

**POLICY BRIEF:
PROMOTING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN SCIENCE-POLICY INTERFACES**

INTRODUCTION

Science-policy interfaces are social processes that encompass relations between scientists and other actors in the policy process, enabling the exchange, co-evolution, and collaborative construction of knowledge to enhance decision-making.¹ In this context, youth are critical stakeholders and partners who offer distinct knowledge, competencies and lived experiences to strengthen environmental science and policy. Young people’s unique dispositions, perceptions, ingenuity, and creativity bring innovations, new energy, and perspectives that, when combined with existing knowledge and tools, make significant and transformative contributions toward addressing complex global challenges.² Harnessing youth voices as a force for change can lead to a more holistic understanding of science-policy issues, thereby increasing the policy and societal relevance of science-policy interfaces.³

The ongoing negotiations on the Science-Policy Panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution present a unique opportunity to redesign the narrative around youth engagement. The new panel has the potential to overcome the limitations of existing science-policy interfaces by embedding meaningful youth engagement and fostering intergenerational partnerships by design.

KEY MESSAGES

1. Youth, who comprise nearly half of the global population, remain significantly underrepresented in the science-policy interface. Young people possess a diverse range of knowledge, skills, and lived experiences that can greatly benefit policy design, implementation, and evaluation. Establishing a Youth Experts Advisory Group can make the new panel more inclusive, responsive, and impactful, bridging the gap between the scientific community and the lived realities of young people.⁴
2. The new panel should learn from the best practices of youth engagement adopted by existing interfaces while being innovative in its approach to addressing the persistent barriers, including limited knowledge, awareness, accessibility, inclusivity and participation.
3. The stakeholder engagement strategy for the new panel should be developed through a public consultation process that actively engages young people. By involving youth as equal partners in designing the engagement strategy, the panel can better understand and address their specific needs and expertise while also fostering trust, ownership, and commitment among young people as key stakeholders.

BEST PRACTICES

This policy brief identifies and highlights best practices of youth engagement from existing science-policy interfaces⁵ that the Children and Youth Major Group to UNEP would like to see from the new panel. The combination of these practices can ensure that the panel leverages the unique knowledge, skills, and lived experiences that youth bring to the table, ultimately strengthening the credibility, relevance, and impact of its global assessments.

¹ https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/38115/UNEP%4050_report_ENGLISH_FINAL.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

² https://iucncongress2020.org/sites/www.iucncongress2020.org/files/page/files/intergens_report_review_youth_engagement_and_intergenerational_partnership_across_iucn_-_06042021.pdf

³ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/26395916.2022.2085807>

⁴ [Youth Priorities_OEWG3](#)

⁵ The International Resource Panel (IRP) does not have an established youth engagement strategy, which explains why it is not included in this policy brief.



CASE 1: INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE (IPCC)

1. *Broadened access through existing networks:* Organisations with observer status at WMO, UNEP, and UNFCCC are automatically considered IPCC observers upon request, without the need to submit additional documentation. This simplifies the process for youth organisations to participate in IPCC activities.
2. *Scholarship Programme for Early-Career Researchers:* The Programme supports early-career scientists from developing countries in pursuing doctoral studies on climate adaptation and mitigation. This fosters their academic and professional growth while empowering them to contribute to global efforts to address climate change.
3. *Chapter Scientists:* Early-career research scientists provide technical and logistical support to author teams with technical aspects of chapter development, with opportunities to advance to roles as Contributing and Lead Authors in subsequent assessments. This provides opportunities for early-career scientists to gain state-of-the-art knowledge in the field, unique insights into the IPCC assessment process and valuable networks that could assist in future career development.

CASE 2: INTERGOVERNMENTAL SCIENCE-POLICY PLATFORM ON BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES (IPBES)

1. *Recognition of self-organised networks of stakeholders:* IPBES recognises self-organised networks of stakeholders, including youth groups, which can co-lead preparations for the IPBES Stakeholder Day(s). This inclusion ensures that youth voices are integral to the discussions, elevating their role as key stakeholders in biodiversity and ecosystem conservation efforts.

2. *Youth Workshop:* Youth and early-career individuals from universities, NGOs, and policy organisations can participate in the annual workshop. This facilitates youth engagement with IPBES and builds their capacity to contribute effectively to its processes and products.
3. *Fellowship Programme for Early-Career Individuals:* Early-career researchers working on biodiversity and ecosystem services can participate in IPBES assessments. Fellows gain valuable experience and mentorship from leading experts, enhancing their capacity to contribute to future assessments and promoting IPBES work in their home countries.

CASE 3: GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT OUTLOOK (GEO)

1. *Advisory Groups:* The Children and Youth Major Group to UNEP can nominate representatives to the Intergovernmental and Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group and Multidisciplinary Expert Scientific Advisory Group, contributing their policy and scientific expertise to the process. This ensures youth perspectives are included in the GEO process.
2. *Fellows Programme for Youth:* Young experts support the GEO authors with research, citations, references and visual development, bringing forward-looking perspectives, community realities, and technological literacy. Alumni from past assessment cycles can become leading authors for new assessments, showcasing the programme's impact on developing future leaders.
3. *GEO for Youth:* A one-stop-shop for young people to understand the state of the environment, written by youth for youth. It aims to inform, engage and educate young people, empowering them to take informed environmental action.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

While best practices exist that facilitate youth engagement, a number of barriers that limit youth participation and representation in science-policy interfaces remain. The new panel could address these challenges by consulting with youth during the design of the stakeholder engagement strategy. This approach will better address the specific needs and expertise of young people, fostering trust, ownership, and commitment among them as key stakeholders.

| Barriers to youth engagement | Policy recommendations |
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| <i>Knowledge and awareness</i> | |
| Limited understanding of the science-policy interface | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide educational resources and training to enhance youth understanding of the science-policy interface and empower youth to engage ● Replicate models like GEO for Youth to educate young people about the science-policy interface, environmental issues and informed actions |
| Lack of awareness of engagement opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Amplify outreach and disseminate information about engagement opportunities through youth-focused channels and networks ● Build partnerships with existing youth-led organizations, universities, and other networks to effectively reach and engage young people |
| <i>Access, inclusion and participation</i> | |
| Complex formal accreditation requirements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognise Major Group modalities for stakeholder engagement ● Grant observer status to organizations already accredited by UNEA |
| Limited youth representation, especially those from marginalized backgrounds or with non-traditional scientific expertise | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conduct active outreach to ensure the representation of diverse voices in science policy discussions ● Recognise the value of all ages by allowing observer organisations to nominate minors (anyone below 18 years of age) to participate in the panel’s activities ● Establish a Youth Experts Advisory Group to amplify the voices of youth experts and early-career professionals |
| Focus on established expertise, leaving less room for fresh perspectives and innovative solutions proposed by young people | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Revise selection criteria for youth participation in advisory groups and fellowship programmes to embrace alternative forms of experience and expertise, such as lived experiences, community knowledge, or citizen science contributions ● Allow self-nominations to broaden access and ensure representation from a wider spectrum of youth voices |
| Lack of funding for youth engagement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Allocate dedicated funding and provide financial support to facilitate youth participation in the panel’s activities |
| Lack of capacity-building support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop and offer comprehensive capacity-building programmes specifically designed for young people to equip them with the necessary skills for meaningful participation in the panel’s activities and beyond. These programmes should include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Youth workshops and training that focus on scientific communication, policy analysis, advocacy, and public engagement - Fellowship programmes that enable youth to contribute to assessment reports and gain hands-on experience - Mentorship programmes that connect experienced professionals with young individuals for guidance, support and skill development - Scholarship programmes that allow outstanding young individuals to pursue doctoral studies on issues of chemicals, waste and pollution |

