



**Summit of
the Future**

Our Common Agenda

NATIONAL YOUTH CONSULTATION AHEAD OF THE SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE

YOUTH STATEMENT

**16 AUGUST 2024
COLOMBO, SRI LANKA**



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YOUTH STATEMENT

We, the youth of Sri Lanka in all our diversity and as Agents of Positive Change, reaffirm our commitment in championing the Pact of the Future. As we approach this pivotal moment, we call on all stakeholders to commit to advancing the following priorities, creating a supportive environment where young people can thrive and catalyse meaningful change.

The dual economic and governance crises have intensified economic and social conditions in Sri Lanka, exposing young people like us and other marginalised groups to multiple intersecting vulnerabilities that hinder progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

CURRENT CHALLENGES

As young people of Sri Lanka, we would like to emphasise several key challenges faced by young people, which, if left unaddressed, will persist as obstacles for future generations.

- Due to limited opportunities, regional disparities, lack of support for young entrepreneurs, skills mismatch, and gender differences, young people are facing several challenges in accessing decent jobs, with gender minorities facing additional barriers of lower pay and harsher conditions hindering the economic empowerment of young people.
- Significant barriers in accessing quality education due to the mismatch of the curriculum with existing labour market demands, lack of growth in digital tools and materials, the notable digital divide, and the gap in mentoring for 21st-century skills, including digital literacy and innovation, all lead to disparities in the knowledge and skills of youth. Regional disparities and gender disparities further exacerbate the problem, with young women and gender minorities lacking equal opportunities in decision-making platforms related to education and gender equality.
- Young people also face challenges when accessing rights-based healthcare. The shortage of skilled medical professionals to provide youth-friendly health services, exacerbated by recent economic migrations, severely impacts the availability of care, especially for marginalised youth and those living with disabilities. The cultural and social stigmas surrounding sexual and reproductive health lead to issues such as unplanned pregnancies, teenage pregnancies, HIV/AIDS, STIs and, mental health concerns which remain persistent barriers for young people.

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- The stigmatization of mental health has led to high suicide rates and widespread reluctance among youth to seek mental health services. Lack of awareness on support mechanisms and restricted access has resulted in adverse mental health impact on young people, including the increased use of alcohol or tobacco.
- In terms of political participation and civic engagement, young people face several challenges due to generational divides, stigmatisation, and mostly due to low political literacy. Often exploited within harmful political cultures, youth feel discouraged from engaging in meaningful ways.
- The lack of opportunities for meaningful engagement in nation-building and sustainable development, combined with generational power imbalances, creates an unjust environment for youth leadership. Unmet expectations and the degradation of ethical values further hinder youth participation, which is often tokenistic and offers limited real influence on decision-making.
- The climate crisis significantly impacts young people overall, with several challenges exacerbating their pre-existing vulnerabilities. Additionally, there is limited accessibility and inclusivity for persons with disabilities in climate-related initiatives and broader societal participation.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations on safeguarding the interests of young people and the ability to enjoy our rights fully and freely will be translated to the responsibilities mentioned in the Pact for the Future and the Declaration on Future Generations. Therefore, we recommend the following transformative actions that are of critical importance to the development of youth.

- Creation of youth-centered programs focused on entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and career guidance, to encourage the participation of youth in policy-making processes, to ensure their voices influence decisions affecting their economic future.
- Stronger policies against workplace sexual harassment, and discriminatory laws, that address pay gaps, in both the public and private sector, by developing comprehensive, zero-tolerance and inclusive policies and establishing independent bodies to handle complaints confidentially. In addition, a safe work environment, especially for young women and gender minorities, encourages more young people to engage in employment.
- To support gender minorities in the workplace, we recommend introducing inclusive job recruitment and application policies, providing stigma-reducing inclusion training, and mandating accommodations such as medical leave.



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- The education system to shift towards a learner-centric model with improved digital infrastructure to enhance access to education across urban and rural areas.
- Education reforms to align with the current needs of young people and the education system, including technical and vocational education to provide young people with the skills required in the 21st century.
- To promote digital literacy, resources should be allocated to address the digital divide and ensure inclusive digital infrastructure along with capacity-building workshops for educators, leveraging social platforms to amplify educational innovation, and ensuring access to technology for all students, especially those from marginalised communities.
- Implement youth-centered, gender-responsive, non-discriminatory, and accessible mental health services, equipped with professionals providing youth-friendly health services to address mental health issues and reproductive health issues, along with interconnected areas such as substance use.
- The implementation of age-appropriate health education, including Comprehensive Sexuality Education, from primary school is crucial in ensuring that this information is accessible both in and out of school.
- We also advocate for the decriminalisation of laws against diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, as well as safe abortion, in line with recommendations from judicial and international human rights bodies.
- Enhance climate education and awareness by establishing youth-led councils and committees within government and civil society organizations, ensuring direct involvement in climate action planning and implementation.
- Developing climate-resilient and sustainable agricultural practices, including subsidies for innovative farming solutions, and the integration of climate-smart agriculture into policy and promotion of sustainable consumption practices at the local level can bolster resilience.
- For inclusivity, we request collaboration with expert institutions and leadership programs for PWDs will ensure their meaningful participation in climate action.
- Establishment of platforms for capacity building in civic and political empowerment and create inclusive digital platforms to enable meaningful community engagement.
- The introduction of a youth quota for political representation at all decision-making levels and the integration of political literacy and civic engagement into the education curriculum are also crucial.

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- Strengthen value-based and ethical leadership practices, establishing a national institute to protect youth political candidates' rights and encourage young people's effective political participation.
- Developing a National Action Plan for Youth, Peace & Security Agenda, with a national commitment and multi-stakeholder collaborative process for meaningful youth participation for sustainable peace and security under UNSCR 2250.
- Further strengthening and implantation of the National Action Plan for Women, Peace & Security, Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Policy, Women Empowerment Act, and the National Action Plan to Combat Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women and Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities and other

relevant conventions and treaties is of importance in ensuring inclusivity and gender equality across all areas of concern.

With that, we reaffirm that the youth of Sri Lanka stand united in their commitment to driving positive change and ensuring a brighter future for all.

Our comprehensive recommendations reflect our determination to address the pressing issues affecting health, gender equality, climate resilience, education, and political participation. We request the Government of Sri Lanka and all stakeholders to listen to our voices and act decisively and proactively on these recommendations.

By fostering an environment where young people are empowered, supported, and given meaningful opportunities, we can overcome the challenges we face and build a more equitable, resilient, and innovative society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Sri Lanka Youth Statement was drafted by 72 young people representing 09 provinces and was reviewed by UN agencies in Sri Lanka and the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs.

Organisations involved: Youth Corps, National Youth Services Council, Small Enterprises Development Division (SEDD), Family Planning Association - Youth Committee, SLYCAN Trust - Youth arm, Dialog IdeaMart, Youth Advocacy Network Sri Lanka, Sarvodaya, Global Citizenship Education Youth Network, Safe Circles, CCN Climate Catalyst Network Organization, Heart to Heart Lanka Organization, Alcohol and Drug Information Centre, Diversity and Solidarity Trust, Ability for Action, Youth Pride, Social Roots, AKASA, Lanka Social ventures, Youth Vision, other youth clubs, associations and University Students.

