




YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE POLICY ADVICE PROCESS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENSURING GREATER
PARTICIPATION BY THE YOUNGER GENERATION
AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL IN GERMANY



STATEMENT OF THE FEDERAL YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD



LEGAL NOTICE

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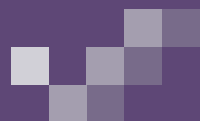
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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS BY FYAB

The Federal Youth Advisory Board (FYAB; in German: *Bundesjugendkuratorium/BJK*) appeals in this statement¹ for engagement with the issue of how of the young generation can be involved in the policy advice processes of the Federal Republic of Germany – as a matter of principle and in a lasting fashion. The forms taken by consultations on policy up to now are almost all open exclusively to adults. They require a specific expert status and often also participation in powerful organized structures. In addition, established consultation formats pose considerable demands for young people or are barely accessible to them.

With this in mind, FYAB formulates recommendations in this statement for comprehensive infrastructure to secure the participation of young people in policy advice processes at the federal level.

SYNOPSIS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- A systematic review of where and in which contexts young people are involved in the policy advice process at the federal level is needed and must encompass every ministry, department, and body in German federal policymaking.
- A conceptual plan must be developed to determine which groups of young people with specific experiences can and should be addressed and how this should be accomplished. Special attention must be devoted to the question of access to policy consultation processes.

¹ This statement was published in German in November 2019. It has been translated into English, revised and updated as was necessary.

- Differentiated, age-appropriate information provision, forms of access and tools must be developed for different age groups and the self-organization of young people of all ages must be fostered.
- It is important that quality standards and durable infrastructure for involving young people in policy advice processes are developed to facilitate the broad and influential participation of young people in policy consultation.
- The involvement of young people in policy advice processes should be tracked by putting systematic monitoring and regular reporting obligations in place.
- In the Children's Commission in the German *Bundestag* (*Kommission zur Wahrnehmung der Belange der Kinder/Commission for safeguarding the interests of children*), proposals should be made that the Commission work to see Ombud-like processes and institutions established to support children, adolescents, and young adults whenever they are unable to avail of their participation rights.
- New developments – for example as they pertain to the digital transformation, environmental protection, regional disparities, or all-day care – should be incorporated into the participation of young people in consultation on policy both as content to be considered and as issues with a bearing on how forms of participation are shaped. Decision-makers are also called on to approach new spaces – including digital spaces – where young people exchange views and form and share political opinions.

1

PARTICIPATION IN POLICY ADVICE BY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE – CURRENT AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

Young people have their own distinctive experiences of the present and their own distinctive expectations for the future as well as experiences and information that are relevant for society as a whole.

The participation of young people in civil society is a vital lifeline for democracy.

Young people are currently throwing up challenges for politics. This is apparent in many countries and evident, for instance, in protests for more environmental protection and climate change mitigation (“Fridays for Future”), demonstrations for affordable rents in metropolitan areas, initiatives tackling racism and discrimination, the self-organization of care leavers, and campaigns supporting the rights of young people in digital space. Young people have experiences and information that are of relevance to society and their own specific experiences of the present and expectations for the future. They position themselves politically as citizens within civil society – in and also beyond political panels and formal political negotiation processes (Gaiser/Hanke/Ott 2016). This form of civil society engagement is a vital lifeline for democracy. Many young members of the public do not see themselves represented in current political discussions and have been drawing attention to their view of current developments, their legitimate expectations for a socially adequate, liveable future, and their expertise. Emphasizing their political interests and their knowledge, they demand new solutions from politics for a better present and a better future. It is important that the knowledge of young people flows into policy advice processes more strongly than it has thus far and that their expertise is given the weighting due to it in political controversies and decision-making.

These forms of civil society positioning make clear demands on the organizational forms of democracy. The challenge for democracies to perceive and represent the political positions of their citizens is one side of this coin. The question presents itself here as to whether the positions and political interests of young people are sufficiently known and receive adequate consideration. The flip side of the coin is that civil society positioning also poses challenges for the information and knowledge dissemination policies of democra-



cies. Are young people and their present and future concerns adequately represented in the specific forms of consultation and negotiation used?

Are enough suitable and sustainable procedures and forms of exchanging information and views in place to connect young people with the political organizations of government well enough to ensure that young people's knowledge is not merely discussed more comprehensively than previously but also flows into political negotiations and decision-making processes – in ways that cannot be circumvented – and thus becomes potent?

While voting rights for young people have been the subject of much discussion in recent years, changes in this area have been implemented and new forms of participation have been established at different political levels (see 1.1), it is also still true that young people are barely represented in the forms of policy consultation used at the state, federal, EU and international levels. Politics at the federal level takes place largely without serious engagement with children, adolescents, and young adults. No adequate conception exists of how they could, for instance, be integrated into consultation processes in individual ministries or contribute their knowledge to negotiation processes. A dearth of ideas also exists as to how the current political positioning of young people can be used as input for established political processes. With this statement, FYAB calls for engagement with the question of how the young generation – consisting of children, adolescents, and young adults – can participate in the formal generation for knowledge for policy and politics, as a matter of principle and in a lasting fashion. The forms of consultation on policy that have been used up to now are almost all open only to adults and organized in complex negotiation formats that are exceptionally demanding for young people or barely accessible to them.

Young people are currently barely represented in the forms of policy consultation used.

A dearth of ideas exists as to how the current positions of young people can flow into established political processes.

In recent years, however, a new awareness of child and youth policy has emerged.

1.1 PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE: CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN CHILD AND YOUTH POLICY

In recent years, a new awareness of child and youth policy has emerged. At very different political levels, awareness has grown that the participation of young people in politics should be fostered and that young people, as holders of fundamental rights, should be included more comprehensively in political negotiation and decision-making processes. The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, for instance, highlights the right of young people to participation in Article 12 (1). According to the Convention, children and young people are entitled to freely express their opinions in all matters that affect them. Their opinion in matters affecting them must be given consideration to a degree reflecting their age and level of maturity. The *UN Committee on the Rights of the Child* highlights in its *General Comment No. 12* (CRC 2009; The right of the child to be heard) that this right is applicable to all young people up to the age of 18 and can be exercised by both individual children and groups of children (such as children with disabilities, for example).²

At the European level, the participation of the young generation is a key pillar in the EU Youth Strategy and one that has been and continues to be reinforced during the strategy's ongoing overhauling for the 2019–2027 period. The EU member states have set out their aim to “encourage and promote inclusive democratic participation of all young people in society and democratic processes”.³ The EU Youth Dialogue (formerly the “Structured Dialogue”) is the principal instrument deployed to involve young people from the EU states in the delivery of the EU Youth Strategy.

2 “Consequently, the Committee has always interpreted participation broadly in order to establish procedures not only for individual children and clearly defined groups of children, but also for groups of children, such as indigenous children, children with disabilities, or children in general, who are affected directly or indirectly by social, economic or cultural conditions of living in their society.” (CRC 2009, p. 18)

3 https://europa.eu/youth/strategy/engage_en



At the federal level in Germany, attention can be drawn to the development of a joint Youth Strategy by the federal government and Independent Youth Policy (*Eigenständige Jugendpolitik*), founded as early as 2009. The delivery of this policy has included and continues to include the *Werkstatt MitWirkung* participation project run by the German Federal Youth Council (*Deutscher Bundesjugendring*), the Youth Policy Days (*JugendPolitikTage*), topic-specific youth audits and the youth-friendly communities process (*Jugendgerechte Kommunen*). At state level, too, a trend towards “Independent Youth Policy” is discernible; Rhineland-Palatinate, Bavaria, North Rhine-Westphalia and Saxony-Anhalt have all already put necessary legislation in place. Some German states have also anchored the participation of young people in all matters affecting them in their local government codes (see 1.2). Many local authorities have since gone on to implement participation projects and/or taken measures such as establishing children’s or youth parliaments in recent years – with varying degrees of success and varying prospects for sustained long-term continuity.

Only a selection of public political structures has been mentioned thus far, but restructuring of the participation of children, adolescents, and young adults at very different levels can also currently be observed in clubs, associations, churches and faith groups. Participation of the young generation – specifically in policy advice processes – is still, nevertheless, not anchored deeply and lastingly and supported by suitable forms of organization, especially not at the federal level.

The vast majority even of the political decisions taken in recent years with a direct impact on the institutional fabric of growing up, the ways young people live their daily lives, and their futures were made without considering or after giving only scant consideration to the positions and expertise of children, adolescents, and young adults. One need only think of such policy fields as the drive to expand and boost the quality of childcare and all-day care, the trend towards all-day schooling, developments relating to vocational traineeships and higher education policy, numerous social policy legisla-

The vast majority of policy decisions taken directly in relation to young people in recent years were made without considering their expertise or gave it only scant consideration.

tive initiatives (from the so-called education and participation package to the overhauling of labour market policy measures directed at the group of adults under twenty-five), the suspension of compulsory military service and decisions taken on digital technology and in the sphere of climate policy.

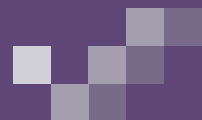
In many cases, the policy processes followed had not arisen in the context of a child and youth policy shaped together with children and young people or in an environment where the experiences and knowledge of children and young people would have been considered.

Even in those cases where young people were consulted, feedback was often not passed back to them to explain how their concerns had been processed and their expertise taken up and to what extent they had been considered – or not considered – in the subsequent (decision-making) processes. FYAB sees the creation of transparency and the integration of young people into knowledge generation and decision-preparation processes – also in relation to the limits of exerting influence – as enormously important aspects of enabling forms of participation that are offered in earnest and sustained over time.

When these current developments are taken together, it becomes apparent that the need to enable more political participation for young people has been recognized and continues to be recognized at least in some quarters. The participation of young people is seen as the ‘real case’ of realizing democracy in political education as well as in the context of policy development treated here. Political awareness that children and young people are entitled to political participation at every level (the EU, Federal, state and local levels) has grown. In this light, special justification is already required when young people are *not* consulted and are thus hindered from exercising their rights. A phrase often heard is that “Politics should be shaped not only *for* young people, but also *with* them.” Current work on this is, however, often still pro-

At least to some extent, the importance of strengthening young people’s participation in political processes has now been recognized.

Political awareness of the right of young people to political participation has deepened.



ject-based and the long-term stability of these projects varies considerably. But a start has been made and this momentum should be carried over into the policy advice process.

It is important that the knowledge and experiences of young people relating to the present and their expectations for the future are recognized and taken seriously. Democratic forms of participation in policy advice processes need to be developed so that perspectives for political action and forms of debating issues can be negotiated. This applies throughout all policy areas and not solely to departments with portfolios concerned with childhood, youth, and families at the federal, state and local levels.

The question of how the entire young generation (children, adolescents and young adults in very different life circumstances and situations) can be addressed and included in participation must also be investigated in greater depth. One key aspect of this will relate to the extent to which the different prerequisites for participation associated with different organizational forms of policy consultation are identified as barriers and compensated for as necessary. The objective must be not only to discern how young people see the social and political contexts of the present and the future as representatives of their generation; capturing the heterogeneity of the current experiences and knowledge of children, adolescents, and young adults will also be decisive. It is important, too, that the specific ways in which young people are growing up in our society and shaping their lives are perceived and acknowledged by politics. It must be considered that the social and political room for manoeuvre open to young people and the opportunities open to them to exert influence vary widely and that young people are affected to different degrees by social inequalities and by inclusion or exclusion. These factors also play a role in determining who can avail of opportunities for participation in policy advice processes and in what ways they can be included.

More investigation of how the entire young generation with its varied life circumstances and situations can be addressed and enabled to participate is needed.

Young people are affected differently and to different degrees by social inequality and the amount of room for manoeuvre open to them varies widely. This has effects for who can even participate in policy advice processes.

1.2 YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE RIGHTS TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION – AT LEVELS INCLUDING THE FEDERAL LEVEL

Young people are holders of fundamental political rights. As citizens in our society, they are entitled to political participation.

Young people are holders of fundamental political rights. As citizens in our society, they are entitled to political participation. The co-determination rights of children and young people to participate in decision-making are described and statutorily anchored in multiple contexts including international laws and treaties, national legislative provisions in the German Social Code (SGB), Book VIII and local government codes in the federal states. The guaranteed right to be heard and included in decision-making anchored in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN-CRC)* – which has already been addressed – is expressed with special clarity in Article 12 (1):

“States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”

In Article 44 (1) of the Convention, the signatory states undertake to report to the *UN Committee on the Rights of the Child* on the measures they have implemented to realize children's rights and on their progress. SGB VIII also provides for the participation of children, adolescents, and young adults who have already reached their majority “in all decisions on the public youth services that affect them” to a degree “corresponding to their maturity” (§ 8 (1)). This also encompasses matters pertaining to the delivery of child and youth policy by local authorities, the associated decisions about child and youth services to be provided locally, and participation in their planning. Consideration of the “growing ability and growing need of the child or young person to act independently and consciously of their responsibility” in the “shaping of services and fulfilment of tasks” is prescribed by § 9 (2). Child and youth work



must, as stated in § 11 (1), also build on the interests of young people and use them as a basis for enabling greater co-determination and a higher degree of participation in shaping developments.

According to § 12, children's and youth associations and their umbrella groups have the right to express and represent the concerns and interests of young people. Apart from these provisions in Book VIII, the remaining eleven books of the German Social Code contain no provisions regulating the participation of young people.

More specific provisions can, however, be found in state-level legislation. Some states (for example Schleswig-Holstein, Berlin, Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia) have incorporated clear recommendations for interpreting and realizing the participation rights of children and young people into their youth development legislation and their municipal codes. In Rhineland-Palatinate and Lower Saxony, for example, participation is mandated in relation to all measures affecting children and young people. The novel passage mandating participation in the Schleswig-Holstein municipal code was, however, unique in Germany until Lower Saxony also incorporated a similar passage into its local government code:

“(1) The municipality must involve children and young people in plans and projects that have a bearing on their interests in an appropriate way. The municipality must develop suitable processes to achieve this over and above the processes for the participation of residents pursuant to §§ 16 a to 16 f.

(2) In implementing plans and projects with a bearing on the interests of children and young people, the municipality must set forth how their interests have been considered and their participation in accordance with Subsection 1 has been secured.” (§ 47 (1), (2), Schleswig-Holstein Municipal Code)

Local authorities are obliged not only to develop suitable procedures for participation but also to demonstrate how the interests of children and young people have already been considered during planning processes. The specific shaping of developments within these statutory frameworks in the local government context generally involves putting appropriate forms of participation in place (such as children and youth parliaments, participation projects, or the appointment of children's commissioners). Structures may also be anchored within specific facilities (co-determination structures in a youth centre, for example). Young people's participation has thus already been anchored at multiple levels (and in some cases also with binding force) in state-level legislation in some states. Apart from the differences between states, differences between children, adolescents, and young adults in terms of the rights they have in our society also need to be borne in mind. Voting age is differentiated and regulated differently from one state to the next. The forms of participation deployed at the local authority, state, and federal levels, and in organizations, continue to be highly diverse. As such, young people as a group are codified in legally differentiated ways and their knowledge and expertise is acknowledged to different degrees. In contrast to the situation in some states and local authority districts, the issue of how the expertise and interests of young people can be systematically and lastingly contributed to and incorporated into the policy advice process in various policy fields has barely been dealt with at the federal level up to now.

How young people can bring their expertise and interests into policy advice in a sustained and systematic fashion has barely been defined for the federal level.



2 WHAT DOES POLICY ADVICE IN A DEMOCRACY MEAN?

Diverse stakeholders from civil society, from clubs and associations, from business and from research are included in policy consultation processes (Weingart/Lentsch 2008, Siefken 2010). A fundamental distinction must be made between the provision of policy advice as a commercial service or mandate and policy advice consultation as a civil society participation process for generating knowledge and preparing policy decisions. The focus below is on policy advice consultation as a civil society participation process.

By systematizing and consolidating interests, concerns, insights, grievances from affected communities, information, etc. that have emerged in social, specialist, economic and scientific societal contexts, the different forms of policy advice as a civil society participation process produce knowledge that in turn represents a systematic foundation for political decision-making. This process, seen as a whole, can be described as knowledge generation via policy advice consultation. Highly diverse forms of knowledge are already included in knowledge generation processes today – for instance when the expertise of self-advocacy organizations, people with disabilities or regional representatives is listened to. Here, too, it becomes clear that the stakeholders in policy advice processes, with their different forms of knowledge, also possess influence to see their expertise implemented to very different degrees.⁴

It is a hallmark of policy advice in a democracy that different stakeholders from civil society, clubs and associations, business, and research have a role to play in policy consultation processes.

4 On the diverse forms of knowledge that flow into policy advice and the complex forms taken by consultation processes, see Siefken 2010, pp. 129.

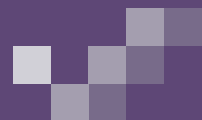
It must be considered that the selection of participants in policy advice processes is already a political process.

Many forms of policy consultation are so complex and demanding that they exclude people who lack access to specific knowledge or relevant networks.

Knowledge generation processes are of fundamental political significance today, as dynamic knowledge societies like the Federal Republic of Germany need to sort and systematize interests, concerns, insights, grievances and information at different levels and draw on as broad a base of expertise as possible to create a balanced foundation for sustainable policy decisions. It should be considered that the selection of stakeholders involved in policy advice, for example the questions of who participates, with what voice, and in what form, is already a political process that allocates access to decision-makers and distributes political power. Over and above this, many forms of participation involve such complex and demanding requirements that they tacitly exclude people unable to meet such preconditions (education, relevant institutional knowledge, language codes, effective relationships networks, etc.) from the relevant processes.

2.1 STAKEHOLDERS IN POLICY ADVICE PROCESSES

Policy consultation processes are accordingly focused on systematizing and structuring knowledge, making it available, and engaging in dialogue about it with relevant political bodies. The objective is to prepare the way for decision-making on policy rather than for actual political decisions made, for instance, in the legislative chamber. Politics in dynamic knowledge societies is compelled – as has been pointed out – to enter into these processes to secure its knowledge of social, economic, cultural, and environmental contexts, incorporate new developments and reflect on community grievances and consequences of previous decisions.



It is striking that definitions of the concept of “policy advice”⁵ at the federal level in Germany foreground certain stakeholder groups: policy advice from the research community, economic and business interests, and representatives of various stakeholders from society and politics (clubs, associations, local government, state-level bodies) tends to be emphasized because of the country’s market economy, its federal political structures and its welfare state on the corporatist model.

“Policy advice in the widest sense of the concept involves, above all, contributing ‘expertise’ to the political process. ‘Experts’ supplying (research-based) information can be found at very different levels of our society with its large-scale organizational structures: in parliament, administrative structures, interest groups and especially in research. In a wide sense, the provision of research-based advice to politics can encompass advice provided by people who understand how to apply scholarly methods and approaches. In a narrower sense, it generally encompasses various forms of consulting that are typically institutionally embedded and provided by professional researchers who advise political entities on the basis of (new) insights from research.” (Lompe 2007, p. 25)

FYAB, for example, is organized as an advisory board composed of actors from research but also and especially from organizations (welfare associations, youth associations, political representatives from the state and local authority levels, specialist units, etc.).

It is clear from this example that policy advice does not rely on research-based knowledge alone but also draws on knowledge and expertise from the political, social and economic structures underlying our society and from the civil society community.

5 A fundamental distinction can be made between two dimensions of policy advice, the policy advice given (the content dimension) and the consulting process (process dimension) during which advice on policy content or on processes in policy or politics is provided (Siefken 2010, p. 131).

2.2 VOICES FROM CIVIL SOCIETY IN POLICY ADVICE

On the whole, policy consulting processes up to now have barely given consideration to the fact that forms of knowledge and positions have developed in civil society that are relevant for shaping social coexistence and the fabric of the state just as knowledge from associations and clubs and from research is relevant. Research and research funding already recognizes this situation – as we can discern from the use of terms like “citizen science” (Finke 2014) and the development of new forms of participatory research in the context of the democratization of research. It is important that greater recognition is given to knowledge accumulated by citizens in contexts beyond established organizational forms of knowledge production and the representation of interests. Such knowledge also includes experiences and knowledge accumulated in various contexts of “affectedness” that have often – for example because of different life situations, regional disparities or experiences of violence or exclusion – not received adequate consideration.

It is important that people’s “voices” and their expressions of and reflections on their concerns, experiences and information are heard in various forms of negotiation. Including such perspectives in the process of knowledge generation should be seen as an extension to other approaches to policy advice processes rather than as a replacement for them. Recognizing these voices from civil society in policy consultation amplifies their potency for knowledge generation processes and political decision-making.

2.3 YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE POLICY ADVICE PROCESS

As has already been outlined, policy advice processes mainly tend to include actors from research and the economy, clubs and associations, local government and the federal states, etc. Although efforts to consider the perspectives of young people in policy advice processes are discernible, it is also evident that representatives of

Greater recognition needs to be given to knowledge accumulated by citizens outside established organizational forms of knowledge production and the representation of interests.



the young generation and children, adolescents, and young adults themselves are only involved in consultation processes to a limited extent and often not at all. Expectations that this level of youth participation will be improved are now, however, strikingly evident. At the same time, only a handful of procedures and models for policy advice exist that demonstrate how this can be achieved in a lasting fashion and give young people a powerful voice. Existing participation formats are currently only rarely applied in policy advice processes and developed further for use in the policy advice context. The content and the conventional formats used in policy consultation are, moreover, focused strongly on adults. The specification of what constitutes expertise is, furthermore, also conceived of in an adult-centred fashion.

It follows that children, adolescents and young adults are a group currently only partially represented with its own “voice” in the policy advice process both because of how young people have been represented thus far and because of the adult-centered ways in which expertise has been defined. Young people have their own distinctive experiences, information, concerns, grievances over issues affecting them and forms of civil society engagement, especially in relation to the institutional fabric of growing up, but also as citizens in our society. They have their own expertise in systematizing and sorting information, concerns, and experiences. Formats must therefore be developed that enable young people to be perceived and recognized as civil society actors, included directly in policy consultation processes, and systematically and lastingly involved – especially at the federal level – in the generation of knowledge for policy.

It is important that existing participation formats are developed further and made fruitful for policy advice processes.

Formats that perceive and acknowledge young people as civil society stakeholders in the policy advice process and involve them in consultation processes need to be developed.

3 WHAT DOES THE PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN POLICY ADVICE MEAN?

The participation of children, adolescents and young adults in the policy advice process differs from their role in established participation formats that often relate to political decisions being directly taken at local government level and to highly specific concerns such as shaping child and youth services or their own organizational structures in, for instance, youth associations. At the same time, taking action to involve young people more comprehensively in the policy advice process has now become necessary and, indeed, imperative. Policy consultation processes directly pertaining to childhood and youth in the relevant departments are already navigating this challenge, albeit as yet without participation being structurally anchored. This contrasts with the situation in other departments, ministries and bodies involved in shaping federal policy, where the pressing need for action has barely been registered up to now.

3.1 EXAMPLES FOR CHILD AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EXISTING FEDERAL POLICY ADVICE PROCESSES

The *Children and Youth Reports* issued by the federal government represent one policy advice format with a direct bearing on childhood and youth. The federal government is obliged by SGB VIII § 84 to make a “report on the situation of young people and the endeavours and achievements of child and youth services” to both houses of the German Parliament, the *Bundestag* and the *Bundesrat*, in every legislative period. The *15th Children and Youth Report* was the first report in which young people expressed themselves, and a brochure aimed at young people provided a compact and readily comprehensible overview of the report’s core content. In the context of preparing the *16th Children and Youth Report*, workshops were also organized to facilitate consideration of young people’s perspectives.



A look at the 15th *Children and Youth Report* nevertheless reveals that the forms of participation deployed are anchored in infrastructure only to a very limited extent and are, in fact, barely discernible from the survey and interview formats deployed in areas like social sciences youth research. The establishment of durable participation structures and in-depth engagement with the issue of whether and how children, adolescents and young adults should participate in the *Children and Youth Report* process are still largely outstanding.

The prevailing situation is similar for FYAB, our panel advising the federal government as per its role set out in SGB VIII § 83. According to the administrative provision defining the mandate of FYAB, young people should be “involved in consultations in a suitable way”. Up to now, this has been realized by means of interviews and conversations with young people on specific individual topics. In addition, and depending on the topic, exchanges with youth organizations also take place. But here, too, the discussion of how young people’s participation can be sustained lastingly over time – and with what resources – has only just begun and an answer to the question of what is specifically politically desired remains to be found.

The Children’s Commission in the German *Bundestag* (*Kommission zur Wahrnehmung der Belange der Kinder*/Commission for safeguarding the interests of children) is a further case in point. This subcommittee of the Committee for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth is tasked with representing the interests of children and young people in the German parliament. Every parliamentary grouping appoints one delegate to the Commission. The website of the German *Bundestag* contains a note inviting participation from children and young people: “The Children’s Commission also needs feedback from children and young people

Up to now, in-depth discussion of whether and how young people can be lastingly involved in child and youth policy reporting has been lacking.

who wish to advocate for their interests and actively shape their environment. Children and young people may tell the Children's Commission about problems they see in specific areas from their perspective at any time."⁶ Putting infrastructure for this feedback process in place and ensuring its sustained continuity needs to be advanced further.

The inclusion of young people in policy advice processes is currently envisaged, to give one example, in the context of work on the federal government's Youth Strategy. Following the federal government's "Independent Youth Policy" and the BMFSFJ Youth Strategy 2015–2018, the coalition agreement for the nineteenth legislative period also envisages pursuit of a coordinated Youth Strategy by the federal government. An "Inter-Ministerial Working Group Youth" (*Interministerielle Arbeitsgruppe Jugend/IIMA*) has been established. This working group coordinates the content of the Youth Strategy and cooperation between different ministries and departments. Since February 2019, it has been counselled by an advisory council with representatives from professional and youth associations, the federal states, and umbrella organizations from the local government level. Children, adolescents, and young adults are participating in the Youth Policy Days and in topic-specific youth audits on individual action areas within the Youth Strategy in the context of work on the current Youth Strategy.

Young people are also included – albeit patchily – in the policy development work of other ministries. The Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection (BMJV) organizes an annual "Web-Days" project that includes a youth conference and is dedicated to the topic of young people shaping the digital living environment of the future. The Federal Ministry for the Environment conducts youth workshops and participation-oriented studies on environmental education and young people's visions for the future.

6 <https://www.bundestag.de/aussschuesse/a13/kik/basisinformationen-557888>



The examples show that involving young people in policy consultation processes is clearly desired. But participation by young people up to now has largely been in the policy context of youth and childhood.

In the area of education policy, one of the main policy fields clearly shaping the institutional fabric of young people's lives in essential ways, no examples for the participation of children and young people in the policy advice process are evident. The same is true for interior policy – to name but these two areas. A distinction must be made between forms of participation in which young people are 'only' heard (as in political hearings) and participation formats embedded in infrastructure that ensures that the positions and voices of young people are included in policy advice in a sustained and influential fashion.

Various studies have, moreover, arrived at results indicating that children and young people with migration backgrounds and/or socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and young people with disabilities are generally significantly under-represented in established forms of participation and that political participation continues to be structured by gender (Simonson/Vogel/Tesch-Römer 2014; Gille 2018). With that, a challenge for including young people in policy advice processes comes into view: the question presents itself as to whether existing formats are suitable for enabling broad participation and representing disparate background conditions, needs and constellations of interests. New formats ought to be developed together with young people that have been designed not only around established structures but also with the life situations, the typical communication forms of young people and new developments such as the digital transformation in mind.⁷ This can mean extending existing panels and formats or developing new forms.

Young people with a migration background, with disabilities and/or from socio-economically deprived households are significantly under-represented in established participation formats.

Together with young people, formats need to be developed that focus on young people's life situations, forms of communication typically used by young people and new developments.

7 Research has shown, however, that unequal participation is reproduced in digital formats (see, for example, DIVSI 2015; DJI/TU Dortmund Research Consortium 2011).

EXAMPLES OF PARTICIPATION BY YOUNG PEOPLE IN POLICY ADVICE PROCESSES

Procedures, tools and infrastructure must be developed and put in place if participation by young people in the various ministries, departments and bodies at the federal level is to be realized in a sustained fashion. Two examples from the international context are introduced below with this in mind.^a It is clear from the examples that the participation of young people in policy advice processes cannot proceed on the basis of scattered one-off projects but requires infrastructural anchoring and willingness on the part of adults to reflect on their own attitude towards the young generation. At the same time, it also becomes obvious that those who wish to be advised by young people are well advised to seek them out in the spaces where they communicate and develop their positions.

“THE CHANGE FACTORY”

The core idea behind this participatory approach from Norway is to make the perspectives of young people on the welfare state and its support systems visible.^b This approach is intended to support the goal of giving greater consideration to the perspectives of people affected by organizations in the welfare system (such as early childhood daycare centres, schools, residential care settings, etc.). “The Change Factory” lets young people have their say and recognizes their knowledge about the organization forms of the welfare state. At the same time, missing options and opportunities for acquiring this knowledge are criticized. It is intended that young people should be encouraged to network and develop ideas for change and that paths should be opened up for direct communication between affected system users and people who are responsible for delivering services or their representatives.

The young people are seen as “Pro’s” who pool and expand their knowledge to make their voices audible to influential adults (Nordic Council of Ministers 2016, pp. 55). They are encouraged to act as “lobbyists” presenting suggestions for improvements and driving change forward. “The Change Factory” is based on the principle that young people affected by services – the people with experiences and information from specific living situations who are familiar with the relevant institutions and problem areas – can compile knowledge that is important for finding solutions and opportunities for development. To chisel out these specific forms of knowledge, methods (“change methodology”) are developed on the basis of participatory learning and acting. With support from the “Change Factory Team”, young people work on defining required actions and opportunities for change that can in turn be taken up, introduced into relevant discussions, and delivered by politics. The results are presented to political decision-makers (ministers and public services managers) in short audio-visual and print contributions.

EXAMPLES OF PARTICIPATION BY YOUNG PEOPLE IN POLICY ADVICE PROCESSES

“YOUTH-LED PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH” (YPAR)

This participation strategy based on the self-determination and empowerment of young people provides children and young people with opportunities and spaces to identify central problems in their life situations and explore them in greater depth with suitable investigation methods, develop solutions and formulate recommendations for those who are (politically) responsible. The strategy is oriented towards the participatory research approach^c that has also increasingly been adopted in Germany again following criticism of the selective nature of the consideration of young people in participatory opportunities (Wöhler/Arztmann/Wintersteller/Schneider 2017 on participatory research in the school context). In the Anglo-American context, this approach was initially mainly deployed in after-school programmes in marginalized districts. The intention is to address young people in precarious life situations and to include them in political (decision-making) processes. The approach is now being used more comprehensively. A major feature of YPAR is that young people are involved in the consultations leading to decision-making processes and that the power imbalances between young people and adults are subjected to systematic reflection and worked on. This requires the adults involved to adopt a power-sensitive stance and reflect on their roles. Young people in YPAR programmes act in a self-determined way, with the support they need and in liaison with the teams of adults involved, on issues ranging from the initial formulation of a question and identification of topics to the exchanges with all major stakeholders to the presentation of results (in a local government setting, for example). Research shows that YPAR programmes can be anchored in such a way that the young people involved have been able to participate in organizational and political decisions in a sustained fashion (Ozler/Wright 2012).

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- a Presenting two approaches from outside Germany is not intended to imply that successful participation formats are not found within Germany. The examples serve to open up a broader perspective and discuss procedures and tools that could be interesting for the continued advancement of developments here in Germany.
 - b For more on the “Change Factory”, see <https://www.forandringsfabrikken.no/article/about-us-english>.
 - c The aim of participatory research is to maximize participation of the people whose life situations are under investigation throughout the entire research process. Research is conducted not on, but with people to generate knowledge that can play a role in improving their life circumstances. The research process is shaped as a partnership between all participants (Bergold/Thomas 2012).

4 STRENGTHENING YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN THE POLICY ADVICE PROCESS: WHAT MUST BE DONE?

For over a decade now, the need for a coherent, cross-departmental child and youth policy at the federal level has been under discussion – and such a policy must also encompass policy on participation (FYAB 2009). Work on such a “youth policy cast from a single mould” (Hornstein 2004) that is more than a simple cross-cutting policy has been developed and advanced, especially since 2015, by BMFSFJ in contexts including “Independent Youth Policy.” The “Youth Check” (*Jugend-Check*) regulatory impact assessment tool and the development of a concerted Youth Strategy currently being pursued by BMFSFJ represent further developments in this direction.

Expectations that young people be included to a greater extent in policy advice processes have also grown in this context.⁸ The recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and with them the fundamental requirements for delivering the right of children to be heard must also be taken up in this regard:

“The views expressed by children may add relevant perspectives and experience and should be considered in decision-making, policymaking and preparation of laws and/or measures as well as their evaluation.” (CRC 2009, p. 5)

Precisely the forms of participation that have already been drawn on for policy advice processes – for example in liaison with youth associations, youth councils and other bodies representing young people – have shown how significant the participation of young people is and demonstrated, at the same time, that securing broad participation requires comprehensive infrastructure to be put in

8 Calls to lower the voting age have also become ever louder and more forceful. FYAB already called for this as early as 2009 and again in 2017 (FYAB 2009, 2017).



place. Apart from such advances, the youth associations and youth councils are also not otherwise embedded in an infrastructural context in which it is simply understood that the participation of young people is self-evident. They are, rather, compelled to assert themselves time and again in policy advice processes dominated by subject experts and association representatives.

All in all, the prospect of demographic developments leading to a lack of representation of the “few” – and thus of the younger generation – is one that must be guarded against. While initial approaches towards counteracting this trend have emerged (in the context of the Youth Strategy, for example), the consistent, sustained, and effective inclusion of the young generation in policy advice processes in all portfolios, ministries, and bodies at federal level has yet to be realized.

Models of participation such as those practised and developed further in the context of the *Children and Youth Report* still have a status that has not been comprehensively secured at the political or infrastructural levels. For both project-based and statutorily mandated forms of participation, the question of how young people can be included and how the delivery of or engagement with their demands can be systematically recorded depends to a large degree on the political situation, the political decision-makers and the resources provided by politics for these purposes. It is thus necessary to systematically track engagement with and the delivery of demands. With this in mind, FYAB has formulated the following recommendations:

1. A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF PARTICIPATION AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL: To begin with, a systematic review encompassing every ministry, portfolio and body at federal level is needed to uncover where and in what contexts young people and the young gener-

The prospect of demographic trends leading to a lack of representation of the “few” – and thus of the younger generation – is one that must be guarded against.

ation as a whole are already involved in policy advice processes. How does participation take place and why?⁹

2. THE QUESTION OF REPRESENTATION: Young people are not a homogeneous group. Their interests, experiences and positions are just as diverse as in comparable groups of adults. Especially in light of calls for more inclusion, a conceptual plan must also be developed to determine the groups with their specific experiences to be addressed and how this should be approached. Young people growing up in precarious life situations, young people with non-academic backgrounds, young women and girls and young people with disabilities are strongly under-represented in the most used participation formats. Special attention must therefore be given to the question of access to policy advice processes. Questions of representativeness and legitimacy – the question, in other words, of which young people can speak on behalf of which others on which specific issues – must be disentangled for all participation formats involving young people. This should be an express requirement in policy advice processes. Effective structural inclusion of young people will only be achieved when answers are found that consider both open formats and the organized representation of young people without pitting these approaches against one another.

3. AGE-APPROPRIATE FORMATS: Distinctions must be made between children, adolescents, and young adults. This matters because the participation of young people should not be reduced to the participation only of adolescents and young adults; children, too, also have a right to political participation. Modes of providing age-appropriate information, access and tools must consequently be developed for all age groups and the self-organization of young people of all ages should be fostered.

9 A first step towards this task has already been undertaken by the inter-ministerial committee "IMA Jugend" in the context of the Youth Strategy (see 3.1). From the perspective of FYAB, the reasons why young people are (not) included and the specific groups affected in each case must also be analysed.



4. LASTING INFRASTRUCTURE AND QUALITY STANDARDS:

Lasting infrastructure and quality standards¹⁰ for enabling the participation of young people in policy advice processes (including suitable tools, procedures, platforms, forms of dialogue, and resources) need to be developed to effectively include broad groups of young people in policy advice processes.

This can mean extending existing panels and participation formats or creating custom forms of participation in ministries, departments, or bodies. The EU Youth Dialogue should also be borne in mind in this context.

5. SYSTEMATIC MONITORING: The involvement of young people in policy advice processes should be tracked by putting systematic monitoring and regular reporting obligations in place. The methodological delivery and the progression of participatory processes should be foregrounded: How are participation plans delivered? Which groups of young people are included or not included? Are the concerns, interests and suggestions of the young people given consideration in the participation process? Have the young people involved been given information or feedback on this? Systematic monitoring in the form of a reporting regime should scrutinize the long-term sustainability and the effectiveness of the participation process.

6. STRENGTHENING OF THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSION: In the Children's Commission in the *Bundestag* (*Kommission zur Wahrnehmung der Belange der Kinder/Commission for safeguarding the interests of children*), proposals should be made that the Commission work to see Ombud-like processes and institutions established to support children, adolescents, and young adults whenever they are unable to avail of their participation rights. Such

10 This process can build on the outcome document created in the context of the National action plan for a child-friendly Germany (Für ein kindergerechtes Deutschland) (BMFSFJ 2015).

Ombud-like procedures and institutions should be part of the infrastructure for the participation of young people in policy advice processes. In addition, the participation of young people should also be structurally anchored in the work of the Children's Commission in the German *Bundestag*.

7. CONTINUOUS FURTHER DEVELOPMENT: Recent developments – in relation to issues such as the digital transformation, environmental protection, regional disparities, and all-day care – have barely been taken up as content for policy advice participation processes or factors that must be considered in shaping their form. Comprehensive action on this is now required. Decision-makers are also challenged to seek out new spaces – including digital spaces – where young people exchange views and form and communicate their political opinions. Consideration should be given to the importance of shaping and/or moderating these spaces in ways that are sensitive to inequality.

Establishing sustainable infrastructure for the participation of young people in policy advice processes would represent a further step towards developing child and youth policy shaped not only for, but also with young people.

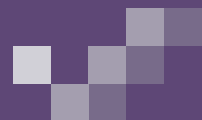
All in all, developments in childhood and youth policy in recent years can now be built on at the federal level. The establishment of lasting infrastructure for the participation of young people in policy advice processes would represent a further step towards developing a child and youth policy shaped not only for but also with children, adolescents and young adults that could be regarded, in light of demographic developments, as a political signal to the young generation. This development should also be woven into the EU Youth Strategy. As Germany will, among other responsibilities, be tasked with shaping the EU Youth Dialogue when it holds the Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2020, an opportunity presents itself here.



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