

Unheard Voices: The Issue of Youth Representation in the Modern World

With the world rapidly advancing at speeds never seen before and the threats of global warming and social inequality becoming more and more inevitable, the lack of youth representation in governance bodies is an imminent threat to modern society and democracies all over the world. In Lithuanian media, at events, political figures love to use the slogan “Youth is not the future but rather the present” but does it truly represent the view of the general public and heads of government? If it does, why is youth underrepresented in regional, national, and even European levels of governance? With those questions in mind, the search for answers leads to navigating the seas of challenges that youth face every day on every continent of the planet. So, what obstacles do young people face in the realm of making their voices heard?

The first issue faced by youth is the legal challenges when trying to represent the voices of the young generation in politics. In most countries worldwide even today young people’s right to vote and access critical simple-to-understand information about democratic and political processes are constrained. More than a hundred years ago women fought for their right to vote and now it’s time for youth to come together and join the Vote16 movement which promotes the ability of individuals from 16 years old to participate in electing officials into office at the regional and even national level. The lack of voting rights for teens aged 16 and 17 is one of the major reasons why politicians don’t introduce policies that would benefit young people, meaning such an important group of citizens is underrepresented. Such lack of representation causes young people’s voices to go unheard even though they are the generation that will have to live with the consequences of poor natural resource management and social inequality caused by short-sighted policies. So, the issue of legal constraints on

voting caused by partiality is one of the main issues when it comes to youth representation.

The second issue young people face is the critical outlook on youth representing themselves in society as a whole. When youth non-governmental organizations try to fight for the rights of young individuals and amplify the voice of an entire generation, most of the general public and even politicians turn a blind eye causing underrepresentation and ultimately decisions adversely affecting this social group. What is more, if a young person runs for office in any level of government, they are often met with dismissal or even criticism from older generations. Such a biased view of young people in power doesn't empower young people, rather it makes them even less represented in the development and adoption of policies that ultimately affect the lives of youth. So, another issue faced by young individuals is prejudice against them in a society that dismisses their need to be heard.

To conclude, it's important to understand that underlying issues such as legal barriers and predisposition against youth are the two main causes of why young people are represented so poorly in societies that value equality so much. In addition, such challenges discourage youth from fighting for change and make the democracies of the free world weaker and less fair.

Tadas Ambrozaitis, IB 2, Siauliai Didzdvaris Gymnasium, Lithuania