 16- or 17-year-olds) from diverse backgrounds to work together on ‘social action’ projects and to develop skills, confidence, and a sense of community and responsibility as engaged, effective citizens. The scheme is open to all 16-year-olds (although it is not mandatory) and includes residential activities both in young people’s local communities (but outside their homes) and activities away from their local communities.



The final policy framework we include in our analysis is the *Prevent Strategy* in two iterations. This framework differs from the others in that its principal focus is on the prevention of terrorism and is not exclusively focused on young people. We include it here both because of the stances the strategy takes towards engagement, inclusion, and citizenship and because of a significant *de facto* focus on young people (especially Muslim youth). Its enactment, alongside other policy frameworks that seek to promote youth engagement, is relevant for understanding the policy environment relating to youth engagement more broadly, especially for young people from Muslim and economically disadvantaged backgrounds – both of which are cited as generative of higher levels of approval of violent extremism (HM Government, 2011b). The first iteration, the Prevent strand within the *Countering International Terrorism* strategy (HM Government, 2006), was developed under a Labour government and placed significant emphasis on preventing radicalisation by attending to issues of structural disadvantage, promoting integration and cohesion, and empowering local communities to address the potential development of extremist ideologies among their populations. The second iteration, *The Prevent Strategy* (2011), while accepting the importance of integration, focuses more on challenging extremist ideology and promoting the embrace of ‘mainstream British values’ seen as central to social cohesion and citizenship: ‘democracy, rule of law, equality of opportunity, freedom of speech and the rights of all men and women to live free from persecution of any kind’ (HM Government, 2011b: 34):

A stronger sense of ‘belonging’ and citizenship makes communities more resilient to terrorist ideology and propagandists. We believe that *Prevent* depends on integration, democratic participation and a strong interfaith dialogue (HM Government 2011b: 27).

## 3. Analysis: Comparing Frameworks

We now turn to a comparative analysis of these frameworks, focused on a set of key themes. First, we examine how these policy frameworks view and characterise young people, the challenges and opportunities that face them, and their current connections to and engagement in society. Next, we examine the influences and impetus for policies to foster engagement, including historical and contemporary context (social, economic, demographic, political) and prior policies concerning young people. Third, we interrogate and compare the rationales and conceptual orientations that lie behind these policies. Fourth, we outline the kinds of outcomes they highlight as likely to be achieved through the effective engagement of young people. We then consider the specific strategies and mechanisms suggested or established by these policies, including the expected role of government, non-governmental organisations, and other actors and the kinds of resources and supports provided or recommended. Finally, we evaluate the relationship among these thematic components – their coherence or inherent tensions and the similarities and differences across policies operating at different levels and in different contexts – and tease out some practical implications, enduring questions, and potential next steps.

### 3.1 Perspectives on Young People

With regard to perspectives on young people, we identify four main interrelated perspectives on youth (generally identified as those between about 14 and 24 years of age, but sometimes extending to as much as 30) in the policy frameworks examined. First, a common perspective throughout is a view that young people should be seen as active participants in society; the view that young people are assets to be invested in features strongly across supranational and national discourses. Second, there is a strong emphasis placed on the barriers to participation given that young people are prone to risk and disadvantage. The importance of recognising the diversity of young people in terms of their characteristics, needs, and context features in both supranational and national contexts, though it is more heavily emphasised in the UN and EU frameworks. Third, young people are seen explicitly as ‘rights bearers’, a theme also emphasised as a rationale for promoting youth engagement. The fourth core theme relates to young people as subjects of policymaking and development, which directly links to the articulation of strategies and responsible actors, to be examined later.

#### 3.1.1 Youth as Active Participants in and Contributors to Society

One of the main perspectives to be observed in the policy frameworks is the view that young people should be seen as active participants and contributors to society and, at the same time, that they are often blocked from such participation due to a range of factors and circumstances. Particularly in supranational frameworks, youth are described (by UNESCO for example) as ‘agents of change’ towards ‘social transformations, peace, and sustainable development’ (UNESCO, 2014: 8). Promoting their participation as ‘equal partners’ is meant to harness the positive and often untapped potential young people have to make a strong contribution to society. As the *WPAY* framework puts it:

The capacity for progress in our societies is based . . . on their capacity to incorporate the contribution and responsibility of youth in the building and designing of the future. In addition to their intellectual contribution and their ability to mobilize support, they bring unique perspectives that need to be taken into account (United Nations, 2010: 42).

A key component of this stated perspective is a focus on young people as assets and an intent to promote their positive development rather than focus exclusively on addressing problems. As England's *Positive for Youth* (HM Government, 2011a: Ministerial Foreword) puts it: 'all young people enjoy their teenage ambitions and good opportunities. Our focus is on helping young people succeed, not just on preventing them from failing.'

EU frameworks are strong in emphasising the need to view young people's social capital as an asset to be invested in, and this notion is articulated as well at the national level. For example, both the *Northern Ireland Youth Forum Strategic Plan* and the *Children and Young People Ten-Year Pledge in Northern Ireland*, as well as *Positive for Youth* in England, explicitly assert the importance of investing in young people. This perspective is perhaps most explicitly stated in Ireland's *Better Outcomes, Better Futures*, which equates investment in children and young people with 'capital investment from which significant returns flow' (DCYA, 2014: 3). Importantly, however, several supranational frameworks as well as those of the Irish Republic also focus on young people's status and potential *today*, not just in the future. The Irish *National Strategy for Young People's Participation* is perhaps most explicit on this front, articulating the importance of viewing young people as not just 'beings in becoming' but as 'citizens of today' (DCYA, 2015: v). At the same time, the framework takes a developmental view of the young person as evolving rather than static, emphasising the need to take developmental stage and capacity into account.

### 3.1.2 Barriers to Participation Faced by (Some) Young People

Coexisting alongside the notion of the young person as an asset and contributor is the perspective that young people are often blocked from realising their potential in this regard. For example, the European Union's *Enter!*, while emphasising the role that young people can play as positive social actors who are resilient in the face of exclusion and disadvantage, also notes that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, in particular, are an untapped resource and often left out of decision-making processes. This is also the case in Northern Irish policy (e.g., *Together: Building a United Community*), which acknowledges the positive contribution that young people make in the community alongside an acknowledgement that 'some of our young people feel disaffected from wider society and a small number demonstrate this in a negative way' (NI Executive Office, 2013: 21). There is a strong emphasis placed in the English policies, such as *Positive for Youth*, on how negative stereotyping of young people by media and advertising, for example, is a challenge that needs to be addressed through working in partnership with young people and their families.

Young people's non-participation is seen as particularly likely, and particularly problematic, with regard to youth who are disadvantaged. This lack of participation is seen to fundamentally limit young people's potential. For example, the European Union's strategy *Investing and Empowering* notes the limits imposed on young people due to educational and employment barriers. *Erasmus+* expands on this position, arguing for inclusion and diversity programmes that focus specifically on young people who are disadvantaged. *Enter!* presents disadvantage

as a process, rather than a set of characteristics, through which some groups of young people or other individuals are systematically denied (whether by design or neglect) the opportunity or means to fully enjoy social rights as defined by the European Charter (Ramberg, 2015).

The focus on disadvantage is differentially emphasised across frameworks, which sometimes speak generally about disadvantage and at other times articulate specific groups of young people. Supranational frameworks (at both UN and European level) and Irish frameworks are most explicit about the categories of persons most likely to be disadvantaged, with the frameworks of England and Northern Ireland primarily concerned with so-called NEETs. For example, in *Enter!*, the main groups of disadvantaged young people identified are children in care; those from migrant backgrounds; those living with a disability, mental health problems, or illness; and those living in isolated or impoverished communities. The *UNDP Youth Strategy* likewise emphasises that young people are not a homogeneous constituency and their experiences and needs vary greatly depending on their context. Emphasis is placed on understanding the needs of several groups of young men and women in particular, including ethnic minorities, LGBTQ youth, young people living in poverty, and those affected by conflict, sexual and domestic violence, sex trafficking and slavery, drug use, forced marriage, and religious discrimination. The underpinning assumption in most of these frameworks is that not all young people in society can achieve the ideals of societal engagement, and many of the factors that limit them are socially constructed and ameliorable. Although they tend not to focus on how we might respond more fundamentally to the structural factors that shape and reproduce disadvantage and inequality, supranational frameworks are more likely to note these factors as foundational issues.

National frameworks tend to acknowledge the impact of discrimination on some young people, as well as the role that media play in promoting negative stereotypes of young people and the deleterious effects such portrayals can have. For example, Northern Ireland's *Together: Building a United Community* and England's *Positive for Youth* both highlight how negative portrayal of young people can lead to marginalisation. Although less clear about how such discrimination might be addressed, the promotion of youth engagement strategies is clearly one avenue they promote, as we will explore below.

### **3.1.3 Youth as Rights Bearers**

The perspective on young people as bearers of rights, as articulated in the UNCRC, is present across frameworks at all levels and across contexts (though to varying degrees), and will be examined in more detail in the section on rationale, below. The key point to be made here is that perspectives on young people that guide these frameworks include an emphasis on young people as not simply recipients of developmental and policy efforts but as agents with both potential and, fundamentally, the right to 'respond positively to life challenges and be positive agents of transformational change, as collaborators and as leaders' (UNDP, 2014: 23).

### **3.1.4 Youth as Subjects of and Partners in Policymaking and Development**

More or less by definition, the frameworks examined include a dominant perspective of young people as a special focus for policymaking and development, given their dual potential to contribute and their need for supports in light of their age, stage, and context. The need to take a holistic approach to policy development for youth is highlighted across frameworks, with an

emphasis on engaging young people as active participants in policymaking and delivery. The *UNDP Youth Strategy* articulates the principles behind this perspective and emphasises the need for a global perspective that is intentional in its inclusion of young people from diverse contexts. The *UNESCO Operational Plan* focuses more on the delivery of services through promotion of effective methodologies and mechanisms for member states to engage youth in policy and programme design and delivery, particularly through youth organisations.

At the national level, the view of the need for holistic services is also evident. For example, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* explicitly claims to be about a move from a narrow organisational focus to a ‘whole of government’ response requiring a continuum of investment (DCYA, 2014: 12). In the UK, the emphasis is on the importance of an integrated approach that recognises that a young person experiencing one problem is often experiencing several others at the same time (HM Government, 2007). With regard to types of policy and services to be developed, education and training are frequently referred to, as is the importance of complementing formal education with volunteerism and internships (UNDP, 2014).

Policies need to be underpinned by an understanding of youth as active participants and the barriers to their participation so that they respect the agency of young people while also recognising the challenges they face. Ramberg (2015: 112), for example, notes that young people are being subjected to ‘well-intended but still very regulated, paternalistic and fragmented intervention’, in part because of a tendency to see young people as more a problem than a solution. At the national level, *Positive for Youth* also pays a lot of attention to understanding the influences on young people and how they are perceived and constructed through family structure, the environment, and the media.

## 3.2 Influences and Impetus

The policy concern with youth civic and political engagement at supranational and national levels is grounded in the perceptions regarding young people just outlined, but is also profoundly influenced by a complex range of contextual dynamics. In this section, we review the key political, economic, demographic, and social issues that were highlighted in the policy frameworks reviewed. First, in terms of political influences, issues of concern include declining rates of voting and political participation among younger age groups and the need to promote positive political engagement among young people in areas of conflict. Second, many policy documents reference the negative economic impact of the recession of 2008 on young people, and its potential implications for their exclusion from society. Third, changes in the age structure of populations and increased rates of migration are salient demographic influences. Finally, the changing social context of young people’s lives, including the increasing role of technology and social media, is also an important and relevant contextual factor for the development of policy in this area.

### 3.2.1 Political Influences

The *UN Youth Strategy 2014–2017* acknowledges that young men and women have traditionally been significant drivers of social, economic, and political transformation but that the increasing disengagement of young people from political processes has made a focus on supporting youth political engagement a priority. A key issue raised in the Strategy relates to the decline in voting and civic engagement among younger age groups which, while a global trend, is



particularly evident in the global north. Such disengagement is attributed to a lack of trust among young people in governments and formal political systems. A related factor raised by the UN Strategy is that social norms and structural barriers to youth participation in politics mean that people under the age of 35 rarely occupy leadership positions in politics. These factors are seen as contributing to the disenfranchisement of young people. Likewise, *Investing and Empowering* (European Union, 2009: 8) sees the full participation of young people in civic and political life as an increasing challenge due to the 'gap between youth and the institutions'. The *EU Youth Report* notes that young people 'were the largest group of abstainers' in the 2014 European parliament elections (European Union, 2016: 77). However, based on research conducted by the Commission, it interprets these trends as a call for different forms of political participation for young people:

In 2013 the Commission published a study on youth participation in democratic life, which addressed youth representation, promoting youth engagement, voting, media and youth participation, as well as youth exclusion. According to the findings, there is no crisis of democratic participation or disenchantment with political issues and concerns among youth in Europe, but young people often feel that their opinions are not represented, are dissatisfied with the way politics are conducted and are less likely to vote than older age groups. They are keen to participate, but their interests are shifting; they ask for more channels of participation (European Union, 2016: 77).

While declining youth voting and lack of youth representation in politics are raised as concerns at the supranational level, it is interesting to note that, although similar trends in the decline of formal political participation among youth are well known (see, e.g., OECD, 2016), they are less prominently identified as an impetus for action in youth-specific strategies at the national level in our three jurisdictions. Across these national-level strategies, a political influence of greater note is the desire to build more inclusive societies in the context of the conflict in Northern Ireland and the recent wave of terrorist attacks in England. In such cases, the civic and political engagement of young people is seen as a means of promoting constructive dialogue and preventing conflict.

In Northern Ireland, for example, *Our Children and Young People: A 10-Year Pledge* acknowledges that children and young people in Northern Ireland 'are living in a society emerging from a long period of conflict, a society which is still in many ways divided and only beginning to take steps towards peace building, reconciliation and inclusion' (OFMDFM, 2006: 17). Children and young people are seen as key to securing an inclusive society that is respectful of difference. In Ireland, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* invokes the increasing alienation of young people from institutional politics as a cause for concern due to the need to ensure ongoing political engagement in relation to the Northern Ireland peace process. In England, the *Prevent Strategy* focuses on the importance of youth engagement and integration in the prevention of youth radicalisation and terrorism. The *UN Youth Strategy 2014-2017* also notes that more than 600 million youth live in fragile and conflict-afflicted countries and territories and have a key role to play in the resolution of such conflicts.

### 3.2.2 Economic Influences

Across the UN and EU documents, the negative consequences of the global recession on young people are explicitly acknowledged. The relatively high rates of youth unemployment and increased prevalence of precarious and poor-quality employment are flagged as issues of significant concern. While these issues affect young people throughout the world, the UN Youth

Strategy highlights that 87 per cent of young people in developing countries face challenges in terms of employment and poverty. Across the EU policy documents, there is a concern that the financial crisis will affect vulnerable groups most severely, particularly those who leave school without qualifications and those who are caught in an intergenerational cycle of poverty. *Enter!* further notes that youth policies are often not prioritised by governments and warns that tensions and conflict may be deepened due to feelings of powerlessness among young people. It refers explicitly to the political dimensions of this economic context, making a case for 'a shift in thinking' to generate innovative ideas from citizens with regard to addressing the economic challenges (Ramberg, 2015: 118). The *EU Youth Report* also emphasises the political implications of social exclusion, stating that it 'can lead to radicalisation and even violent extremism' (European Union, 2016: 4).

Many of the concerns raised at the EU level are also addressed in the Irish *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, which emphasises the negative impact of the recession on the well-being of children and youth in Ireland and raises concerns regarding high rates of youth unemployment, particularly among young people with lower levels of education. Reference to the impact of changing economic factors on young people is notably absent in the Northern Irish and English context, although the need to integrate young people into employment, education, or training (with a particular focus on so-called NEETs) is a key policy concern. Arguably, the issue of youth economic exclusion is framed more as an individual than a structural issue in these policy documents.


As a consequence of austerity measures over the past decade, there have been reductions in funding for social and public services. The need for policy measures which deliver value for money in the context of reduced government funding is raised in *Positive for Youth* (England) and *Together: Building a Positive Future* (Northern Ireland). In Ireland, the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* strategy acknowledges the importance of funding in terms of ensuring better outcomes for children and young people, a difficulty which is exacerbated in the context of new fiscal rules and conditions that apply in the EU context.

### 3.2.3 Demographic Influences

While demographic changes are considered to be important contextual factors at both the supranational and national levels, there are notable differences between the UN and EU documents with regard to the precise issues of concern and their implications. The *UNDP Youth Strategy 2014–2017*, for example, notes that the current generation of youth is the largest the world has ever known, with young people aged 15–24 accounting for more than 60 per cent of the population in many countries in the global south. The Strategy highlights that age-related discrimination against youth can be an issue in nation states, with a tendency to make negative assumptions with regard to young people's capacity for social engagement and leadership.

By contrast, the EU documents emphasise the declining percentage of young people in populations in Europe, with just 19.3 per cent of the population aged 15–24 years, a figure that is projected to decline to 15.3 per cent in 2050. In *Investing and Empowering*, it is noted that most member states are experiencing a declining birth rate and that intergenerational relations are more complex than in the past due to longer life expectancy, population ageing, and increasing geographical mobility (European Union, 2009). A generational divide is emerging between the younger and older populations with regard to issues such as pay, pensions, job security, and access to employment. The *Enter!* report highlights the paradox that young people are





needed more than ever to work, pay taxes, and take care of the elderly, yet a high proportion are denied access to the labour market (Ramberg, 2015). In contrast to much of Europe, the Irish demographic profile is going against this trend, showing a strong birth rate and continued population growth (DCYA, 2014). No references to changing age demographics are evident in the Northern Ireland or English policy documents.

Issues related to migration and the integration of migrants are also highlighted in UN, EU and national policy documents. The *UNDP Youth Strategy*, for example, emphasises the fact that young people account for a high proportion of the migrant population. Given Europe's ageing population, this 'makes integrating all young people (while respecting their diversity) even more necessary and urgent' (European Union, 2016: 10). But the challenges of such integration are significant, as evidenced by the political push-back on refugee resettlement in the wake of the Syrian conflict in 2016–17, as well as the rise of populist, anti-immigrant sentiment (and the strengthening of far-right, nationalist parties) in many European countries.

### 3.2.4 Social Influences

The social context of young people's lives is also of relevance to the debates and discourses surrounding civic engagement. The UNDP report emphasises that the life experiences and perspectives of young people in the 21st century differ greatly depending on context, with young people living in the global south facing a host of challenges:

In many parts of the world, youth face poverty, hunger, barriers to education, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, violence, and limited opportunities for growth and employment prospects. Youth are generally excluded from decision-making and are looking at untraditional avenues for civic engagement (UNDP, 2014: 10).

The key social issues highlighted for young people living in the EU, by contrast, centre on the changing nature of youth transitions to adulthood. The *EU Youth Report 2015* and *Enter!* draw attention to the fact that these transitions have become longer and more complex. Young people spend longer in education, remain longer in the parental home, and are more likely to combine education and work than previous generations. The increasingly individualised nature of society means that young people no longer rely to the same degree on traditional social institutions, and instead look to 'new solidarities' such as internet-based social media platforms for identity and belonging. Technology is driving social change, allowing young people greater access to independent means of communication than in previous generations, but also posing new risks such as potential recruitment to extremist causes (European Union, 2009).

Across the EU policy documents, concern is expressed for young people who face discrimination due to gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and other aspects of identity. The challenges faced by immigrant, refugee, and ethnic minority youth are particularly noted in many of the documents. According to *Enter!*, many young people feel that they don't have a stake in society, and there is a risk that feelings of powerlessness will deepen local tensions and underlying conflicts. The report asks whether the English disturbances of 2011 should be classed as 'riots' or as 'protests' by young people expressing their sense of alienation:



For some, this was economic: the lack of money, jobs or opportunity. For others, it was more broadly social: not just the absence of material things, but how they felt they were treated compared to others. For young people in particular what came across was a profound sense of alienation. Those who feel they have little or no stake in society's order as the archbishop of Canterbury put it, feel 'little obligation to sustain it'. Or as one north Londoner in his mid-20s said: When nobody cares about you, you're going to eventually make them care, you're going to cause a disturbance (Ramberg, 2015: 111).


Discussion of these issues is largely absent from the national-level policy documents, with the exception of the Irish *National Youth Work Development Plan*, which focuses on individualisation and loss of faith in traditional institutions, and *Positive for Youth* in England, which highlights the risks posed by technology and emphasises the need for additional support for some young people making the transition to adulthood.

In summary, across the policy documents reviewed, we can discern a range of dynamics and influences associated with the increased policy focus on youth civic and political engagement. A common thread relates to a perceived disengagement or distancing of young people from traditional societal institutions and practices, which is manifest in reduced voting and political participation, lack of access to quality employment, a perceived generational divide in terms of life expectations, and greater individualisation and reliance on new technologies. There is a particular concern with groups of young people who are marginalised, while the need to address the political, economic, and social implications of increased migration is also a key impetus for policy in this area. There are, however, notable differences in focus among the UN, EU, and national policy documents. At the UN level, global issues related to poverty and denial of rights affecting a high percentage of young people in developing countries are prominent, while the EU is concerned with issues facing developed societies, with a particular emphasis on the processes by which young people become excluded or alienated. Some of the concerns raised at EU level are also highlighted in national policy documents, though in some of the national policies the concern leads primarily to efforts targeted to fix the symptoms of these larger processes, with less attention given to an analysis of causes.

### 3.3 Rationales and Orientations

There are a number of rationales that lie behind the arguments for the importance of promoting youth civic and political engagement and that are codified in the policy frameworks that seek to promote it. Rationales are often related to specific outcome expectations – the ways in which youth engagement is expected to lead to concrete changes in the world at either the individual (youth) or collective (community, society) level. We will examine these outcome expectations and their presumed relationship to youth engagement and participation in more detail in the next section. But rationales are also grounded in values, and they emphasise convictions about the importance of particular orientations – human rights, democracy, inclusion, diversity – that may or may not be directly connected to expectations for generating particular kinds of instrumental outcomes.

Our analysis here suggests four principal rationales, each of which informs policy frameworks across levels and contexts, but with different relative emphasis. One rationale is grounded in convictions about fundamental *rights*, and views young people as individual agents and members of society, as holders of such rights just as adults are. A second focuses on the process



of *youth development* and the importance of participation for cultivating the capacities and competencies that shape young people's ability to be successful and impactful members of society, now and into adulthood, including their relational skills and capabilities for leadership. A third focuses on *prevention* – the ways in which youth engagement can counteract young people's exposure to negative influences and help avert negative outcomes, often for individual young people but also sometimes focused on preventing problems at the community or societal level. A fourth concerns the importance of social cohesion and the ways in which integrating young people into active roles in their communities and bringing together youth from different backgrounds can reduce discrimination and promote a more inclusive and equitable society.

### 3.3.1 Rights

As noted above, the idea of young people as rights bearers is a core perspective in the policy documents, and rights language features to varying degrees across all the policy frameworks we examined. At the supranational level, the importance of recognising the rights of young people is consistent across frameworks and is almost universally invoked as an explicit rationale for promoting youth engagement, particularly among UN agencies. A focus on rights is seen in most cases as important both in its own right and for providing a foundation for achieving other goals. In both UN and EU frameworks, the right to participation in decision-making and the importance of empowering young people to engage in social action both play a prominent role, as DEs attention to basic social rights, including the right to employment, housing, education, health, and non-discrimination. As outlined in the *UNDP Youth Strategy* (2014: 23):

The Youth Strategy recognizes the intrinsic and internationally-recognized human rights standards and principles pursued through the human rights-based approach. The strategy aims for the fulfilment of the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of young women and young men, which are central to UNDP's sustainable human development framework. UNDP also recognizes that young people are not simply recipients of development efforts. Young people have the potential to respond positively to life challenges and be positive agents of transformational change, as collaborators and as leaders.

At the national level, rights language was used most explicitly and frequently in Ireland, where all the policy frameworks we examined made some mention of the importance of recognising and respecting the rights of young people, listening to young people's perspectives, and taking into account their views in decisions that affect them. Indeed, although they also focused on more instrumental rationales like the value of participation for promoting youth development and preventing negative outcomes, the right of young people 'to be heard' and for their voice and views to be 'given due weight' is foundational. Irish frameworks also consistently invoke international rights frameworks as critical points of reference, especially the UNCRC and, in some cases, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

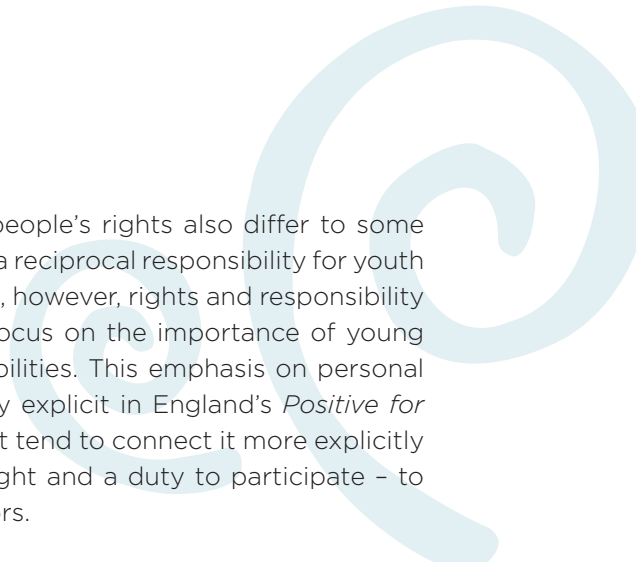
Rights language is also present in the frameworks in Northern Ireland and England, if less centrally. The Northern Ireland frameworks we examined all invoke the importance of attending to the rights of young people. Although greater emphasis is placed on the instrumental benefits of engagement, in most cases a rights orientation – that young people should live in a society that respects their rights – is described as an underpinning value. As in the Republic, the UNCRC is explicitly referenced, though less universally. The English frameworks are less explicitly focused on rights, although *Positive for Youth* notes young people's 'right to have a voice' as a 'key principle' undergirding the policy and invokes the UNCRC with reference to

both the right for youth to have a voice and the importance for youth to respect the rights of others (HM Government 2011a, Ministerial Foreword). The Prevent strategies, from both 2006 and 2011, also explicitly focus on rights, though not as a rationale for youth engagement; rights are invoked in this case with reference to the lack of respect for human rights held by terrorists and the importance of emphasising rights and democratic values to counter terrorism and the potential embrace of radical views.

These orientations to young people's rights as a rationale for promoting youth civic and political engagement also differ to some extent in terms of how they connect with other issues, including the relationship between a focus on young people's rights and youth outcomes, the relationship between championing young people's rights and a focus on reciprocal responsibilities youth have towards society, the extent to which 'rights talk' in these frameworks is related explicitly to notions of democracy and citizenship, and the extent to which the focus on rights is connected to particular attention to marginalised or disadvantaged populations.

Across levels and contexts, even where the promotion and protection of young people's rights are seen as sufficient rationale in and of themselves to justify efforts to encourage youth engagement – and where the 'right to rights' is argued to exist without the need to justify it with instrumental value (Ramberg, 2015: 9) – policy frameworks often connect the rights argument with the ways in which a focus on rights will contribute to the realisation of positive outcomes for young people or society more broadly. Thus, promoting young people's rights, and young people's exercise of these rights through civic and political engagement, is seen to lead to particular positive outcomes. In UN and EU frameworks, this emphasis is more likely to focus on collective benefits as well as individual outcomes for youth. UNESCO's *Operational Strategy for Youth*, for example, emphasises the ways in which respecting and promoting the rights of young people leads to both youth development and broader social change, and the *UNDP Youth Strategy* emphasises how young people's understanding and exercise of their rights leads to both active engagement in society and political processes, which in turn lead to broader societal change.

National frameworks tend to focus more on how attending to young people's rights to engagement leads to individual-level benefits for young people. The relationship between the right to participate and youth outcomes is largely framed as indirect, in which the right to be heard and have their perspectives taken into account leads to better outcomes through the development or management of better services – 'youth proofing' policies, as it is put in England's *Positive for Youth* – so that better decisions are made (HM Government 2011a, Ministerial Foreword). (More direct benefits are drawn between engagement and outcomes when the rationale for engagement is more explicitly focused on youth development rather than a rights orientation.) In some cases, the emphasis regarding the relationship between rights and outcomes is drawn in the other direction: Both the Republic of Ireland's *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and Northern Ireland's *Our Children and Young People* reference the ways in which a focus on more instrumental outcome goals (e.g., health, education, employment) for youth demonstrates respect for and leads to the fulfillment of the state's commitment to ensure the rights of the child as outlined in the UNCRC.



Arguments about the importance of attending to young people's rights also differ to some extent in the degree to which they see these rights as tied to a reciprocal responsibility for youth to contribute in particular ways to society. For the most part, however, rights and responsibility are linked. At the national level in particular, frameworks focus on the importance of young people's awareness of both their rights and their responsibilities. This emphasis on personal responsibility and its relation to social justice is particularly explicit in England's *Positive for Youth*. Supranational frameworks also recognise this link, but tend to connect it more explicitly to notions of young people as social actors with both a right and a duty to participate – to receive from and contribute to society as valued social actors.

This emphasis on young people as social actors is also connected to notions of citizenship and democracy, and reflects outcome goals related to promoting youth engagement towards their developing the skills, capacities, and inclination to be 'active citizens', which we will explore in more detail in the section on outcomes below. The idea of citizenship is prominent in several frameworks at different levels. At the supranational level it is most explicit in EU frameworks, with a particular focus on European identity and citizenship and on the active involvement of young people in deliberation and social action, the importance of education in cultivating democratic values and a knowledge and appreciation of human rights, and promoting social inclusion. It is also explicit in UNESCO's *Operational Strategy for Youth*, which notes the importance of global citizenship education and in which 'exercising citizenship' is seen as a key phase in young people's development (UNESCO, 2014: 11).

At the national level, an emphasis on citizenship is most prevalent in the Republic of Ireland, where frameworks emphasise young people's status as 'citizens of today' rather than 'beings in becoming' (DCYA, 2015: v). In England, the references to young people and citizenship relate primarily to two frameworks. The first is the *National Citizens Service*, which aims to be a 'rite of passage' leading young people to develop skills and awareness and become actively engaged towards the development of 'a more cohesive, responsible, and engaged society' (House of Commons, 2017: 4). The second is the *Prevent Strategy* in both its iterations, although the importance of engaged citizenship is less explicitly tied to rights than to prevention, in this case prevention of radicalisation. In Northern Ireland, references to citizenship are mostly connected to the role that education and youth work can play in contributing to young people's capacity to 'reach their potential as valued individuals and responsible citizens' (DE, 2014: 1).

Explicit references to democracy also vary across frameworks, largely along the lines suggested by the relative focus on citizenship described above. Democratic participation of young people in supranational frameworks tends to be invoked with reference both to fundamental rights to participation and to the relationship between young people's engagement in democratic processes and sustainable development, social cohesion, and prevention of conflict. As noted above, several European frameworks, as well as those in Ireland, specifically reference the downward trend among young people in terms of their participation in formal political processes. These frameworks, along with *Positive for Youth* in England and *Our Children and Young People* and *Priorities for Youth* in Northern Ireland, invoke the importance of formal participatory mechanisms, such as youth councils, as being crucial to promoting young people's engagement and contribution to well-functioning democratic societies.


Finally, frameworks differ in the degree to which an emphasis on rights as a rationale for promoting youth engagement includes a specific focus on marginalised young people. The supranational frameworks we reviewed are far more likely to focus explicitly on addressing inequality in this way, specifying the need to address inequality and exclusion based on gender, ethnic minority status, economic disadvantage, and other types of vulnerability. The *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making and Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* in Ireland also make specific reference to engaging the 'seldom heard' (in the former) and having a special focus on marginalised young people (in the latter). National frameworks in England and Northern Ireland speak more generally of the need to build social cohesion and inclusion.

### 3.3.2 Youth Development

A second major rationale for the promotion of young people's civic and political engagement in these policy frameworks focuses on the relationship between such engagement and promoting positive youth development as well as broader social development in society at large. Supranational frameworks focus more and are more explicit about the relationship between young people's participation and social development more broadly. *WPAY* and the *UNDP Youth Strategy*, for example, cite the importance of youth engagement in both civic and political realms for contributing to sustainable development, including reaching Millennium (now Sustainable) Development Goals. Ireland's *National Youth Work Development Strategy* and Northern Ireland's *Priorities for Youth* also explicitly connect engagement with both youth development and social development, but for the most part national frameworks are much more focused on the importance of youth engagement for promoting development at the level of individual young people. This is often referred to, particularly in English and Northern Irish frameworks, as contributing to the 'personal and social development' of young people.

There are several aspects to how these frameworks view the personal and social development of young people. One aspect focuses on specific skills, competencies, and personal qualities that young people develop through participation. Frameworks across contexts that incorporate this rationale are largely in agreement about the kinds of individual developmental benefits to which participation contributes. These include the cultivation of instrumental and crucial 'soft' skills, such as discipline and organisation, the ability to communicate effectively, to work in a team, and to solve problems and make decisions. They also include positive changes in young people's outlook and aspirations, including increased self-esteem, confidence, motivation, and responsibility. English and Northern Irish frameworks (*Positive for Youth*, *National Citizen Service*, *Our Children and Young People*), in particular, explicitly connect these benefits to the potential for promoting the integration of young people into the workforce – they are all 'qualities and skills that employers value' (HM Government, 2011a: 32). Frameworks in these jurisdictions also place a greater emphasis on so-called NEETs – young people not in employment, education, or training – and on balancing capacity-building and control:

Teenagers naturally grow in independence and need to try new things, take on responsibility, and be allowed to learn from their failures and mistakes. Through this process young people often question and test the assumptions, rules and boundaries that shape their lives at home, in education, and in their communities. In each of these environments, young people benefit from a firm and positive approach that encourages independent thinking but makes clear that there are boundaries, and that these will be enforced (HM Government, 2011a: 7-8).



Youth employment, education, and employability are also emphasised in other frameworks, including in the Republic of Ireland (*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and *National Youth Strategy*) and at the supranational level, but in the latter the emphasis is more on the ways in which economic empowerment and workforce participation contribute to broader social and political engagement and to development at the community and societal level:

Economically empowered youth will more actively contribute to local economic development and sustainable human development. . . . In addition, the economic empowerment of youth has important societal benefits including promotion of social justice and gender equality, and offers the potential for social transformation, through increased, constructive interaction between generations. Jobs provide young people with a sense of identity and dignity but also respect for societal values and norms. Thus, they increase social cohesion, re-establish trust in political systems and institutions and provide an important vehicle for the exchange of ideas and opinions between generations in the workplace (UNDP, 2014: 27).

Beyond employment specifically, some frameworks at every level and across contexts argue that youth engagement contributes more broadly to a successful transition to adulthood, allowing young people to ‘reach their maximum potential’, moving successfully from school to work, contributing to their families and communities, and embracing the role of active citizens. While the relationship between engagement and youth development is most often emphasised as unidirectional – participation and engagement leading to skills, capacities, and attitudes that in turn contribute to the personal and social development of young people who participate – underlying the logic of this argument in many cases is a kind of reciprocal influence and reinforcing dynamic:

When children and young people have positive experiences, they develop an understanding of themselves as significant and respected, and feel a sense of belonging essential for their own wellbeing and their participation in society (DCYA, 2014: 101).

Young people’s civic and political engagement is also seen to contribute to youths’ personal and social development through the kinds of relational dividends that participation can provide, connecting young people to new opportunities and relationships – including both positive peer relationships and cross-generational interactions and role models – as well as developing trust and respect from (and for) others. Several frameworks (Ireland’s *National Strategy on Child and Youth Participation*, Northern Ireland’s *Our Children and Young People*, and UNESCO’s *Operational Strategy for Youth*) explicitly emphasise how participation, in combining these aspects of development, can promote leadership development among young people. And there is a significant emphasis, across levels and contexts but particularly in supranational and English frameworks, on how engagement can contribute to young people’s resilience – the capacity of young people to manage and overcome adversity and avoid risky behaviour and negative outcomes:

Through participation, young people develop socially and emotionally, building communication skills and improving self-confidence and esteem. This in turn increases their resilience, helping them avoid risks such as experimenting with drugs, having unprotected sex, or being involved in crime, as well as contributing to better attendance and higher attainment at school (HM Government, 2007: 5).

Indeed, this focus on young people's engagement contributing to the prevention of a range of negative outcomes is an important rationale for promoting engagement in its own right, a theme to which we now turn.

### 3.3.3 Prevention

Rationales grounded in the presumed relationship between youth engagement and prevention focus on several different issues, with different relative emphases. These include the potential to help prevent youth involvement in crime and antisocial behaviour, reduce the possibility of radicalisation and extremism, address issues of racism and discrimination, and reduce young people's tendency towards engaging in risky behaviours.

Supranational frameworks in general place relatively more emphasis on rights as a rationale for promoting young people's civic and political engagement than on either promotive or preventive rationales, although all three rationales are in evidence. Where they are focused on prevention, supranational frameworks tend to be oriented more towards the societal rather than the individual level, with a principal focus on preventing violence, conflict, and extremism. The *UNDP Youth Strategy*, in particular, emphasises the importance of youth engagement in both responding to and preventing crisis, particularly in the context of turmoil or disaster:

Young people's contributions and leadership in preventing and resolving conflict, violence and extremism, or in the recovery process after crisis, is a rich resource essential to building sustainable peace and stability. Young people can play valuable roles as innovators and agents of change, and their contribution should be actively supported and seen as part of building peaceful communities and supporting democratic governance in crisis and post-conflict settings. Young people have demonstrated the potential to build bridges across communities, working together, helping to manage conflict and promote peace (UNDP, 2014: 21).

Some European frameworks, such as *An EU Strategy for Youth: Investing and Empowering*, similarly connect the potential for youth engagement to contribute to the prevention of radicalisation, but also place significant focus on addressing inequality and preventing discrimination based on race, ethnicity, sex, or citizenship status.

At the national level, the English frameworks we reviewed tended to lean more heavily on prevention than either promotion or rights rationales, with the exception of the *National Citizen Service*, in which the principal focus is on youth development and promoting cohesion. In Northern Ireland, the frameworks also have a somewhat stronger stress on prevention, but there is a greater balance between language focusing on prevention and on the personal and social development of young people, particularly in the ten-year plan *Our Children and Young People*. Irish frameworks, in addition to their strong rhetorical emphasis on rights, tend to balance prevention and promotion, with significant attention on risk and protective factors and early intervention undergirding the strategies.

In terms of preventive focus, frameworks across these jurisdictions differ to some extent in relative emphasis. In Northern Ireland, there is specific reference to concerns about young people's mental health and rising rates of youth suicide, and in the Republic of Ireland to concerns about the dangers of technology, particularly social media access and use. Unlike supranational frameworks, preventing radicalisation DEs not figure as prominently in the rationales for promoting youth engagement at the national level, with the obvious exception



of both iterations of the *Prevent* strategies in England. Instead, the principal focus is on the prevention of a range of risk behaviours: early pregnancy, substance abuse, school truancy, gang involvement, criminal activity, and a range of delinquent and antisocial behaviours.

Reference to this range of behaviours can be found across the national frameworks we examined, with preventing antisocial behaviour a particularly strong emphasis across contexts. The tendency towards antisocial behaviour is seen as deriving from a range of circumstances, including in particular economic disadvantage and dislocation from the workforce, disengagement from school and low levels of educational attainment, and exposure to negative peer influence or criminal activity. The fundamental theme of disconnection is central to these arguments and at the heart of rationales to promote youth engagement in school, employment, and their communities:

As a society we must collectively face up to the underlying issues that lead to this type of behaviour, including levels of disengagement so that we can reconnect with this group of young people and prevent others from becoming disaffected (NI Executive, 2013: 34–35).

In Northern Ireland, antisocial behaviour and its prevention are also connected to the legacy of sectarian tensions, and in England they were given particular impetus by the riots that were sparked in urban areas across the country in 2011. Regarding the latter, lessons gleaned by research focused on non-riot areas regarding community-level ‘protective factors’, including ‘a sense of community cohesion and young people feeling they were involved in their area and had a route to influence and improve local services’ contribute to the state’s focus on youth engagement (HM Government, 2011a: 58). And while specific mention of radicalisation is limited to the *Prevent* strategy documents in England, an explicit link there is also made between deprivation, garden-variety crime, and the potential for radicalisation:

Young people in the criminal justice system, or on the edge of it, are likely to be the most socially excluded and disadvantaged and can be vulnerable to a number of influences, including radicalisation (HM Government, 2011b: 90).

While encouraging connection and participation among young people is seen as an important preventive strategy in this regard, policy frameworks in England in particular also focus on more direct responses, including the importance of being ‘strong on crime’ through enforcement and suppression.

### **3.3.4 Social Cohesion and Integration**

The final rationale for promoting youth civic and political participation concerns the potential for such engagement to contribute to social cohesion, which in turn is seen to have both promotive and preventive benefits. References to the importance of addressing cohesion and integration all speak in some way to the challenges of diversity and the dynamics of social exclusion to which it contributes. Supranational frameworks from EU-related sources are most explicitly concerned with addressing diversity and countering racism and xenophobia driven by cross-border migration, including refugee and asylum-seeking populations. As noted in the *EU Strategy for Youth: Investing and Empowering*:

Youth strategy has also to do with integration policy, including actions aiming at facilitating access to employment, raising the educational attainments, promoting equal opportunities for all, fostering



intercultural dialogue and increasing civil, cultural and political participation of immigrants. Insofar as mobility of third country nationals (students, trainees, volunteers) is concerned, Youth and immigration policies are closely interconnected (European Union, 2009: 19).

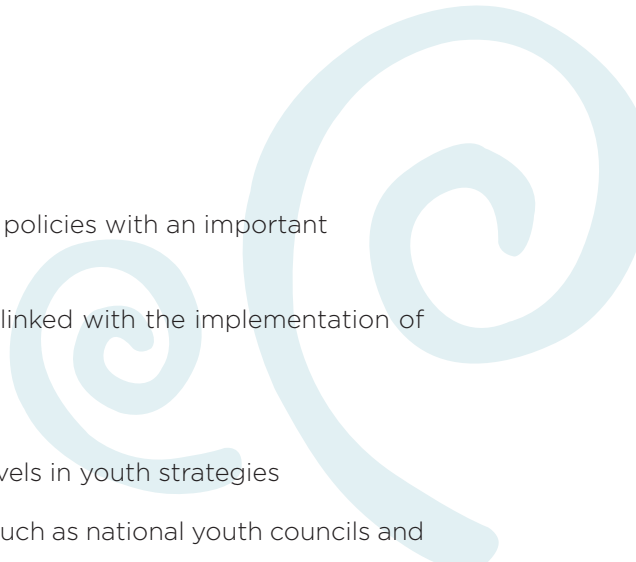
At the national level, a focus on racial and ethnic diversity is also notable across contexts as the countries have begun to incorporate more diverse populations through cross-border migration, though the size of ethnic minority populations is relatively smaller in Ireland and Northern Ireland than in England and much of the continent. Still, policy frameworks in Ireland and Northern Ireland reference the importance of promoting harmony within increasingly multicultural societies, along with attention to dimensions of difference grounded in more indigenous circumstance, such as a focus on gender, civil status, disability, Travellers, and youth experiencing homelessness in Ireland's *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and *National Children's Strategy*, and a focus on responding to 'the twin blights of sectarianism and racism, in addition to other forms of intolerance' in Northern Ireland's *Together: Building a United Community* (NI Executive 2013: 10). In England, frameworks like *Positive for Youth* and *National Citizen Service* refer generally to the need to promote cohesion among young people from 'different backgrounds', including ethnicity and socioeconomic status, the latter being a particular focus in NCS, and they specifically focus on the relationship between Muslim and majority populations in both iterations of the *Prevent* strategy. In the earlier of these frameworks, a much larger focus is placed on promoting cohesion and developing cross-group understanding through community-level efforts to promote participation and address tensions; in the 2011 *Prevent* framework, while acknowledging the importance of integrative efforts, these are largely decoupled from more direct responses to prevent terrorism and radicalisation, including efforts to inculcate 'mainstream British values'.

In addition to a focus on promoting cohesion in contexts of increasing ethnic and economic diversity, promoting cohesion across generations is a focus in both *Positive for Youth* and NCS in England, as well as the EU's *Investing and Empowering*. And there is a significant focus, across frameworks at both national and supranational levels, on the need to focus on economic integration – especially integration into the workforce – as foundational to these efforts.

### 3.4 Expected Outcomes

As discussed in the Rationales section, much of the impetus for promoting young people's civic and political engagement is directed towards achieving specific outcomes. Broadly, outcomes include those relating to social cohesion and integration, active citizenship, addressing risk and preventing harm to individual young people and to society, the promotion of competencies and experience that contribute to positive youth development, and concrete outcomes relating to core issues such as employment, housing, education, welfare, and non-discrimination. These outcome orientations may focus on both individual young people and, more broadly, on the community and society.

At the supranational level, both UN and EU frameworks include a commitment to achieving specific outcomes as part of the vision of social investment. However, many of the measures identified to assess progress towards outcome goals tend to be more process than impact oriented. The EU's *Investing and Empowering* (2009) is a good example; it sets out measures for successful achievement of the Youth Cooperation Framework as follows:

- 
- Successful consensus-building on coordination between policies with an important youth dimension
  - Identification of policy developments in member states linked with the implementation of key priorities at the EU level
  - Regular dialogue with European stakeholders
  - Involvement of young people in the regional and local levels in youth strategies
  - Awareness of policy priorities by national stakeholders (such as national youth councils and other youth-dedicated organisations)
  - Triennial reporting about implementation of priorities and situation of youth in Europe
  - The creation of a dashboard of existing indicators or benchmarks from other policy areas relevant for youth (such as early school leaving rate, child poverty, or youth unemployment rate) in order to illustrate the level of knowledge of the field
  - Development of tools describing youth work activities
  - The creation of a working group to discuss possible descriptors could be set up (European Union, 2009: 31).

In contrast, *WPAY* (2010) provides a list of indicators against which one could develop measurable outcomes, with a more articulated focus on concrete impacts for young people. The report outlines that member states of the United Nations have agreed to work towards achievement of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, inter alia, the promotion of higher standards of living, full employment, and improving conditions of economic and social progress and development:

Young people in all parts of the world, living in countries at different stages of development and in different socioeconomic situations, aspire to full participation in the life of society, as provided in the Charter, including:

- a. Attainment of an educational level commensurate with their aspirations;
- b. Access to employment opportunities equal to their abilities;
- c. Food and nutrition adequate for full participation in the life of society;
- d. A physical and social environment that promotes good health, offers protection from disease and addiction and is free from all types of violence;
- e. Human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction as to race, sex, language, religion or any other forms of discrimination;
- f. Participation in decision-making processes;
- g. Places and facilities for cultural, recreational and sports activities to improve the living standards of young people in both rural and urban areas (United Nations, 2010: 5).

The *UNDP Youth Strategy* emphasises three key outcomes, focused on both individual youth impacts and process measures: increased economic empowerment of youth; enhanced youth civic engagement and participation in decision-making and political processes and institutions; and strengthened youth engagement in resilience-building. It sets out a four-pronged approach to achieving the defined outcomes under each of the designated areas: supporting capacity, engaging through outreach, influence through leadership, and engagement of individual countries in the implementation and support of youth policy.

At the European level, policy frameworks similarly address both individual outcomes and process outputs, although distinctions among outputs, outcomes, indicators, and impact is not always clear. The European Union Youth Report (2016) focuses on individual outcomes, in the service of which most countries undertook to improve young people's access to quality services, and specifies particular outcomes that member states should strive for, including improving young people's employability, their integration into the labour market, their social inclusion, and their active participation in society. Similarly, *Investing and Empowering* identifies a mix of short- and longer-term outcomes organised around the three 'pillars' of active citizenship, social and occupational integration, and youth mainstreaming into other policies (European Union, 2009: 17).

At the national level, each country has its own approach as well as being expected as member states, from the EU perspective, to implement supranational policy within their local contexts (European Union, 2009: 3). (UN policies such as the *UNDP Youth Strategy* likewise set out expectations that member states will work at the national level towards the broad outcome goals they identify.) In Ireland, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* takes an explicit outcomes-based approach to youth development, specifying five national outcomes: that children and youth should:

1. be active and healthy with physical and mental well-being
2. achieve full potential in all areas of learning and development
3. be safe and protected from harm
4. have economic security and opportunity
5. be connected, respected, and contributing to their world (DCYA, 2014: xiv).

The current policy on participation (DCYA, 2015) also makes a distinction between future outcomes and a concern for the present well-being of young people. These national policies are not explicitly set within the context of outcomes and goals set at the supranational level.

With reference to England, *Positive for Youth* is also outcomes-focused in that it sets out a long list of commitments on empowerment, funding, and service provision towards achieving outcomes that, the report states, 'will focus wherever possible on measures of the positive outcomes achieved rather than negative outcomes prevented' (HM Government 2012: 8).

In Northern Ireland, *Our Children and Young People* also uses an explicit outcomes framework, although the framing of outcomes sought is remarkably broad. It states that:

We will know that we have achieved our shared vision for our children and young people if, after ten years, we can report progress and evidence exists, which indicates that *Our Children and Young People* are:

- Healthy
- Enjoying, learning and achieving
- Living in safety and with stability
- Experiencing economic and environmental well-being
- Contributing positively to community and society
- Living in a society which respects their rights (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, 2006: 7).

*Together: Building a United Community* also has an outcomes focus for Northern Ireland, here with an emphasis on creating more opportunities for socially mixed, shared education, with a view to breaking the cycle of intergenerational educational underachievement, unemployment, and sectarianism and to improving good relations among and for our young people. It sets out the long-term outcomes of such a programme to include:

- Greater reconciliation
- Better educational outcomes
- Collaborative working
- Better parenting
- Better quality of life for those living in interface areas (NI Executive Office, 2013: 61–62).

Overall, all documents are focused in one way or another on achieving outcomes for young people in relation to the core areas of their lives, including education and training, employment, living standard, civic engagement, and contributing positively to society. The expression of outcomes is varied in terms of emphasis and orientation. Broadly, participation is an overarching aspiration across frameworks, most commonly expressed in terms of civic rather than political participation at the national level, with supranational frameworks more explicitly focused on political engagement outcomes as well. Some supranational policies focus on outcomes by identifying sets of indicators that broadly identify goals, while others are more specific in setting out particular outcome expectations. National policies, especially in Ireland and Northern Ireland, specify a number of outcomes related to employment, education, family life, decision-making, and well-being, as well as societal outcomes for engagement and participation and process outcomes relating to policy and service development. It is of note that there is no clear connection between the national and supranational documents in terms of alignment of outcomes and expected impacts, making the potential achievement of goals and measurement of impact more nebulous. Neither the UN nor the EU context features prominently in the policy orientations set out in the national documents, with the exception of references to the UNCRC.

## 3.5 Strategies and Mechanisms

A broad range of strategies and approaches to achieve greater youth civic and political engagement are outlined in the policy frameworks at supranational and national levels, and a broad range of actors are tasked with responsibility regarding implementation. These include supranational institutions such as the UN, UNESCO and the EU bodies, national governments and state agencies, local governments, service providers, international and national NGOs and youth organisations, researchers, and young people themselves.

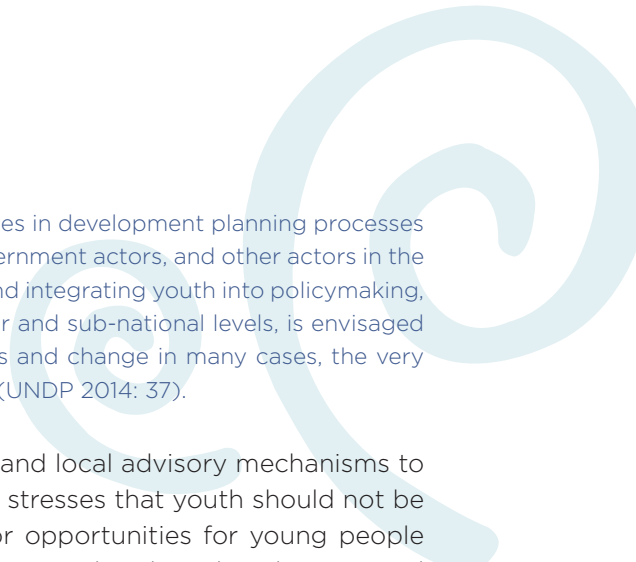
Ten specific strategies can be identified across the frameworks and are described in the section below. These are: establishing deliberative forums; promoting volunteerism; youth work; arts and sport; technology and social media; education and training; partnerships and inter-sectoral linkages; youth organising; capacity-building; and research, evaluation, and monitoring. At the UN and EU levels, the focus is very much on strengthening the capacity of governments to support youth empowerment and political engagement and on promoting international collaboration and sharing in this regard. At the national level, strategies are directed at specific actions.

### 3.5.1 Deliberative Forums

At the supranational level the UNDP and UNESCO, in particular, emphasise the need to engage youth in deliberation and decision-making at all levels of society, and the establishment of deliberative forums for young people are evident across supranational and national strategies. These include mechanisms such as youth advisory boards at the local level, youth parliaments or shadow councils at the national level, and engagement with UN processes at the global level. Such structures are seen to build youth leadership capacity, highlight issues of importance to young people, and provide them with experience engaging with democratic processes. A prominent stated concern is to ensure that the structures and processes are representative of different groups of youth, including vulnerable and marginalised groups. For UNESCO, a key structure in this regard is the UNESCO Youth Forum, which enables young people to submit their recommendations to representatives of 195 member states, while at the same time mobilising these youths to undertake follow-up action for the implementation of their ideas.

The EU strategy *Investing and Empowering* similarly outlines a process of ‘structured dialogue’ with young people, first established in the European Union in 2005 (European Union, 2009: 6). Structured dialogue means that governments and administrations at local, regional, and national levels, as well as EU institutions, discuss chosen themes with young people in order to get their input into policymaking. Reference to this process is included in recent Irish policy documents as well; a Structured Dialogue Working Group has been established as a national participation and consultation structure for young people aged 15–25 to feed into European youth policy on pertinent issues. European frameworks note that cycles of structured dialogue have allowed people to feed into policymaking at the EU level but also recognise the need for the next phase of dialogue to reach a more diverse group of young people.

In addition to these kinds of deliberative forums, institutionalising the inclusion of young people and their perspectives in decisions affecting them is a key focus at the supranational level, with the importance of ‘mainstreaming’ youth involvement emphasised in the UNDP:



Mainstreaming of youth perspectives and youth-related issues in development planning processes will entail working with a range of government and non-government actors, and other actors in the development field. Identifying entry points for advocating and integrating youth into policymaking, budgeting and implementation processes at national, sector and sub-national levels, is envisaged as a multi-year, multi-stakeholder process aimed to address and change in many cases, the very nature of a country's decision-making norms and practices (UNDP 2014: 37).

*Enter!* also emphasises the need to support youth councils and local advisory mechanisms to ensure the democratic participation of young people, but it stresses that youth should not be relegated into youth parliaments. It highlights the need for opportunities for young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to participate in matters related to the planning and management of their local living environment and for mechanisms to ensure the inclusion of studentelected representatives in decisionmaking processes in schools.

National-level strategies also place considerable emphasis on young people's participation via deliberative forums and other structures. In England, Northern Ireland, and Ireland, youth parliaments (the UK Youth Parliament, NI Youth Assembly, and Dáil Na nÓg, respectively) have been established to give young people a voice at the national level. There are also various structures at local or regional levels that provide opportunities for the voice of young people to be heard in local decision-making, including local youth councils. For example, in Ireland, Comhairle na nÓg have been established at local levels to take action on topics of importance to young people, and they act as a consultative forum for adult decision-makers in the locality. In Northern Ireland and England, reference is also made to student councils to give young people a say in decision-making at schools.

A wide range of structures and partnerships has been established in the three countries to promote young people's voices being heard in all aspects of policymaking, from local to national levels and in relation to issues that affect their lives. In England, for example, the *UK National Participation Forum* brings together a range of organisations committed to the participation of children and young people in matters that affect their lives. In Northern Ireland, a 'participation hub' is being developed to deliver a coherent approach to the participation of children and young people, integrate existing and emerging participation structures, and ensure that children and young people have the capacity to engage. In Ireland, formal links between the Department of Children and Youth, the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive, and the EU Structured Dialogue process have been established to facilitate policy-related dialogue between young people and policymakers.

### **3.5.2 Volunteerism**

Across all supranational policy documents, volunteerism is seen as an important mechanism for the civic engagement of young people that helps develop social competencies among youth, promote integration and autonomy, and foster cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. According to the *UNDP Youth Strategy*:

Volunteerism is widely recognized as a powerful means of transforming the pace and nature of development and draws upon the inherent core values of self-help, solidarity and social cohesion. . . . Through volunteering, young people gain a strong sense of civic engagement to bring about transformational change in their communities (UNDP, 2014: 44).

The value of volunteering and internships to enhance young people's employability and employment is also emphasised in the *UNDP Youth Strategy*, which promotes internship, apprenticeship, and volunteering schemes as a means of acquiring skills and in support of young people's transition from school to work or their reintegration into the labour market after long-term unemployment spells. A dedicated trust fund was set up to boost youth volunteerism throughout UN policy and programming initiatives, including the UN Youth Volunteers Programme.

According to the European Union's *Investing and Empowering*, promoting voluntary activities among young people is one of the four priority themes for cooperation proposed under the EU Youth Cooperation Framework established in 2003. A key mechanism through which volunteerism is promoted at the EU level is the European Voluntary Service, through which young people can be full-time volunteers for up to one year in another country. A European Council recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the EU was also adopted in order to encourage youth cross-border volunteering. The *EU Youth Report 2015* emphasises the need to ensure that social inclusion and outreach practices are in place to reach young people of diverse backgrounds, especially those suffering from disadvantage, to ensure their full participation in social and civic activities, including volunteering:

Young people on the wrong side of this divide find it difficult to express their political voice. The less educated or less involved they are in social activities, the less they take part in voting, volunteering or cultural activities. For instance, NEETs have less trust in public institutions and participate less in social and civic activities than their peers (EU, 2016: 10).

In Northern Ireland, an ambitious commitment was made under *Together: Building a United Community* to offer 10,000 young people who are not in education, employment, or training a place on the new United Youth volunteering programme for a one-year period, during which time they receive a stipend. Volunteering features strongly in the English *Positive for Youth* strategy for the following reasons:

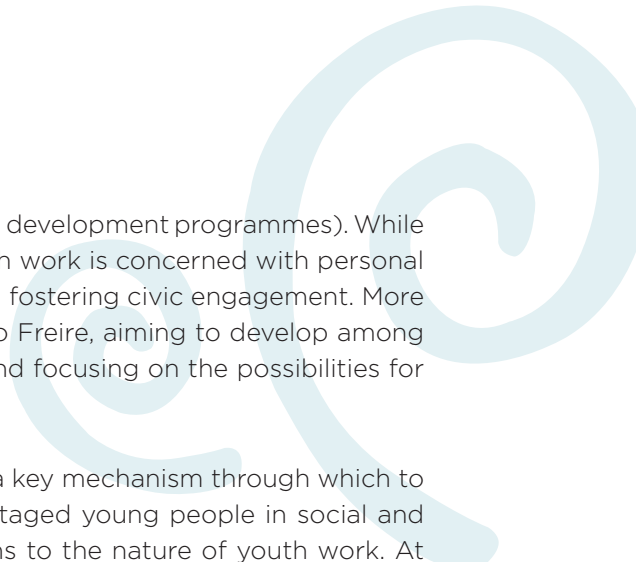
Volunteering is of particular value because it is freely given by the young person and helps build social trust. Social action projects empower young people to make a difference on issues they care about, and can therefore be an important vehicle for engaging the most disaffected. This can include leading and delivering services and activities for other young people (HM Government, 2011a: 39).

In addition to funding a range of initiatives to promote youth volunteering under this strategy, the UK government committed to provide volunteering and service learning opportunities through the *National Citizens Service* (NCS). An NCS course is normally for four consecutive weeks and involves groups of 12 to 15 young people (aged 16–17 years) undertaking a combination of outdoor activities, life skills training, and 'social action' projects. Commitments are also made to promote volunteering for young people in Ireland, though with fewer specifics regarding particular strategies or programmes than in Northern Ireland or England.

### **3.5.3 Youth Work**

Youth work is a type of non-formal education founded on the principles of voluntary participation, accessibility, empowerment, and equality (Furlong, 2013; Lalor, de Róiste, and Devlin, 2007) and generally involves informal relationship-building processes as well as





structured activities (e.g., recreational, sporting, and personal development programmes). While some youth work is purely recreational in focus, much youth work is concerned with personal and skills development, developing social responsibility, and fostering civic engagement. More critical forms of youth work are rooted in the work of Paolo Freire, aiming to develop among (particularly marginalised) youth a critical consciousness and focusing on the possibilities for transformation in the lives of young people (Coburn, 2011).

Across the documents reviewed, youth work is considered a key mechanism through which to promote social inclusion and the participation of disadvantaged young people in social and civic activities, though with somewhat different orientations to the nature of youth work. At the EU level, *Investing and Empowering* stresses the increasing role of targeted youth work in addressing issues of marginalisation and disadvantage. Youth work was also a key component of the *Enter!* project, which calls for greater coordination and support at the EU level for youth work in Europe:

Youth workers and youth organisations are often at the forefront of projects designed to ease tensions, provide alternative nonformal education or leisure time activities, counter discrimination and exclusion and, generally, to promote participation and citizenship. The responses, however, are rarely sufficient and sustainable. At the European level, few possibilities exist for sharing experiences and learning from each other (Ramberg, 2015: 20).

It is acknowledged across all the EU policy documents we reviewed that the value of youth work is not recognised sufficiently for its contribution to the social inclusion of youth, and that funding cutbacks work against sustainability of the profession. The *EU Youth Report 2015* (EU, 2016: 15) commits to support ‘the capacity of youth work, youth organisations and networks to act as forces of inclusion by assisting young people to engage, volunteer, and drive positive social change in communities’ and places a particular emphasis on support for quality youth work. While the term ‘youth work’ is not specifically mentioned in the *UNDP Youth Strategy*, the document DEs emphasise the importance of working with and supporting local community groups and NGOs to support the participation of young people.

Youth work also features prominently in national-level strategies, recognised both as a valued method of non-formal learning for all young people and as a mechanism for inclusion of disadvantaged youths. In Ireland, Northern Ireland, and England, policy frameworks focus on defining the distinctive role and purpose of youth work vis-à-vis education and other forms of youth provision. In Ireland, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* commits to ‘support quality youth work, both as a protective factor contributing to the young person’s overall development and in reaching out to young people at risk of crime or anti-social behaviour’ (DCYA, 2014: 30). *Positive for Youth* in England states that high-quality youth work ‘can have a significant impact on young people’s life chances and be an important form of early intervention for young people at risk of poor outcomes’ (HM Government, 2011a: 69). In Northern Ireland, *Priorities for Youth* states that:

Although relevant for all young people, youth work can be particularly relevant to those at risk of disengaging from society, those who become disaffected at school, those at risk of committing an offence, those who could become non-stakeholders in their own community and those adversely affected by the legacy of the conflict (DE, 2014: 2).



Across the three countries, policy and legislation supporting the development of youth work is referenced. A legislative and policy infrastructure to support the development of quality youth work in Ireland was created through the Youth Work Act 2001 and Youth Work Development Plan 2003–2007. A non-statutory curriculum, ‘Youth Work: A Model for Effective Practice’ (1997, updated 2003), was developed by the Youth Service, which provides a flexible framework for the delivery of good youth work practice in Northern Ireland. In England, *Positive for Youth* states that local authorities throughout the country are required to provide educational and recreational activities for the improvement of young people’s personal and social development.

### 3.5.4 Arts and Sports


At the supranational level, artistic, cultural, and sport activities are viewed as an important means of inclusion, conflict prevention, and reconciliation, particularly in the *UNESCO Operational Strategy* and *Enter!* Both frameworks highlight the potential of sport and culture to promote active youth participation and citizenship, social cohesion, inclusion, and wellbeing. The value of sport and cultural activities as a form of engagement and participation for all young people and as a means of inclusion for young people who are disadvantaged is also highlighted in national policy documents, especially in Ireland and Northern Ireland. For example, the Irish *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* commits to support accessible and affordable youth and sport activities, which encourage young people’s overall personal and social development and engage young people who might be at risk of early school leaving or engaging in criminal activity and anti-social behaviour. *Together: Building a United Community* views the arts and sports as a key means of bringing people together and improving relations across communities in Northern Ireland. While the importance of sport is stressed in *Positive for Youth* in England, it is not explicitly linked to social inclusion or participation.

### 3.5.5 Technology and Social Media

The *EU Youth Report 2015* calls attention to how internet technology can facilitate social and political engagement among young people and notes that many member states are pursuing strategies to promote youth political engagement via social media and technology:

A wide array of opportunities for political participation is also offered by the Internet and its applications, and young people have been in the forefront of using these means of interpersonal communication. The virtual spaces frequented by young people such as online forums, chat rooms, social networks and blogs, serve the same basic function as the physical ones they sometimes replace: establishing collective interaction around common interests. In this sense, they constitute a great resource for political and social engagement, which young people have been the quickest to recognise and use (EU, 2016: 250).

Across the EU policy documents, the importance of accessible information systems that provide youth friendly information on social rights relevant to young people is a prominent theme. The *EU Youth Report 2015* mentions that the European Youth Portal has become a key source of information for young people with regard to EU openings, such as opportunities for cross-border volunteering and job and traineeship offers. It also notes that the European Commission collected ideas from young people in ‘ideas labs’ during the 2015 European Youth Week, in some sense a virtual version of the kinds of deliberative forums described above. In addition to organising face-to-face events, this effort reached 1.2 million young people via social media (EU, 2016: 12).



The *UNDP Youth Strategy* states that young people are becoming frustrated with traditional forms of political engagement and are increasingly drawn to new forms of youth mobilisation, through social media channels or innovative informal groupings. It notes:

Access to information and communication technologies is providing young people with new means to express their aspirations and concerns more freely, to mobilize in large numbers, and to collaborate with other young people across borders to debate and seek solutions to the problems that concern them most (UNDP, 2014: 5).

The *UNDP Youth Strategy*, *WPAY*, and the *UNESCO Operational Strategy* all outline plans to use digital technologies to facilitate the engagement of young people throughout the world. Under its plan, the UNDP commits to explore the role of social media and information and communication technology (ICT) in enabling access to information and fostering political participation, in particular focused on the voices of historically marginalised youth. It will focus on enhancing the capacity of digitally excluded youth groups, including young people living in rural areas, young people in areas of conflict, young people with disabilities, and illiterate young people to have access to ICT and information networks to allow them to collaborate with state and non-state bodies. The UNDP sets out its plan to develop a dedicated youth portal and knowledge-management platform to support knowledge exchange through e-discussions, virtual debates, webinars, dissemination of knowledge products, and other activities. This will support the promotion of UNDP's work on youth in social media and contribute to existing UN platforms and groups, and involvement of young people in the development of new technology-based approaches is seen as critical:

Engagement platforms such as crowd-sourcing, gaming, mobile technologies and other emerging innovative platforms and approaches need to be further explored and tapped into. It is essential to ensure that means of engagement are user-driven and appropriate to youth; this implies involvement of youth from the very beginning of the 'engagement' process to ensure that design of engagement methods are appropriate for the user. Building on existing local solutions, and advocating for the space for youth to develop their own solutions and new approaches will also be essential (UNDP, 2014: 39).

National policy frameworks are less focused on social media and ICT, although there is an awareness of the importance of governments providing information via social media and youth-friendly websites or portals. For example, *Positive for Youth* in England notes that young people were involved in the design of 'I Am...', a government-supported campaign and website that collects career information and opportunities for young people in one place (HM Government 2011a: 30). There is little acknowledgement, however, of the potential for youth political engagement via digital technologies in these national-level documents. One exception is the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation* in Ireland, which highlights that young people's engagement with social media in new social movements and global forms of activism is evidence that they take their citizenship very seriously and are actively engaged on issues of importance to them, using a space that is owned and created by them. There are also concerns expressed in some national policy documents regarding the risks posed by the Internet in terms of cyberbullying and radicalisation. While the *Prevent* strategy in England sees the Internet as a mechanism through which youth have become radicalised, it is also viewed as a platform for the delivery of its strategy.

### 3.5.6 Education and Training

Across the supranational and national policy frameworks, there is a range of education and training strategies of relevance to youth civic and political education. Supranational frameworks, in particular, focus on education for democratic citizenship, human rights, and sustainable development. For example, *WPAY* and the *UNDP Youth Strategy* provide for training to build the capacities of young people for peace-building through focused skills-based training and soft skills to enable young people to contribute to minimising factors that contribute to violence, increase global security, and prevent further armed conflict. The *UNESCO Operational Strategy* emphasises support for the integration of peace, human rights, and global citizenship education into education systems, particularly through national curricula, teacher education, teaching materials, and learning environments. *Enter!* calls for human rights and citizenship education in schools, while *Erasmus+* highlights the need to educate young people and youth workers for interculturalism and diversity. At the national level, the UK *Prevent Strategy* outlines a specific role for education and training in relation to challenging extremist narratives, and it provides schools with advice on how to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to challenge such discourses.

Strategies designed to improve access to appropriate training and employment opportunities for NEETs are prominent at both supranational and national levels. *Erasmus+*, *Enter!*, and the *UNDP Youth Strategy* all reference the need to support private and public sectors to encourage youth employment opportunities through internship and apprenticeship schemes and the need for quality second-chance education for young people who left school early. In England, *Positive for Youth* refers to the introduction of a new Youth Contract, 'worth almost £1 billion, to support vulnerable 16- to 17-year-olds to re-engage in education or training and provide subsidised jobs or work experience to 18–24 year olds' (HM Government 2011a: 31). Many policy frameworks also highlight the need for formal and nonformal education programmes that promote the personal and social development of young people.

### 3.5.7 Partnerships and Linkages

Intersectoral cooperation emerges as a prominent theme across supranational and national strategies. Partnership and interactive working are encouraged in a wide range of spheres, including at the level of supranational organisations (such as between EU institutions and departments) and at the national, local authority, and community levels (including between schools, youth workers, youth justice systems, and other organisations). For example, under the strategic partnerships supported by *Erasmus+*, stakeholders such as youth organisations, experts in relevant sectors (e.g., health, justice, employment), educational institutions, and others can come together to support projects that develop innovative practices and ideas and find solutions to the situations faced by young people with fewer opportunities (European Commission, 2014). Similarly, the *UNDP Youth Strategy* states that it will:

Seek partnerships with civil society organisations (CSOs), educational institutions and media to encourage continuous youth participation and civic education in schools, universities, and outside formal education frameworks. . . . During electoral periods, UNDP could partner with electoral management bodies and CSOs to ensure youth involvement in all phases of voter education campaigns and include youth as election observers (UNDP, 2014: 32).

As part of the 'whole child' perspective in Irish policies since the *National Children's Strategy* of 2000, interagency cooperation and coordination have been critical. As stated in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*:

The Framework is a recognition by Government of the need to 'connect', nationally and locally, if we are to use effectively all of the resources available to support our vision for children and young people, and a recognition also that we need to do more within the resources we have (DCYA, 2014: 2).

Similarly, in Northern Ireland, *Our Children and Young People* emphasises the role that will be played by partnership and coordinated work between stakeholders at all levels. Similarly, *Together: Building a United Community* acknowledges that 'it is only through government, community groups, and individuals working together that a new and united community can truly be formed' in Northern Ireland (NI Executive Office, 2013: 2). In England, *Positive for Youth* 'sets out a new partnership approach for giving young people more opportunities and better support – with young people themselves as key influencers and with voluntary and community groups and local businesses drawn in as full partners' (HM Government, 2011a: 1).

### **3.5.8 Youth Organising and Activism**

Youth organising or activism refers to youth-led activity aimed at bringing about social change. Across the policy frameworks reviewed, youth organising or activism receives relatively little attention in comparison to adult-led models such as volunteerism and youth work. At the supranational level, references to the potential of youth activism as a participatory strategy are more prominent in UN than in EU policy frameworks. The *UNDP Youth Strategy* notes that youth movements and student groups are challenging traditional power structures and advocating for a new social contract between state and society, and it makes a commitment to support initiatives that work with youth to form their visions for their countries. Support for 'young people as leaders' is one of the three pillars of the UNDP (2014: 24) strategy, alongside 'youth as beneficiaries' and 'youth as partners'. The need to support youth leadership in communities forms part of the recommendations in *Enter!* References to youth organising and activism are also largely absent from the national-level strategies, with some minor exceptions. The NI Youth Forum states that one of its key areas of work is supporting young people to lobby and campaign on issues young people care about, and *Positive for Youth* in England notes that in a number of local areas, groups of young people have campaigned for change, citing, for example, innovative transport solutions brought about in response to youth advocacy campaigns.

### **3.5.9 Capacity-building**

The need to build capacity among youth organisations, state agencies, government departments and others to address the complex issues facing youth is emphasised across the various policy domains. Supranational policy documents tend to specify the role of these organisations as facilitating knowledge exchange and building capacity between countries, as exemplified by the *UNESCO Operational Strategy on Youth*:

At global level, UNESCO will enable the exchange of good practices and knowledge among countries and regions and will facilitate and inform related policy debates. At national level, building the capacities of decision-makers and of personnel of related institutions will be an integral part of UNESCO's action under this axis... UNESCO will guide national governments in applying participatory processes, engaging all related stakeholders, particularly young women and men (UNESCO, 2014: 10).

A commitment to building the capacity of young people to engage in political processes is central to the *UNDP Youth Strategy*, which includes creating a positive, enabling environment for the emergence of greater youth leadership. A key concern at the EU level relates to building the capacity of all stakeholders to effectively meet the challenge of ensuring youth engagement and participation, with a particular emphasis on the need to build the capacity of youth workers, teachers, and others working directly with disadvantaged or marginalised young people as well as building the capacity of young people themselves.

Capacity-building strategies also feature prominently in national policy documents, particularly in relation to building expertise and resources to support youth participation.

In Ireland, the *National Strategy on Young People's Participation in Decision-Making* aims to build capacity and confidence among policymakers and practitioners in engaging children and young people in decision-making through the establishment of a 'participation hub':

The hub will champion and promote participation, create resources and training materials, conduct training, document and disseminate learning and establish an online children's participation database. It will also form partnerships with third-level and adult education institutions to oversee development of education on children's rights (including participation in decision-making) for professionals who work with and on behalf of children and young people (DCYA, 2015: 31).

Similarly, in Northern Ireland, *Our Children and Young People* commits to the establishment of a Participation Network with similar goals to those of the participation hub in Ireland. Building the capacity of the youth work sector to deliver a good-quality service to young people is also prominent in Ireland, England, and Northern Ireland, as discussed in the youth work and volunteerism sections above.

In England, *Positive for Youth* also outlines plans to enhance the national participation infrastructure, working through bodies such as the National Participation Forum, which brings together a range of organisations committed to the participation of children and young people in matters affecting their lives. It also details supports for networks of voluntary youth and community organisations that can support one another in bidding for public services. The *Prevent* strategy outlines detailed actions to build capacity in all sectors of society to identify and respond to extremism, including training, education, and awareness-raising.

### **3.5.10 Research, Evaluation, and Monitoring**

The policy frameworks at supranational and national levels all emphasise the importance of evidence-informed policy development. Most documents refer extensively to research in their analysis of the circumstances of young people and view research as a critical element in the ongoing quest to understand young people's lives and to ensure effective policy responses.



In the EU there are a range of structures and initiatives in place to support high-quality research regarding the profile of youth (EU, 2009). Research strategies are embedded in all proposed action areas under the *EU Youth Report* (2016), which also notes that the situation of young people in the EU is measured regularly on the basis of a 'dashboard' of 41 indicators on conditions affecting young people. The dashboard is designed to help member states and the Commission to identify new trends and adapt its priorities as needed (EU, 2016: 20). In addition to supporting research, frameworks also emphasise the importance of networking between researchers and among researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders to share knowledge, as exemplified by the *UNDP Youth Strategy*:

UNDP shall seek expanded partnerships with global, regional and national youth research groups and youth associations in order to support as well as be informed by recent knowledge development in the field of youth (UNDP, 2014: 42).

In Ireland, one of the core aims of the *National Children's Strategy* (2000: 38) was that 'children's lives will be better understood'. Research has played a key role in the development of policy related to youth in the intervening years, a commitment that is summed up in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*:

Understanding the lived experience of children and young people is a critical input to informing policy, practice and resourcing. Knowing how *Our Children and Young People* are developing (and how they fare in relation to international peers) is an important check on the effectiveness of policy. Significant strides have been made over the last decade to meet the information gap on the lives of children and young people in Ireland (DCYA, 2014: 41).

In Northern Ireland, a similar commitment to the development of a robust research infrastructure is made in *Our Children and Young People*, while many commitments in relation to research are made in *Together: Building a United Community*. In England, *Positive for Youth* and, in particular, Prevent refer consistently to research studies throughout and provide for research and evaluation connected to the strategies outlined in the documents. The *UNDP Youth Strategy* and *Positive for Youth* in England connect the focus on research to youth engagement directly by advocating a role for young people as researchers:

Young people can play a valuable role as young inspectors, scrutinising and auditing the quality of provision and the progress being made to improve outcomes. When young inspectors are effectively trained and supported, many areas have found that they are able to provide valuable insights into how to improve service provision and reach target groups of young people more effectively (HM Government, 2011a: 65).

## 4. Conclusion

As set out in the introduction, this policy report provides a foundation for an empirical study in principal cities in each of the national contexts we examined here: Dublin in the Republic of Ireland, Belfast in Northern Ireland, and London in England. The report based on the three-city study (Chaskin et al. 2018c) offers a critical appraisal of the policy context and makes recommendations based on these findings for future policy development. In the current document, our purpose has been to describe and analyse the orientation of the frameworks, their assumptions, their approaches, and the role they play.

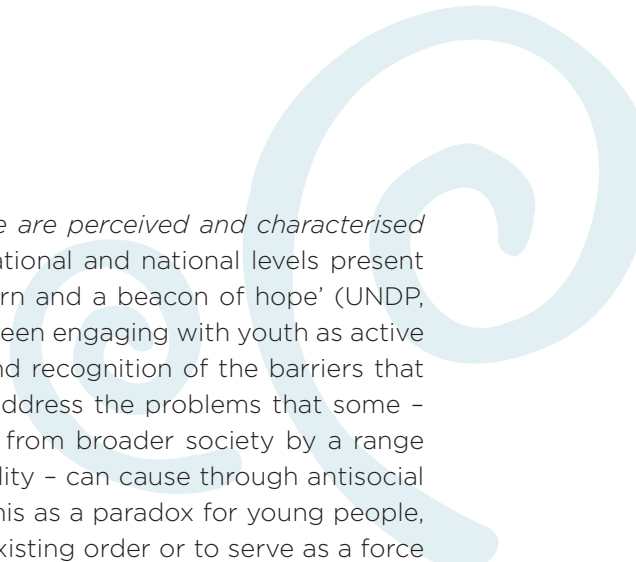
The questions posed in this paper were as follows:

- What are the key assumptions behind policy frameworks that are meant to promote youth engagement? What are the rationales for promoting engagement, what kinds of 'engagement' are looked for, and why?
- What are the key historical, contextual, and contemporary trends and considerations that have shaped the development of these policies, and how do they respond to these considerations?
- Who are the young people these policy frameworks seek to engage, and how are young people characterised in these frameworks?
- What are the major strategic approaches to encouraging young people's engagement? What are the goals, objectives, and outcomes they seek to accomplish?
- What roles are the state, supranational bodies, and civil society organisations meant to play and through what practical strategies (programmes, processes, supports, activities)?

The foregoing material provides a detailed analysis in response to these questions. In this final section, we rehearse the major themes and highlight some of the core similarities and differences among policy frameworks, consider some of the ambiguities and cross-cutting dynamics suggested by them, and discuss how they might play out on the ground.

The first major theme concerns the *challenges of youth engagement*. At both the supranational level and in each of the nation-states that are the focus of our analysis, there has been a significant policy emphasis on responding to these challenges. This has included both the development of specific policy frameworks to encourage young people's participation in civic and political life, and support for specific programmatic schemes to achieve these ends. This agenda is substantially grounded in a common set of perspectives about young people and a common concern about the negative impacts of large numbers of youth remaining disengaged from society – from their communities, from key institutions like school and work, and from political engagement as effective and contributing citizens. It is also grounded in a common conviction about the potential contribution that promoting young people's engagement can make both to the well-being of young people themselves and to society at large. Alongside these similarities, there are some important differences in emphasis, rationale, expectations, and strategic orientation across contexts, and a number of ambiguities regarding the most effective ways to engage young people and the kinds of impact such engagement might have.





The second important theme relates to *how young people are perceived and characterised* in the frameworks. Policy frameworks at both the supranational and national levels present a perspective of young people as both ‘a source of concern and a beacon of hope’ (UNDP, 2014: 10). They emphasise the need to strike a balance between engaging with youth as active citizens with a positive contribution to make to society, and recognition of the barriers that many young people face. They also recognise a need to address the problems that some – particularly those living in disadvantage and marginalised from broader society by a range of circumstances, from poverty to minority status to disability – can cause through antisocial or risky behaviour and non-participation. *WPAY* captures this as a paradox for young people, who must choose either ‘to seek to be integrated into an existing order or to serve as a force to transform that order’ (United Nations, 2010: 1).

Similarly, frameworks across levels and contexts are driven by a recognition of the ways in which contemporary circumstances shape young people’s experience of the world and the possibilities and challenges these circumstances present for promoting their engagement. Particular aspects of these circumstances, however, are emphasised differently. The supranational frameworks we reviewed, for example, are more explicitly concerned than are frameworks at the national level with the impact of political climate and the withdrawal of many young people, especially disadvantaged youth, from participation in formal political processes. The role of political conflict is especially noted in UN and Northern Irish frameworks and, with reference to youth radicalisation, in the EU and English frameworks. The importance of economic circumstances is common across frameworks, although UN and EU documents are most explicit about the impact of the 2008 financial crisis (also noted in Irish frameworks), while in England and Northern Ireland the focus is principally on a subpopulation of economically disadvantaged young people – the so-called NEETs who are dislocated from both education and employment – without particular reference to structural changes that may have contributed to their current circumstances. Demographic changes are similarly noted across frameworks but with different emphases. The age distribution is important across frameworks, but at the global level it is focused more on the challenges created by a ‘youth bulge’ in the global south. In Europe it is more focused on the implications of an increasing dependency ratio given the general ageing of the population. And while racial and ethnic diversity is increasing even in historically homogeneous countries like Ireland, the challenge of integrating immigrants and refugees plays a significantly larger role in UN and EU frameworks than in national frameworks in the three nation-states, with the partial exception of England, by far the most diverse among them. Concerns about inequality and exclusion are common across all frameworks and are seen to both contribute to youth disenfranchisement and shape the context in which efforts to promote their engagement must be addressed.

A third major theme relates to the *reasoning behind and rationale for emphasising youth engagement as a policy priority*. As with perspectives on youth and the circumstances that shape their current and potential engagement, the stated rationales for why promoting youth engagement is important reflect both common roots and divergent emphases. While all frameworks reference the importance of recognising young people’s fundamental rights to participation, and most specifically invoke the UNCRC as a foundational document supporting this orientation, the emphasis on rights is far more strongly emphasised at the supranational level and in Ireland than in England or Northern Ireland; and to the extent that rights are invoked as a central rationale in these contexts, it tends to be tied more closely to an emphasis on reciprocal responsibilities, especially in England. More instrumental arguments for

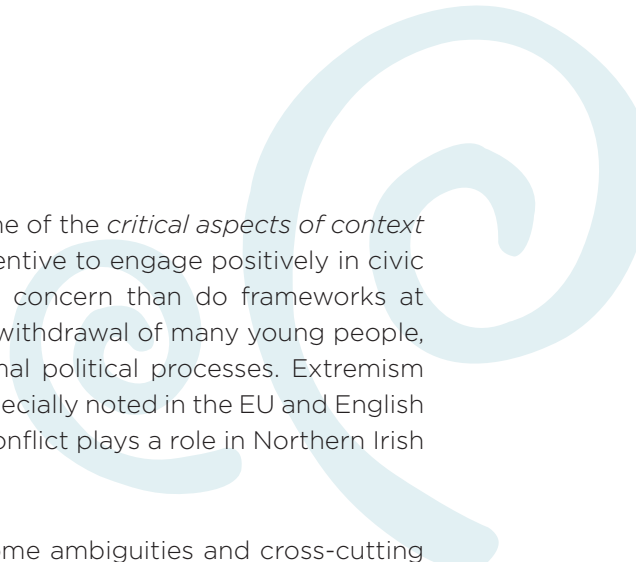


participation – the ways it contributes to youth development broadly, to social development at the collective level, and to the prevention of negative behaviours and outcomes – are common across contexts but with some difference in emphasis. Supranational frameworks tend to focus relatively more on collective benefits to social development, and national frameworks relatively more on beneficial outcomes at the individual level, with a particular focus in England and Northern Ireland on the prevention of negative behaviours and outcomes.

The fourth theme relates to the *strategies and actions recommended* to promote youth civic and political engagement. Grounded in the rationales discussed above, the strategies emphasised to promote youth civic engagement include a range of both somewhat new policy innovations and more traditional approaches. Deliberative forums, such as dedicated youth parliaments and youth councils, are perhaps the most high-profile recent symbol of the commitment to youth civic engagement. New structures have also been developed to support integrated policymaking and implementation and to foster the potential for young people to influence decision-making at all levels of governance, from the local to the supranational. There is also a strong emphasis at the supranational level (though less explicitly among the national frameworks reviewed) on the cultivation of new channels of communication with young people, with the Internet and social media seen to play a potentially key role in both information provision and youth engagement.

These newer approaches coexist with more traditional approaches to youth engagement such as volunteerism, youth work, activism, education and training, and arts and sport – though again with different relative emphasis. Volunteerism is emphasised across contexts, though with relatively less specificity in Irish frameworks, while arts and sport are more heavily emphasised at the national level, especially in Ireland and Northern Ireland. In the latter, sport in particular is a key strategy for attempting to encourage engagement and understanding across sectarian divides. Education is a key focus across frameworks, but at the supranational level it is more specifically oriented towards democratic engagement, citizenship, and human rights, and at the national level it is more focused on young people's 'personal and social development' and on preparing youth to be integrated into the workforce. Youth work is invoked across contexts as a key mechanism for engaging young people, especially important for connecting with and promoting the participation of the most marginalised youth, but the orientation towards youth work is somewhat different. At the supranational level (especially in EU frameworks), youth work is noted as a particularly important tool for fostering inclusion and promoting participation and citizenship, including as a foundation to shape social action to drive community change. In the national frameworks we reviewed it focuses more on recreational and service activities and as a mechanism for preventing antisocial and risky behaviour.

Across many of these domains there also is a focus on innovation and capacity-building, with particular attention to intersectoral collaboration, to ensure that stakeholders are equipped to deal with the challenges facing young people in the 21st century. A focus on young people who are, or are at risk of becoming, marginalised from society is a common theme across all actions, with particular reference to migrant youth in EU documents, to working-class 'NEET' youth in England and Northern Ireland, and to a range of young people – from ethnic minorities (including Travellers) to disabled youth to young people in (or exiting) care in Ireland. There is also a common stated commitment, with varying degrees of emphasis, to evidence-based policy and the importance of research and evaluation to inform policy and implementation.



There are also some differences in the attention paid to some of the *critical aspects of context* that shape young people's lives and their potential and incentive to engage positively in civic and political life. Supranational frameworks express more concern than do frameworks at national level about the impact of political climate and the withdrawal of many young people, especially disadvantaged youth, from participation in formal political processes. Extremism and fears about the potential for youth radicalisation are especially noted in the EU and English frameworks, while the legacy and impact of the sectarian conflict plays a role in Northern Irish frameworks, and to some extent in those of the Republic.

Beyond these similarities and differences, there are also some ambiguities and cross-cutting dynamics suggested by these frameworks and how they might play out on the ground. Understanding the influence and impact of the policy frameworks reviewed obviously requires moving beyond an analysis of policy documents themselves. In a follow-up report, we explore the relationship between these policy orientations and goals, and the organisational infrastructure, state of practice, and emerging lessons on the ground in three cities – Dublin, Belfast, and London – based on an analysis of the work and perspectives of policymakers, major youth-serving organisations, front-line practitioners, and young people themselves. But some issues can be highlighted here based on the policy analysis alone.

One concerns fundamental orientations, for example, towards rights versus more instrumental benefits, and towards promoting development versus preventing negative behaviours and outcomes. On the one hand, rights orientations emphasise the importance of embracing young people as active citizens and respecting their fundamental rights to participation, without necessarily insisting on specific outcome dividends such as educational attainment, workforce participation, or reductions in crime and antisocial behaviour. These more instrumental outcomes are generally presumed to flow from supporting young people's rights, a 'natural' outcome of empowerment and integration. On the other hand, claims about rights are nearly always contested – or at least contestable – and more instrumental concern, especially around issues of security and social order, often 'trumps rights' (Mitchell, 2003: 6). Indeed, a focus on rights may be a barrier to promoting support for some kinds of youth engagement strategies, as Ingrid Ramberg (2015: 85) notes: 'The "rights" language that the *Enter!* project has chosen to use is potentially scaring away those who might be in the best position to support this kind of project and without whom there can be little followup.' Indeed, there is a relative absence in these frameworks, particularly at the national level, of reference to youth organising, activism, and advocacy (notwithstanding the common rhetoric regarding youth leadership and empowerment), and most of the strategies embraced are largely adult-led. More instrumental arguments for supporting youth engagement may be more politically feasible, but may also lead to more regulated kinds of engagement, as much about social control as about empowerment. And an emphasis on specific instrumental behavioural or achievement outcomes as a rationale for supporting youth engagement might constrain resources to support more relational, process-focused engagement strategies that are arguably essential for engaging the most disenfranchised young people.

A second issue concerns the question of outcome expectations more broadly, and clarity about how to measure them. The policy frameworks we reviewed, when identifying specific orientations to assessing outcomes of youth engagement strategies, have tended to frame outcomes very broadly, or with little differentiation between process outcomes (e.g., increasing the number of young people engaged in various participatory schemes or diversifying

participation to include more disadvantaged youth), outputs (e.g., creating working groups or tools to monitor youth engagement activities), and impacts. There is also some ambiguity about the expected relationship between policy frameworks, specific strategies, and outcome expectations, for example, the ways in which promoting young people's engagement in arts or sport will contribute to broader civic or political engagement. While outcomes are specified to some extent, clarity on how they will be measured and monitored is lacking in general.

Third, countervailing pressures (for example, around funding or worries about radicalisation) may lead to some potential tensions between the rhetoric framing and stated goals of policy frameworks and the strategies they engage. *Prevent* in the UK, for example, emphasises a focus on the importance of integration and on democratic engagement as a tool to combat radicalisation, but its implementation has come under significant criticism by advocates, the media, and academics as being ineffective, having a 'chilling effect' on free speech and debate, and potentially leading to further alienation of Muslims in Britain and their withdrawal from civic and political life (e.g., Independent Voices, 2015; Awan, 2012). The issues around funding of youth work provide another example. Policy frameworks at both supranational and national level recognise the importance of youth work in connecting with young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, but the reality on the ground is somewhat different, and there is evidence of widespread cutbacks in funding to youth services over recent years. In Ireland, for example, there were eight successive years of cuts to youth work services during the period of austerity, amounting to a 31 per cent reduction in funding to youth services between 2008 and 2014 (National Youth Council of Ireland, 2016). Likewise, an estimated £387 million in funding was cut from youth services between 2010 and 2016 across the UK (Unison, 2017). Part of the rationale behind these cuts is likely related to ambiguity about the purpose and likely benefits of youth work and the difficulty of measuring discrete outcomes clearly attributable to its impact.

Fourth, policy frameworks argue for support of various strategies to engage young people, but we need to understand more about their relative reach and effectiveness. Young people have different interests, differential access to resources and opportunity, and face different kinds of constraints to their engagement. Youth parliaments and youth councils in their various iterations, for example, are sometimes critiqued for their tendency to attract relatively engaged and successful young people, disproportionately from more privileged backgrounds, to the exclusion of more marginalised youth (e.g., Turkie, 2010). The challenges of effectively engaging a broad range of young people, particularly the most marginalised, remain significant. Several of the policy frameworks we reviewed reference the potential for new mechanisms, such as digital technology and social media, to address this challenge, but the emphasis on these tools remains mostly aspirational, and their possibilities and limitations mostly unknown.

Finally, there may be fundamental limitations to policies seeking to promote youth civic and political engagement that need to be addressed beyond the boundaries of participatory schemes that engage them. For youth to have effective influence, opportunities to express their priorities and engage in civic and political action must be met by interlocutors that respect and take seriously their input: 'Strategies to give children a voice will only work if there are adults willing to listen to them' (DCYA, 2015: 17). This may include training for professionals, as advocated by the Irish *National Youth Strategy*, but it may also include a broader role for education (both formal and informal) to build the knowledge and capacity of youth, broader support for spaces and places that support and promote young people's development and participation, and more fundamental attention to the structural inequalities that shape disadvantage and constrain participation among the most marginalised.

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 661541.