Youth4Data Lab Toolkit

DATASPHERE INITIATIVE

shaping a responsible digital future through youth-driven innovation

About the Datasphere Initiative

The Datasphere Initiative is a think and do tank that catalyzes meaningful dialogues and co-creates actionable and innovative approaches to respond to data challenges and harness opportunities across borders. Our mission is to equip organizations to responsibly unlock the value of data for all. For more information, visit www.thedatasphere.org or contact info@thedatasphere.org.

About this report

The Datasphere Initiative, with the support of the Omidyar Network and as winners of the Future of Data Challenge, launched the Youth4OurDataFuture project in 2022 to amplify young people as key stakeholders in shaping the future of data and artificial intelligence (AI) governance. Over the past two years, the initiative has reached more than 15,000 people through a global social media campaign, engaged youth from all regions of the world to understand their priorities and concerns, and conducted a series of Youth4Data Labs—interactive workshops that brought young people into key policy forums, the U.S., and global decision-making spaces. These engagements have not only elevated youth voices but have also contributed to shaping policy discussions in major international processes, including at the UN and the G20.

This report marks the conclusion of the first iteration of the project, synthesizing our insights and presenting a toolkit for policymakers on how to meaningfully engage youth in the governance of data and AI.

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WHO WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUTH AND DATA

Youth engagement in data and artificial intelligence (AI) governance is not just about inclusion—it is a necessity for building equitable, innovative, and future-proof digital policies. This report outlines a practical methodology developed through the Youth4OurDataFuture project to move beyond tokenistic youth participation. Through social media campaigns, direct youth engagement, and Youth4Data Labs embedded in major policy events, this project has tested and refined an approach that enhances young people as co-creators of data and AI governance frameworks.

The report introduces a three-step framework for meaningful youth involvement:

1 **Start with what matters.** Engaging youth by grounding discussions in real-world challenges they face, such as climate change, education, employment, gender equity, and mental health, rather than starting with abstract technological debates.

2 **Build bridges between technology and lived experiences.** Connecting these pressing issues to data governance and AI systems to make digital policy discussions relevant, relatable, and impactful for young people.

3 **Create ongoing, iterative engagement.** Ensuring youth participation is continuous and substantive, rather than based on one-off consultations, fostering spaces where young people can directly influence innovation.
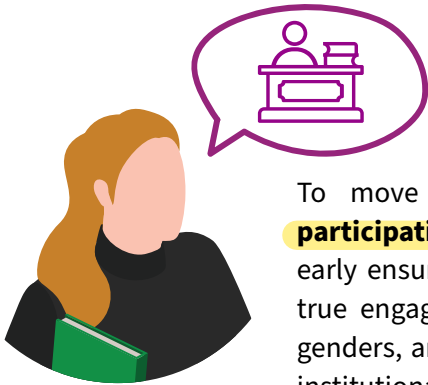
Key Lessons for Policymakers

To move beyond symbolic inclusion, policymakers must **embed youth participation from the start** rather than as an afterthought. Engaging youth early ensures their insights shape priorities and outcomes. Diversity is critical—true engagement requires representing different socio-economic backgrounds, genders, and regions, and providing youth with the knowledge, mentorship, and institutional support needed for meaningful contributions.

Experimentation must be embraced. To address the challenges of dynamic and fast-evolving sectors, policymakers should prioritize flexibility and innovation in their approaches. Traditional, rigid decision-making processes can often stifle progress, so it's crucial to create **environments that allow for experimentation and continuous adaptation.** This includes fostering ongoing participation, **particularly from youth**, by offering repeated opportunities for meaningful input, ensuring that their perspectives influence policies over time. Institutions must evolve to support these dynamic engagement models, allowing for the co-creation of policies that can effectively respond to the needs of a rapidly changing world.

Youth are not passive beneficiaries of digital transformation; they are **active drivers of change**. Their participation strengthens accountability, mitigates bias, and ensures that AI and data policies align with human rights and ethical standards. The report underscores the need to integrate **data literacy and AI awareness** into education, equipping young people to critically engage with and shape the technologies affecting their lives.

Through **intergenerational dialogue and meaningful participation**, we can ensure that digital governance frameworks are not only inclusive but also resilient, adaptive, and truly representative of society's needs—both today and for future generations.

WHY WE NEED YOUTH IN AI GOVERNANCE

Digital transformation relies on two interconnected pillars: data and artificial intelligence (AI). While AI often dominates discussions on technological advancement, data serves as its foundation, determining its fairness, accuracy, and overall impact. The quality of AI outputs heavily depends on how data is collected, processed, and managed, making data governance a critical factor in AI's ability to drive equitable and meaningful change. However, conversations on AI often overlook the crucial role of data governance, particularly in ensuring equitable outcomes. This is especially important for young people, who generate vast amounts of data and are broadly affected by data-driven technologies, but are frequently excluded from discussions on both data governance and AI ethics.

> **Actively involving youth throughout the data lifecycle,** from collection and validation to policymaking, can lead to more inclusive and representative AI systems that respond to diverse local realities and align with societal needs.
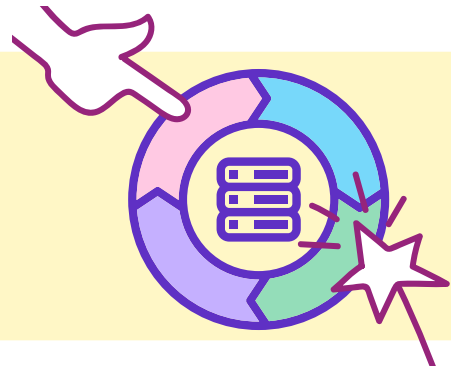
For AI to serve society equitably, it must be built on high-quality, representative, and unbiased data.[1] Poorly collected or incomplete data risks reinforcing discrimination and perpetuating systemic inequalities. **Ensuring youth participation in data governance helps mitigate biases, improve AI transparency, and strengthen privacy protections.** Without strong governance, AI-driven tools in education, hiring, and social services risk producing flawed predictions, reinforcing social disparities, and failing to address the diverse needs of younger generations. Investing in youth digital literacy, promoting ethical data practices, and fostering AI transparency are essential steps toward an inclusive digital future. By empowering young people as data stewards[2] and AI co-creators, we can ensure AI-driven decisions reflect diverse perspectives and serve as a force for equitable progress.

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[1] Datasphere Initiative (2024). *6 reasons why data matters for AI.* https://www.thedatasphere.org/news/6-reasons-why-data-matters-for-ai/; World Economic Forum (2024). Advancing Data Equity: An Action-Oriented Framework. https://www.weforum.org/publications/advancing-data-equity-an-action-oriented-framework/

[2] A data steward ensures the quality, integrity, security, and proper use of an organization's data. As part of data governance, they oversee data assets, manage metadata, enforce policies, and maintain compliance to support reliable and efficient data use. Cf. Rosenbaum, S. (2010). Data governance and stewardship: Designing data stewardship entities and advancing data access. *Health Services Research*, 45(5p2), 1442–1455. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6773.2010.01140.x
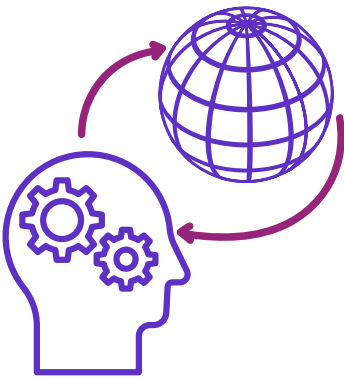
Equally important is a thorough reflection on the ethical implications of AI use across sectors and the ways it is shaping our world. It is essential to debate when, by whom, and how AI should be utilized, paying special attention to emerging technologies like generative AI. Ensuring that AI applications are explainable, accountable, and aligned with human rights is essential to prevent potential harms and maximize benefits.[3] **Promoting critical thinking, ensuring democratic outcomes, and assessing the impacts of digital technologies on youth mental health and overall wellbeing are central themes.** Our project learnings highlight that addressing these issues requires including youth insights and experiences in the development and deployment of AI and related governance approaches.

Moreover, education plays a crucial role in preparing future generations for a world filled with both challenges and opportunities. Integrating data and AI into educational settings not only fosters more personalized and efficient learning but also creates conditions conducive to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The insights from our project underscore that a **strong foundation in data literacy and AI governance empowers young people to critically engage with digital technologies**, ensuring that AI is used responsibly and equitably.

In this rapidly evolving landscape, youth perspectives are not just a nice-to-have; they are critical for building transparent and accountable data governance frameworks. **Young people, often among the earliest adopters of new digital tools,[4] provide valuable insights for designing effective products, services, and policies that stay relevant over time.** By actively involving them in AI and data governance discussions, stakeholders can ensure decisions reflect a wide array of experiences and future aspirations.
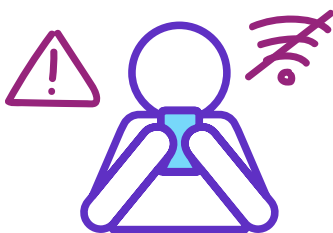
Just as importantly, youth from underserved or underrepresented communities offer firsthand perspectives on connectivity gaps, digital barriers[5] and the risks of biased AI models, making them **indispensable in efforts to truly bridge the digital divide**. Their voices help craft policies that do not unintentionally widen existing inequalities. In addition, young leaders, with their future-oriented mindset,[6] are strong advocates for ethical and human-centered AI. They emphasize aligning emerging technologies with human rights, equity, and sustainable development, guiding innovations toward socially responsible applications.

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[3] UNESCO (2021). *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence.* https://www.unesco.org/en/artificial-intelligence/recommendation-ethics

[4] Portulans Institute (2023). *International Youth Day 2023: How are younger generations shaping the new digital era?* https://networkreadinessindex.org/international-youth-day-2023/

[5] PwC (2020). *Stepping forward: Connecting today's youth to the digital future.* https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/upskilling/GenU-PwC-Report_FINAL.pdf

[6] See, e.g., Datasphere Initiative (n. d.). *Why do we need youth voices in data policy?* https://www.thedatasphere.org/youth4ourdatafuture/why-do-we-need-youth-voices-in-data-policy/

Youth engagement also unlocks potential for cross-regional cooperation. As a generation more globally interconnected than ever before, they can galvanize international dialogue on data standards, governance models, and the responsible use of AI. By fostering collaboration across diverse realities, young people can contribute to governance structures that transcend borders and address global challenges in innovative ways.

Moreover, involving youth in AI decision-making is an investment in long-term sustainability. The policies and technologies shaping AI development today will have repercussions for decades, and including youth voices now can help ensure these approaches remain effective, equitable, and adaptable to evolving challenges. **As the primary stakeholders of tomorrow's digital landscape, young people offer insights into the ethical, cultural, and practical implications of AI that can guide the creation of frameworks designed to adapt over time.** Their engagement helps foster policies that are resilient, forward-thinking, and capable of bridging the digital divide, ultimately ensuring that AI serves the broader interests of society for decades to come.
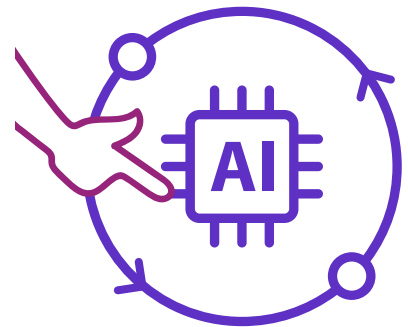
Ultimately, whether companies aim to create better products or policymakers strive for more impactful regulations, engaging young people's energy, and innovative thinking is essential to charting an equitable, inclusive, and future-proof digital path forward. While being young does not automatically equate to digital literacy, young people's energy and innovative thinking remain vital assets in our rapidly evolving digital landscape. It is important to recognize that digital fluency is a skill that can be cultivated through education, experience, and access to opportunities. By providing platforms for skill development, their unique perspectives can lead to more informed contributions. Only by integrating youth voices into data governance and AI decision-making can we build a future where AI serves everyone equitably and responsibly.

HOW TO MEANINGFULLY ENGAGE YOUTH IN DATA AND AI POLICYMAKING

While various policy spaces and forums are beginning to recognize the importance of engaging youth in global decision-making processes for data and AI, meaningful youth participation remains a challenge. Policymakers often lack the tools to rethink and redesign engagement mechanisms or to create new spaces where youth voices are not just heard but can actively shape discussions and outcomes.

For over two years, the Youth4OurDataFuture project has worked to bridge this gap by developing and testing a structured methodology for meaningful youth engagement. We launched a global social media campaign to amplify youth perspectives, engaged directly with young people across all regions of the world to understand their concerns, and hosted *Youth4Data Labs*—interactive sessions embedded in major policy events and academic spaces—to create tangible opportunities for youth to influence data and AI governance.

Through these experiences, we have learned that meaningful engagement requires more than invitations to high-level discussions; it demands intentional steps, thoughtful design, and a commitment to avoiding tokenization. It requires shifting from one-off consultations to ongoing, iterative participation.

Bringing youth into data and AI governance is not just about representation—it is about ensuring the policies of today reflect the needs and aspirations of the next generation. By anchoring engagement in real-world issues, creating bridges between youth experiences and digital policy, and fostering ongoing, non-tokenistic participation, we can design governance frameworks that are more inclusive, adaptive, and forward-looking. The challenge is not just integrating youth into existing policy structures, but evolving those structures to enable youth-driven change.

The Datasphere Initiative Youth4OurDataFuture has developed a **Youth4Data Lab** methodology to ensure youth engagement is not only meaningful but also drives real impact. The next section outlines the key pillars and steps policymakers can take to realise this methodology and support meaningful youth engagement in AI and data governance.

1 **Identifying relevant issues**

2 **Build bridges**

3 **Create engagement**

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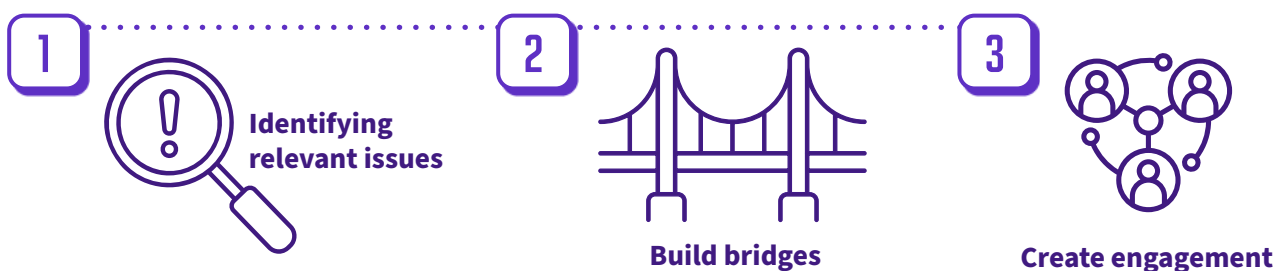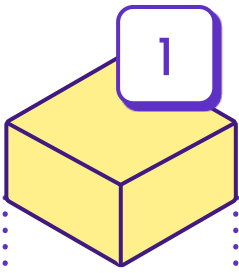
START WITH WHAT MATTERS: IDENTIFYING RELEVANT (NON-TECH) ISSUES

Discussions about data and AI can feel abstract and disconnected from young people's everyday lives. The first step in meaningful youth engagement is recognizing that technology is not always the starting point—real-world issues are. Climate change, education, job opportunities, gender equity, mental health, and online safety are top concerns for young people worldwide. To bring youth into the conversation, we must begin with these pressing challenges, creating safe spaces for youth to talk about the things that matter most to them and the challenges they are experiencing in their communities and local contexts. These challenges are often perceived and experienced differently by youth, making their perspectives essential in shaping policies and solutions that truly reflect their realities.

2
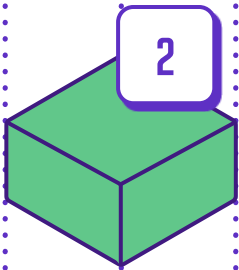
BUILD BRIDGES BETWEEN TECHNOLOGY AND LIVED EXPERIENCES

Once youth are engaged on the issues that matter to them, the next step is connecting these concerns to digital technologies and data-driven solutions that could help them address those issues. Real-world issues and existing gaps are often exacerbated by digital technologies, so this angle also helps to connect youth with digital policy issues. Conversations about AI and data governance are most effective when they link back to tangible realities: how data-driven technologies and data centers impact the environment and nature, how digital ID systems affect access to education and health services, or how algorithmic biases can reinforce systemic inequalities. By making these connections explicit, we empower young people to engage with digital policy in ways that are personal and urgent, rather than theoretical or abstract.

3
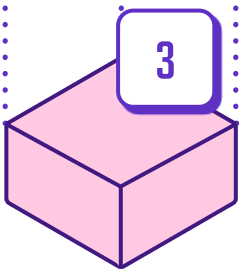
CREATE ONGOING, ITERATIVE ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN YOUTH AND POLICYMAKERS

For youth perspectives to genuinely shape policy, engagement must be structured as an ongoing, participatory process. This means moving beyond simply asking young people for their opinions and instead offering spaces where they can co-create and design solutions, engage with policymakers as equals, and actively shape the policies that affect their lives. Meaningful engagement should provide opportunities for youth not only to share their perspectives but also to learn about existing proposals, critically assess them, and refine them with their own insights.

Closing vocabulary gaps is key—technical or bureaucratic language often creates barriers that can make policymaking feel inaccessible or intimidating. Instead of expecting youth to adapt to rigid policy jargon, we must meet them where they are, ensuring they feel comfortable expressing their ideas in ways that feel natural to them. This approach fosters a culture of belonging, where young people are not just invited into the conversation but are empowered to participate fully as themselves. When youth feel truly heard, valued, and included, they are more likely to engage meaningfully, leading to more innovative, inclusive, and impactful policymaking.

Key actions for policymakers: what we've learned

After collaborating with young people across different regions, we have identified key insights that can help policymakers move beyond tokenistic approaches and toward meaningful, sustained youth participation. These insights serve as essential considerations for rethinking, redesigning, and creating policy engagement mechanisms that place youth at the center. By integrating these lessons, policymakers can ensure that young people are empowered as active contributors in shaping the future of data and AI governance.

START WITH YOUTH AT THE CENTER

One of the most common mistakes in youth engagement is waiting until the final stages of a decision-making process to bring young people into the conversation. When youth perspectives are relegated to the last session of a conference or treated as a checkbox exercise, their contributions lack the opportunity to shape real outcomes. Instead, youth must be part of the conversation from the beginning—informing priorities, shaping the agenda, and contributing meaningfully to the development and assessment of policies.
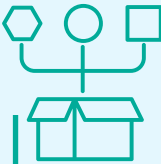
MOVE BEYOND TOKENISM

Inviting one or two young representatives into a high-level discussion does not equate to meaningful youth participation. True engagement requires ensuring that a diverse range of youth voices—across gender, socio-economic backgrounds, regions, and expertise levels— are involved. Moreover, young people need access to the right information, mentorship, and institutional support to meaningfully contribute, rather than being expected to navigate complex policy discussions without proper preparation. More investment is needed to fund these kinds of training efforts, ensuring that youth have sustained access to the knowledge, tools, and opportunities required to engage meaningfully in policy discussions.

PLAY AND EXPERIMENT

Youth bring fresh perspectives to the table, but they also bring a spirit of experimentation that is often missing from traditional policymaking. Engagement strategies that foster creativity, problem-solving, and prototyping tend to yield better results than rigid consultation formats.

Innovation-focused approaches, such as sandboxes,[7] policy labs, hackathons, and challenge-based initiatives, can create structured yet flexible spaces for youth to contribute fresh ideas and test new solutions. For example, the EU Policy Lab has used foresight and co-creation methods to engage young people in shaping digital and social policies.[8] Similarly, UNDP's Youth Co:Lab, co-led with Citi Foundation, has empowered young social entrepreneurs across Asia-Pacific to develop policy solutions through hackathons and innovation challenges.[9] Sandboxes, while traditionally used for financial and technological experimentation (e.g., the UK Financial Conduct Authority's sandbox), could also be adapted to engage youth in testing policy ideas in a controlled environment.

This project has also reinforced the need to update how policymaking is traditionally done, moving beyond static, top-down approaches to more adaptive, participatory processes. Bringing play and experimentation back into the policy design process is not just beneficial—it is essential. When young people are given the space to explore, test ideas, and rethink existing frameworks, policymaking becomes more responsive, inclusive, and forward-looking. By embracing these new approaches, we can create mechanisms that allow youth to co-design solutions rather than simply react to pre-existing structures.

EVOLVE GOVERNANCE TO ENABLE PARTICIPATION

One of the biggest challenges in youth engagement is that our regulatory and governance systems have not caught up with the speed of technological change. If we want youth to play a meaningful role in shaping the future, we need to provide them with tools and processes that make participation feasible and impactful. This means rethinking how decisions are made, how policies are designed, and how institutions integrate youth perspectives as part of a long-term commitment to inclusive governance.

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[7] Sandboxes are safe spaces to test new technologies and practices against regulatory frameworks or experiment with innovative uses and means of governing data. They can be operational, regulatory, or hybrid. Cf. Datasphere Initiative (2024). *Introduction to Sandboxes.* https://www.thedatasphere.org/intro-to-sandboxes/

[8] EU Policy Lab (2025). *Paving the way for an EU Intergenerational Fairness Strategy.* https://policy-lab.ec.europa.eu/news/paving-way-eu-intergenerational-fairness-strategy-2025-02-25_en

[9] UNDP (2024). *Youth Co:Lab Summit 2024: Asia Pacific's Largest Youth Social Entrepreneurs Gathering Calls for Inclusive Entrepreneurship.* https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/press-releases/youth-colab-summit-2024-asia-pacifics-largest-youth-social-entrepreneurs-gathering-calls-inclusive-entrepreneurship

WHO IS WHO: THE YOUTH4DATA NETWORK

As policymakers start to engage youth in digital policy processes, one thing is for certain: there are many youth advocates and organizations around the world who should be involved. This section presents the organizations and individuals that the Datasphere Initiative collaborated with as part of the Youth4Data Future project. It is by no means a comprehensive list of all youth organizations working on data and AI, but rather an insight into the diversity of expertise and perspectives among youth-led and youth-supported initiatives.

The Datasphere Initiative and its partners have built a vibrant network of youth leaders and organizations dedicated to shaping data and AI governance. These collaborations emerged through workshops, interviews, and events such as the UN World Data Forum 2024, UNCTAD eWeek 2023, and the Data Festival organized by the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD). The project also engaged with youth-led groups like the World Economic Forum's Global Shapers community and the GPSDD's Data Values Advocates, which amplify young local voices for data through storytelling and community-led policy actions.

YOUTH-LED OR YOUTH-FOCUSED ORGANIZATIONS

- Alana Foundation
- BitsnBytes Cybersecurity
- Chaski Global
- Children and Screens
- Cyber Collective
- Design It For Us
- Digital Futures Institute
- Girl Security
- Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data
- Internet Society Youth Standing Group
- ITU Generation Connect
- JAAKLAC
- koodos labs
- Log Off Movement
- Mtoto News
- Next Einstein Forum
- Quit Clicking Kids
- Restless Development
- SafeOnline Women Kenya
- Transform Health
- UNICEF's Data Governance Fit for Children
- World Economic Forum's Global Shapers community
- Youth For Privacy
- Youth IGF
- Youth-Nex
- 3CL
- 5Rights Foundation

In our labs and consultations with these organisations a range of insights were shared as youth articulated their areas of concern and interest in the data governance and AI ecosystem. The below provides a snapshot of issue areas that were identified.

From Latin America to Africa and beyond, young advocates underscored the need for bridging gaps between youth and policymakers rooted in local contexts and the needs of underserved communities.
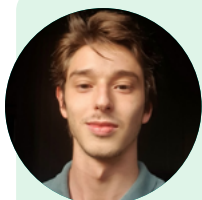
"The biggest challenge is bridging the gap between youth and decision-makers. Our biggest effort has focused on making sure that those actors understand the importance of listening to youth in a way that is meaningful to them."
— João Francisco de Aguiar Coelho (Lawyer for the Children and Consumption Program, Alana Institute)

"It's great to have new spaces like this for youth to share how they can build a better future together. And here it's important to capture not only the vision of young people in general but also of young people from the Global South."
— Germán López Ardila (Member at the Internet Society Youth Standing Group)

Youth called for greater inclusion of marginalized and underrepresented groups.

"Inclusion allows us to amplify a wide range of voices, especially those from underrepresented groups such as women."
— Edith Milanzi (Former Fellow, Datasphere Initiative)
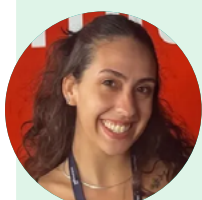
"The hardest problems to solve, such as violence against women, poverty, and hunger, affect people who are often overlooked in the datasets. This is why inclusion needs to be a core goal of data and policy-making, so it can make the invisible, visible."
— Camila Gomide (Technology and Data Product Manager, Red Dot Foundation)

"Inclusion is not just a goal; it is essential for dismantling systemic inequalities and crafting policies that authentically address the diverse needs of individuals."
— Lilian Olivia Orero (Former Fellow, Datasphere Initiative)

"Talking about inclusion does not only mean talking about numbers. It means creating a culture of belonging where people—and women and girls in particular— are encouraged to come as they are and are safe and appreciated to share their experiences and perspectives."

— Mariana Rozo-Paz (Youth4OurDataFuture Project Lead, Datasphere Initiative)

Young people also highlighted the urgency of building a future in which everyone has the skills and resources to participate in the data economy.

"Youth and people may lose opportunities for not having a digital background (...) we need thorough training."

— Juana Dussan (16, Belize)

"It is not enough to have a seat at the table, you also have to have a microphone. The issue is how do we ensure that they actually have a vote."

— Elena Maffioletti (26, Chile)

"Policymakers need to listen to young people and take into account those voices and opinions when making decisions."

— Jimena Cascante (Costa Rica)

Many also voiced calls for more transparent and equitable use of data.

"Data governance is everybody's right. Everybody has the right to know what their data is being used for."

— Busayo Fashoto (Nigeria)

"We should be more intentional in the way digital technologies are implemented and used. Often the impacts and risks are not taken into account."

— Daniela Arregui (28, Ecuador/Germany)

"Unchecked technologies could further exacerbate inequalities within youth and any other communities who might not have access."

— Tiffany Saade (21, Lebanon)

Others saw creative opportunities to include new voices in policy processes.

"I would like to do things that engage people who don't normally think about data governance."
— Zino Haro (26, United States)

"We can use the power of technology and the Internet to share our voices and let ourselves be heard."
— Elaine Zhang (20, China)

"As a young person, I have questions on how to bring some of these ideas or bring my concerns to the table if the people that are making decisions in my country aren't even aware of them or don't have the infrastructure to receive comments."
— Jess Edelson (24, United States)

Advocating for equitable regulations and diversity in tech.

"Regulations should ensure equitable access to technology and encourage diversity in tech through inclusive hiring practices."
— Hebah Al-Tawaiha (28, Jordan)

"Local events help promote coordination efforts."
— Laila Lorenzon (25, Brazil/France)

"Crafting the digital environment is as important as a national project."
— Justin Bryant (29, United States)

"When it comes to matters of digital policy, it is often the younger activists who formulate the best solutions."
— Chris McCarty (19, United States)

"We need multistakeholder consultations and approaches where people from different ages, groups, and spheres are included."
— Tetiana Avdieieva (24, Ukraine)

"People need to be educated on what their data or the data they are generating could be used for and how it can be used to support them or harm them."
— Yazid Mikail (23, Nigeria)

Beyond connectivity and access: Youth-led action in mental health, online safety, and sustainability.

"Providing education in a sense of community belonging will help prevent cyberbullying."
— Shane Yu (Canada)

"We need stronger human-based laws and to hold companies accountable to serve their customers, not only profit from them suffering from mental health issues."
— Ellie Hutterli (23, Switzerland)

"Young people should get more informed about the data economy, but also demand more from the platforms they use."
— Simona Ruzer & Jad Esber (koodos labs)

"Education in data governance equips youth to drive a greener future by teaching responsible data management."
— Krystal Briggs (Data Scientist, Privacy Advocate, and Tech Mentor)

This diverse roster of youth leaders has done more than simply reveal gaps in the data and AI ecosystem. They have **demonstrated practical ways to address these challenges by sharing firsthand experiences that range from the struggle to access reliable internet in underserved regions to the need for localized digital literacy programs.** Through their commitment to working across continents, they have shown that effective policy solutions are most likely to emerge when people from different backgrounds pool their expertise and collaborate toward shared objectives, such as equitable access and the responsible deployment of emerging technologies.
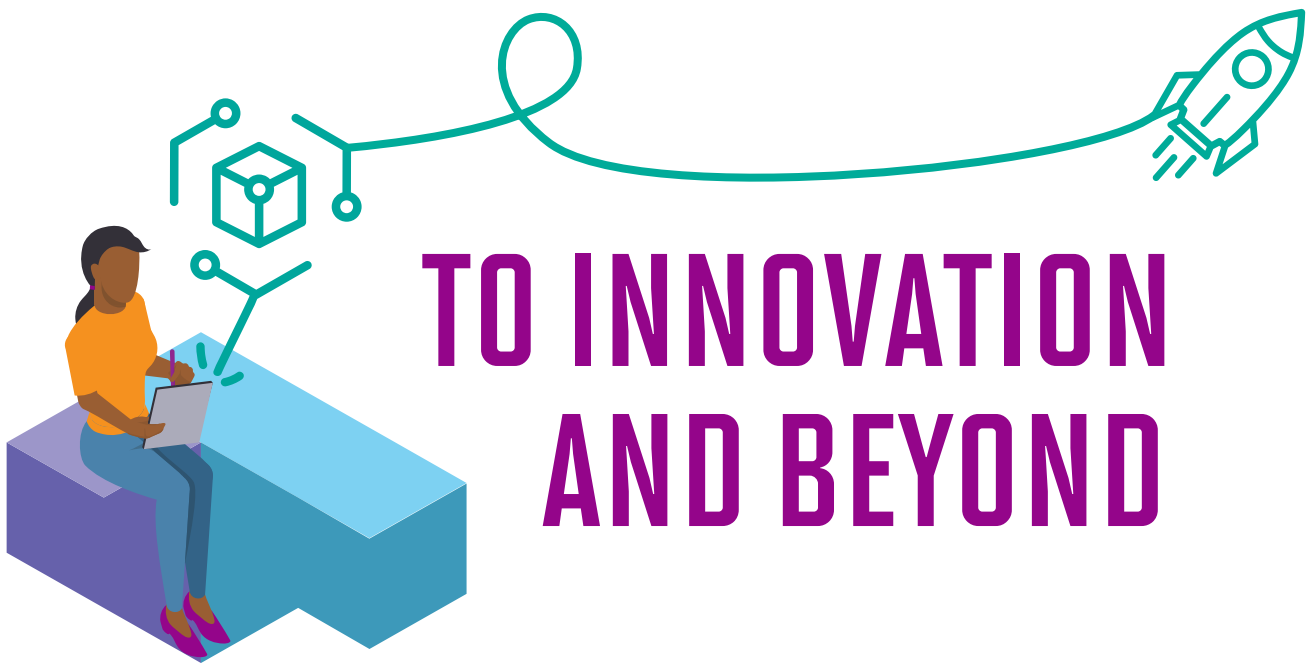
TO INNOVATION AND BEYOND

Looking ahead, the emphasis on human rights, particularly regarding privacy, algorithmic bias, and the broader impacts of technology on vulnerable communities, becomes ever more critical. The young leaders involved in the **Youth4OurDataFuture** project illustrate that data governance is not merely a technical issue but a profound ethical challenge requiring frameworks that reflect diverse social and cultural realities. Their insistence on culturally relevant, community-driven approaches challenges policymakers to move beyond one-size-fits-all solutions and design interventions that genuinely align with local needs.

Crucially, youth are not passive observers in the policy space—they are **active co-creators**. Their engagement pushes the boundaries of traditional policymaking, transforming it from a closed-door process into one that is inclusive, participatory, and reflective of the communities it seeks to serve. By fostering digital literacy programs, establishing ethical guidelines for AI, and creating inclusive forums for cross-regional collaboration, these initiatives lay the foundation for innovative and sustainable change.

At its core, the Youth4OurDataFuture project proves that inclusive governance is not just aspirational; it is entirely achievable. When youth perspectives are valued as essential components in shaping the future of data and AI, we move closer to building a more resilient, equitable, and forward-thinking digital society. The journey ahead requires bold thinking, collaborative action, and a commitment to ensuring that innovation serves everyone—**ethically, responsibly, and inclusively**. To innovation and beyond!

ANNEX - DEAR DIARY

The following section presents a series of diary entries from Mariana Rozo-Paz, the Youth4OurDataFuture project lead, capturing key moments, milestones, and reflections throughout the journey. These entries offer a behind-the-scenes look at how the project unfolded—from the initial idea to global policy impact—highlighting the excitement, challenges, and inspiring contributions of young people along the way.

September 30, 2022

Dear Diary,

The Future of Data Challenge is open, and we are determined to apply with our youth project idea. We've spent so much time engaging with adult stakeholders, but youth voices are missing from the conversations. Decisions impacting young people are being made without them at the table. What if we created a space for youth to engage? We've partnered with advisors and put together a video to submit our application. Natalia worked her magic editing the video, and I recorded the voiceover (the team says I have a talent for podcasts—who knew? Haha!). Fingers crossed!

– Mariana

Introducing
#Youth4OurDataFuture
1:30

#Youth4OurDataFuture - Datasphere
Initiative

February 14, 2023

$100,000 WINNER

DATASPHERE INITIATIVE

Datasphere Initiative

Through awareness and engagement campaigns, Datasphere Initiative will assert rights for a more equitable data economy by boldly leveraging under-represented youth voices in the centers of data...

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⊙ Headquarters: Genève / Switzerland

#Youth4OurDataFuture

Datasphere Initiative awarded Future of Data Prize

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March 15, 2023

Dear Diary,

We won! WE WON! I called Carolina, and we jumped and screamed on the phone as we got the news. We need to start planning now! We let our partners know that we got this, and the excitement is real. Martin, our co-founder, was summoned for a very short call, and when they shared their screen, there it was: we won! The whole process was tough—we had to peer-review other amazing projects creating value in so many ways. But we did it! And now, the real work begins.
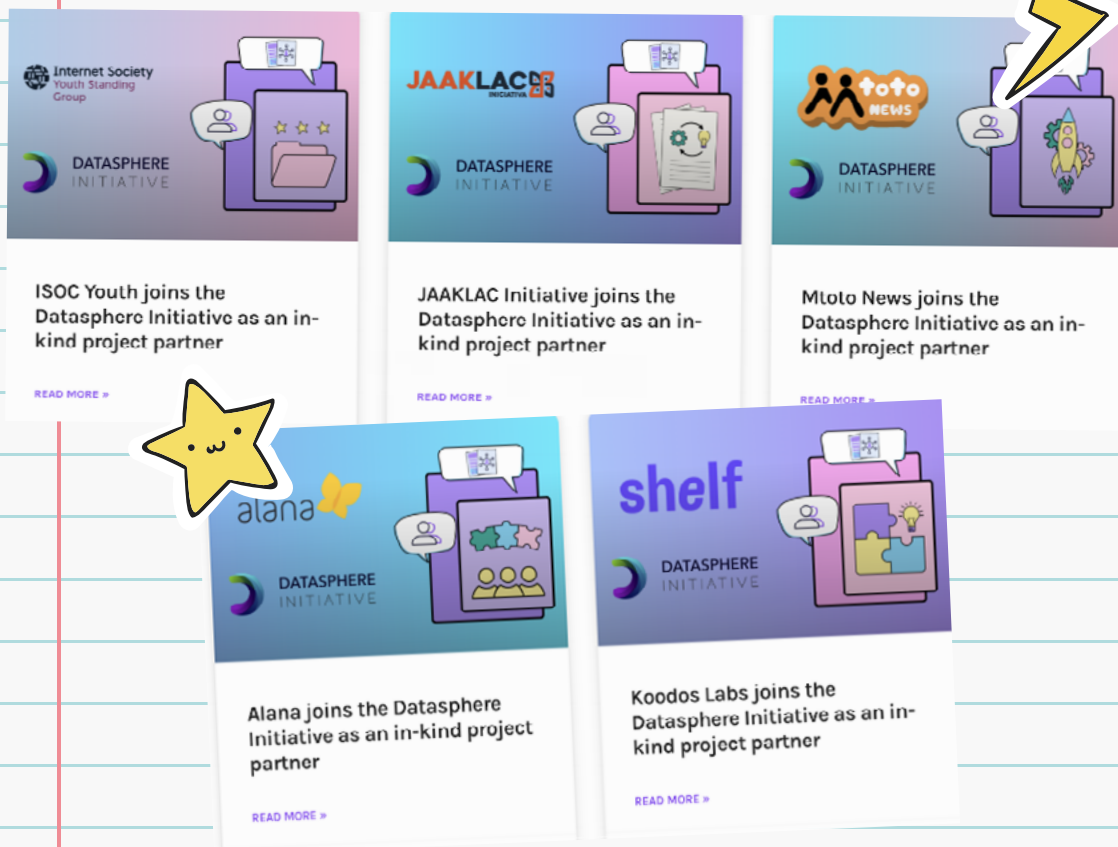
– Mariana

July 13, 2023

Dear Diary,

Today, we convened our advisory group. We knew from the start that we wanted to do this project responsibly, so we didn't just invite adults—we made sure youth leaders and organizations working with young people were involved in co-designing the project. We are already experimenting with new methods, so of course, we got our advisors working in a Miro board. It feels like we are building something truly participatory from the ground up.

– Mariana

ISOC Youth joins the Datasphere Initiative as an in-kind project partner

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JAAKLAC Initiative joins the Datasphere Initiative as an in-kind project partner

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Mtoto News joins the Datasphere Initiative as an in-kind project partner

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Alana joins the Datasphere Initiative as an in-kind project partner

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Koodos Labs joins the Datasphere Initiative as an in-kind project partner
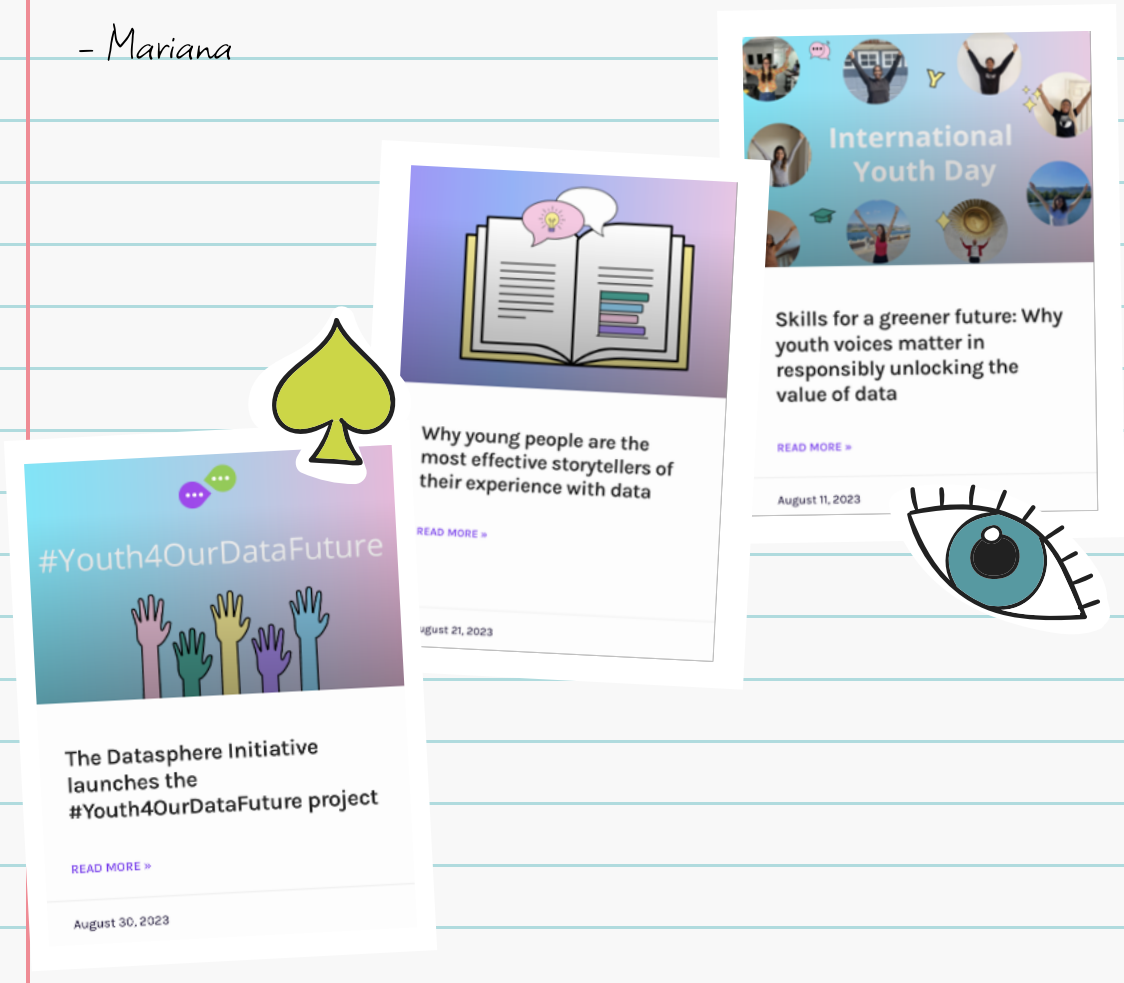
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July 17, 2023

Dear Diary,

Our social media campaign is officially live! When Carolina and I went to RightsCon in Costa Rica last month, we got policymakers and young people to dance to a trending song. Who knew that asking people to join and dance could be such an incredible way to engage them? It turns out all my years of dancing since I was a baby have finally paid off! This campaign is going to be so much fun. We will officially launch the project in late August.

– Mariana

International
Youth Day

Skills for a greener future: Why youth voices matter in responsibly unlocking the value of data

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August 11, 2023

Why young people are the most effective storytellers of their experience with data

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ugust 21, 2023

#Youth4OurDataFuture

The Datasphere Initiative launches the #Youth4OurDataFuture project

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August 30, 2023

December 15, 2023

Dear Diary,

Last month, I attended the Festival de Datos conference organized by our partner the Global Partnership on Sustainable Development Data in Uruguay and besides hosting a workshop with young people, I did a talk on the importance of closing the gap between youth and decisionmakers. What a couple of existing months!

Also, Christmas is almost here, and we've realized that people are more interested in what they care about rather than abstract data. So, we made a fun video sharing interesting Christmas data. Did you know that 384,000 km of wrapping paper is thrown away every year? That blew my mind. Maybe we should all rethink how we wrap our gifts this year... And on that note, I realized our climate data video was watched by more than 10,000 people! Wow.

– Mariana

March 30, 2024

Dear Diary,

We have a winner for our video competition! While it was definitely hard to get people to record a video, Valentina from Colombia won a VR headset for a cool reflection on education in the AI age. Young people are full of ideas— they just need the right opportunities to share them. I can't wait to see what Valentina does next with this tech.

– Mariana

April 24, 2024
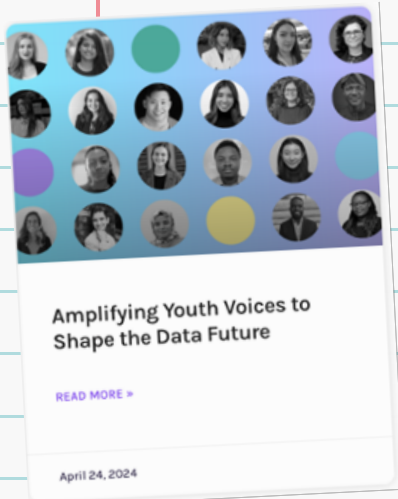
Dear Diary,

We have now spoken to 19 young people from all regions of the world and launched a global campaign amplifying their voices. The insights they've shared are inspiring, exciting, and sometimes even surprising. From in-depth cybersecurity concerns to mental health and education, I am very happy we got to talk with them directly. Every conversation reinforces why youth perspectives must be at the center of policymaking. There is so much to learn from them.

– Mariana

October 22, 2024

Dear Diary,

We hosted a Youth Lab at COP16 in Cali, Colombia, with support from the Global Shapers community—and it was incredible! 90 people attended. We talked about how data and AI can drive biodiversity protection and support sustainability. People kept saying how they had never considered the connection between biodiversity, data, and AI. Seeing these discussions spark curiosity and action makes all the effort worthwhile.

– Mariana

November 15, 2024

Dear Diary,

We just wrapped up another Youth Lab, this time at the UN World Data Forum! This one focused on development challenges that data and AI can help address. It was amazing to bring together youth from Latin America and Africa, who shared similar challenges—such as internet connectivity gaps, education and skills shortages, and the disparities faced by rural communities. Also, big news: we joined UNICEF's Data Governance Fit for Children commitment! This coalition could lead to something huge.
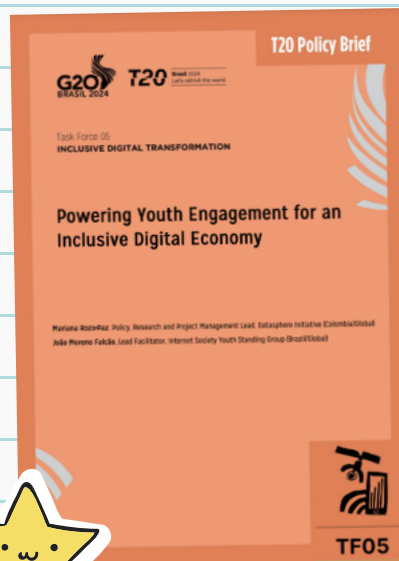
– Mariana

December 19, 2024

Dear Diary,

Two major wins today! The T20 approved our policy brief on powering youth engagement in the digital economy. AND we hosted an event at the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) to share our project's insights together with youth leaders. Seeing our work have an impact at such high-level spaces proves that youth engagement isn't just a nice-to-have—it's a necessity.

– Mariana

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