



Youth Manifesto Summary

A collective blueprint for intergenerational action and youth-led transformation

The CIVICUS Youth Manifesto is the outcome of the 2025 CIVICUS Youth Assembly, held in Bangkok as part of the International Civil Society Week (ICSW) 2025. Bringing together around 100 young leaders from across the world, the Assembly became a space for reflection, connection, and co-creation, where youth civil society united to envision a more equitable, democratic, and inclusive world.

Why a manifesto? Youth are living the consequences of shrinking civic space every day, facing repression, disinformation, underfunding, and exclusion from decisions that shape their present and future. These demands rise from lived experiences; from young activists forced into exile, from movements striving to survive without funding, from communities disconnected by censorship, and from generations yearning to work *with* each other rather than apart.

Online consultations with around 80 CIVICUS youth members & partners led us to identify key risks in how youth is facing the defence of civic space and human rights. Later, through a full day of dialogue, young delegates of the Youth Assembly examined these risks and proposed strategies to defend human rights, strengthen intergenerational solidarity, and resource youth-led movements sustainably.

Youth is broad, numerous, and diverse, so to claim it represents all youth would be an overstatement. This Youth manifesto is a set of recommendations and advocacy approaches that focus initially on CIVICUS members & partners and ICSW delegates, who we believe can reasonably influence the way civil society operates. Nevertheless we believe these guidelines can be a blueprint for collaborative advocacy for broader youth organisations, movements, and decision makers.

We demand transformation because **participation without power is not enough**. The CIVICUS Youth Manifesto calls for accountability, redistribution, and solidarity, so that youth are not only heard but trusted; not only invited, but equipped to lead.

The Manifesto reflects the collective vision and advocacy priorities of youth civil society across five key pillars:

On Conflict & Violence:

Risks	Strategies	Actions
The main risks identified include conflict-driven economies, where profits from ongoing conflicts remain opaque; the suppression of human rights defenders and freedom of speech by governments; and external interference by powerful actors or neighboring countries that exacerbate local tensions.	To address this, the group suggests strategies focused on fighting back against oppression and building collaboration and sustainability for social movements, including real-life social media campaigns focused on new democracies.	Key actions involve young leaders and ordinary people actively fighting against corruption, pursuing the equal distribution of wealth and resources, and strengthening protection for human rights defenders.

Call to action:

Empowered youth and civil society must unite and work as one, build sustainable movements, and fight back against conflict economies and corruption to secure justice, freedom of speech, and the equal distribution of wealth and power.

Additionally:

- Securing media protection against disinformation, misinformation and malinformation.
- Identify fundings for accountability projects and flexible social movements.

On Funding youth-led groups:

Risks	Strategies	Actions
Youth-led organizations face growing risks due to limited institutional capacity, shrinking civic space, and government pressure that discourages both public and private funding. Many young activists and groups distrust state structures, while international and local NGOs remain the main intermediaries for support.	To address these challenges, youth networks propose strengthening ethical and transparent grant-making, diversifying funding partnerships with international actors, and promoting flexible, inclusive models for collaboration. The focus is on capacity building, trust, and equitable participation in decision-making.	Practical steps include providing training and holistic support to youth groups, creating digital tools that connect donors with recipients, forming regional coalitions to share knowledge, and ensuring youth are directly engaged in dialogue, advocacy, and resource distribution.

Call to action:

Prioritise organisational capacity building for local funds and resources (to cut out reliance on big donors).

Additionally:

- Decolonise reporting by centering trust, transparency and accountability in ways that are not western centric (e.g. oral reporting).
- Making international NGOs fundraise and provide grants ethically.

On Misinformation & Digital Oppression:

Risks	Strategies	Actions
Key risks identified include the spread of misinformation through biased and opaque algorithms, censorship of dissenting voices, and unequal access to technology that deepens existing inequalities. The concentration of power among major tech companies enables digital manipulation and weak accountability, while inadequate regulation leaves communities vulnerable to exploitation, surveillance, and loss of digital rights.	To combat misinformation and digital oppression, we need to promote Mandatory media literacy and critical thinking modules through primary and tertiary education. The group emphasised the need for coordinated international regulation, transparent human rights based technologies, and stronger community education to ensure digital systems serve the public good rather than corporate or political interests.	-Enable CSOs to create creative media literacy education initiatives and to promote intercultural dialogue to combat misinformation and digital oppression. -Establish a multilateral body consisting of INGOs, governments, activists, youth, tech and social media companies to create a human rights-based international standard for use of AI and social media.

Call to action:

Embed mandatory media literacy and critical thinking in education, enable CSOs to lead creative and intercultural initiatives, and establish a multilateral body to set human rights-based standards for AI and social media.

Additionally:

- Establish multi-actor, inclusive body to co create international human rights standards on AI & social media use
- Boycott social media companies - force them to have more transparent and inclusive algorithms.
- Increase research on combatting misinformation and disinformation.

On Repression

Risks	Strategies	Actions
Key risks include the use of violence, surveillance, and legal persecution to silence dissenting voices. State actors employ national security narratives and emergency laws to justify repression, while media control and digital surveillance extend the reach of intimidation. International institutions often remain ineffective, constrained by political interests, leaving civil society exposed. Funding restrictions, mobility barriers, and social stigma further isolate activists and limit civic engagement.	-Support watchdog organisations for lasting accountability. -Reclaim civic power through politics, media, public awareness, and data-driven advocacy. -Document instances of repression. -Foster solidarity, intergenerational dialogue, and human rights education. -Promote sustainable, caring activism rooted in everyday resistance. -Engage subcultures creatively to foster intergenerational dialogue. -Diversify funding and strengthen independence by building peer-to-peer learning systems. -Advocate for safe, sustained access to public institutions and spaces.	Build community-owned protection networks and digital safety protocols to safeguard activists. Develop counter-hegemonic and strategic narratives that expose repression and reclaim public discourse. Strengthen intergenerational and civic education to sustain awareness, resilience, and collective resistance. Unite NGOs, unions, and youth movements across sectors to coordinate advocacy and mutual defense. Conduct data-driven documentation of abuses to hold perpetrators accountable and make repression undeniable. Leverage international watchdog mechanisms and solidarity networks to increase global pressure on repressive regimes.

Call to action:

Design platforms, campaigns, and spaces that protect and empower civic actors, amplify silenced voices, and transform fear into collective strength. Create tools and narratives that make repression visible, and resistance unstoppable

Additionally:

- Demand a holistic approach to human rights (not western centric)
- Strengthening indigenous knowledge systems and support networks to enhance safety and resilience

On Power Dynamics & Discrimination

Risks	Strategies	Actions
Youth exclusion from decision-making remains widespread, reinforced by generational and patriarchal power structures that limit participation and leadership. Marginalized groups, especially women, are often left out of policy processes, while weak accountability, corruption, and human rights violations erode trust in institutions. Underfunded youth structures, limited civic education, and tokenistic consultations further entrench disempowerment and civic disengagement.	- Build transparent systems to hold governments accountable. Invest in capacity building for youth-led movements. -Create sustained intergenerational dialogue with inclusive leadership. -Ensure comprehensive sexuality education as a human rights tool. -Engage youth and women in local decision-making and policy development. -Strengthen collaboration between activists, policymakers, and community leaders for systemic change. -Support existing community work and put pressure on governments to be accountable. -Address intersectionality and multiple social identities; encourage critical thinking. -Address the role of the media in perpetuating discrimination and work within systems to leverage circumstances for change.	Strengthen youth leadership and inclusion by investing in capacity-building, gender sensitization, and awareness programs that challenge stereotypes and promote equality. Support youth-led media and advocacy efforts that amplify diverse voices and ensure accountability. Create inclusive platforms for youth participation in policy design and decision-making, ensuring representation of marginalized communities. Foster collaboration between governments, civil society, and youth movements to institutionalize participatory, rights-based governance.

Call to action:

Demand government transparency and accountability through intergenerational approaches that respect the voices of young people.

Additionally:

- Stronger collaboration between and inclusive leadership among civil society (making youth equal actors in decision-making).
- Facilitate inclusive capacity-building that fosters youth inclusion and critical thinking.