

## Youth representation in politics

The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated pre-existing challenges for young people, while recovery measures are bringing questions of intergenerational justice to the forefront of the policy debate (OECD, 2020b). Youth representation in public institutions is critical to ensuring that public decisions take into account different perspectives, policy solutions benefit from a range of experiences and skills, and that policy outcomes are sustainable and responsive to all citizens' interests, needs and specificities (OECD, 2020a). The active involvement of youth can also inspire others of the same age and help restore their trust in public institutions (OECD, 2020a).

Civic and citizenship education can be instrumental in familiarising youth with democratic processes and providing them with the necessary skills for active citizenship. Governments can engage young people through public consultations, participatory budgeting programmes, innovative deliberative processes, affiliating advisory youth councils to government or specific ministries (as happens in 53% of OECD countries), or through youth councils at national (in 78% of OECD countries) and sub-national levels (in 88% of OECD countries) (OECD, 2020a). However, youth participation and representation in public and political life remain limited.

Among the barriers to becoming elected officials faced by young people, a lack of time and funding to run a campaign is the issue most frequently raised, by 71% of the 65 youth organisations in OECD countries surveyed in the OECD Youth Governance Survey. Limited opportunities in political parties (51%), traditional stereotypes portraying them as inexperienced (47%) and minimum age requirements (22%) are also perceived as barriers (OECD, 2020a).

While democracy does not necessarily require institutions to mirror demographics, youth's underrepresentation in parliament indicates the existence of norms, rules and regulations that hamper their participation to democratic processes. In 2020, on average across the OECD, 22% of members of parliaments (MPs) were under 40, ranging from 36% in Norway to 8% in France. In comparison, 20-39 year-olds represent 34% of the voting-age population on average across OECD countries, an average representation gap of more than 12 percentage points (p.p.). Wide differences exist among OECD countries: in Italy, Finland and Norway the share of young MPs is larger than the share of young people in the voting-age population (by 6 p.p. in Italy, 4 p.p. in Finland and 1 p.p. in Norway) but in all other OECD countries, the share of young MPs is lower. The largest representation gaps are found in Luxembourg (-26 p.p.), the United States (-25 p.p.) and Australia (-24 p.p.) (Figure 3.12). Some OECD countries have adopted youth quotas for national parliaments voluntarily by some party lists (such as in Lithuania, Mexico and Sweden).

Representation gaps are even more pronounced within countries' political leadership. In 2018, the average age

of cabinet members ranged from 45 years in Iceland to 62 years in Japan, with an OECD average of 53 years. The five youngest cabinets across OECD countries were in Iceland (45 years), Norway (46.2), Estonia (47.1), Denmark (47.4) and Finland (47.4) (Figure 3.13). In 2018, across the OECD, only 51 of the then-incumbent cabinet members were under 40 (8%) and only 20 were aged 35 or below (3%) (Figure 3.13).

### Methodology and definitions

Youth quotas refer to reserving seats (reserved quotas) or a number of positions as political candidates to young people, whether imposed by law on all parties (legislated quotas) or adopted by one or more parties (party quotas). There are wide variations in quota design across countries in terms of the type of quota, the age group specified, the percentage applicable and whether gender requirements are included.

Data on the share of young parliamentarians refer to the share of parliamentary representatives aged 40 and under obtained from the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Parline database. Data on young people as a share of the voting-age population refer to the percentage of people aged 20-39 as a share of people aged 20 and over, and were obtained from the OECD Demography and Population database.

Data on the average age of cabinet members were collected through desktop research of OECD countries' cabinet membership from official government websites, and the biographies of each member. The data reflect the situation as of February 2018.

### Further reading

OECD (2020a), *Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice: Fit for All Generations?*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/c3e5cb8a-en>.

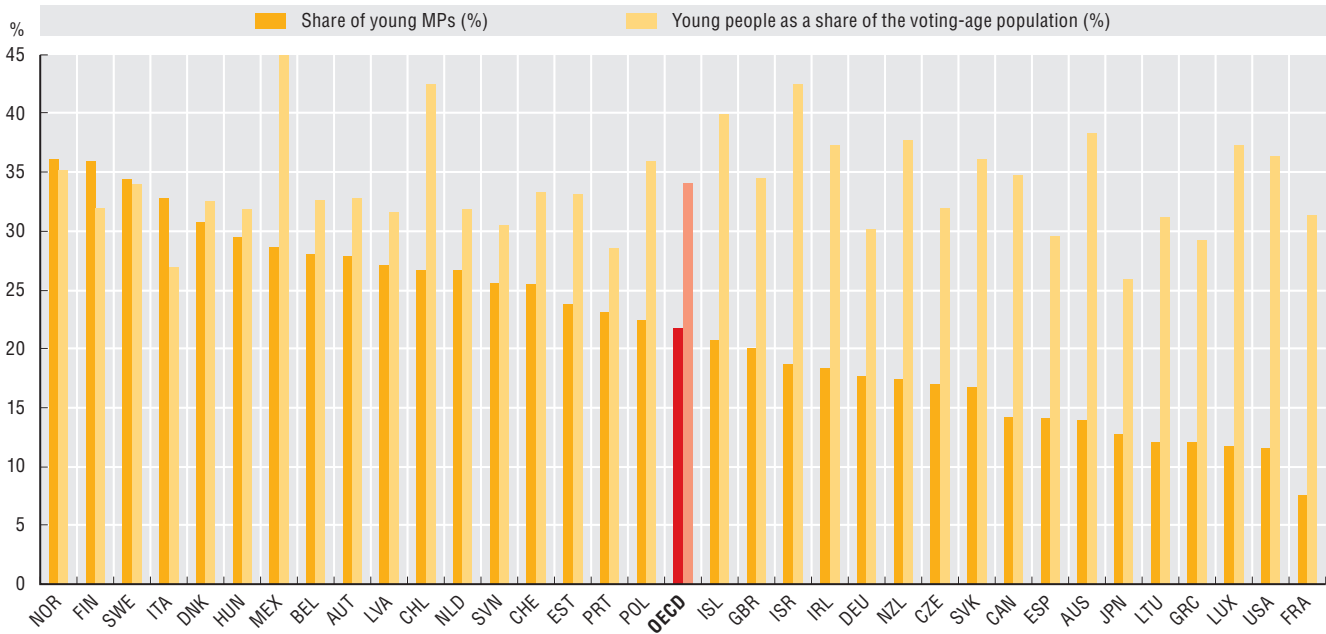
OECD (2020b), "Youth and COVID-19: Response, recovery and resilience", *OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19)*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c40e61c6-en>.

### Figure notes

3.12. Data on the share of young people as a share of the voting-age population refer to 2018.

3.13. Data for one cabinet member in Canada and three in Mexico could not be found. Representatives were selected based on the cabinet members listed on the official government websites.

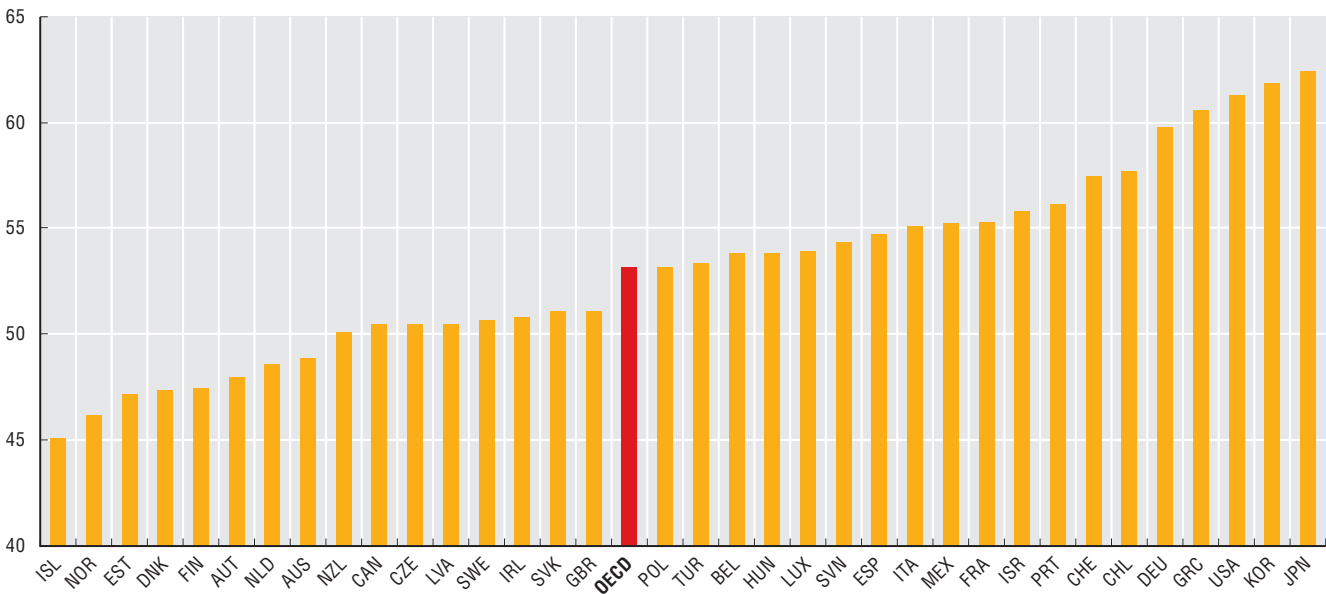
3.12. Share of members of parliament aged 40 and under and people aged 20-39 as a share of voting-age population, 2020



Source: OECD calculations based on OECD Demography and Population (database); Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Parline (database) on national parliaments.

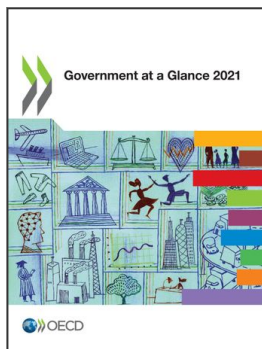
StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934257546>

3.13. Average age of cabinet members, 2018



Source: OECD (2020), Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice: Fit for All Generations.

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934257565>



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