

CALL FOR RESEARCH PAPERS

“In the minds of Gen Z: Understanding Today’s Citizens”.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Open to: young and early career scholars (20 to 35 years old)

Gen Z is a highly diverse group of young people, and it is broadly seen as a politically active generation of young people. On the streets, in the communities, and on digital spaces, Gen Z young people are (re)shaping politics and their societies. Across a wide spectrum of ideologies and leanings, the diverse civic and political actions of Gen Z reflect the needs and aspirations of this generation of young people. Understanding what motivates these actions can help grasp this generation of young people and how they see themselves in their societies. It is also a necessary step to better engage with them as they redefine societies.

“In the minds of Gen Z” is a global UNESCO knowledge project that explores the phenomena and factors informing Gen Z’s civic and political participation and actions. It is framed with the support of an Expert Group of eight scholars from all regions of the world and will produce knowledge to inform policy and programmes. The central research question/thread of the project is: *“What motivates and affects the civic and political actions of Gen Z and how?”*

The project aspires to:

- Increase understanding of the diverse phenomena that affect Gen Z’s civic and political actions.
- Provide policymakers with tangible policy orientations to recognise, support and harness Gen Z’s contributions to societies.
- Inspire further reflection and research on the subject.

Through this project, UNESCO also aspires to recognize and more fully understand the civic and political action in which young people are already engaged.

Call for Papers

Through this call, UNESCO seeks to collect brief research papers that can showcase the different phenomena and factors that inform Gen Z civic and political actions in different parts of the world. Those selected will feature as part of a global UNESCO study on the subject, in 2026.

Contributors: Young / Early career scholars (Master students, Research master students, PhD candidates, lecturers, etc.). These may contribute either as individuals or as leading authors of a broader research group that can be composed of both younger and senior scholars. Priority will be given to those papers that have meaningfully included Gen Z young people as part of the research process. If selected, the papers will also be subject to commentaries by Gen-Z young people.

Scope of papers (*for more information, please read Annex I*)

- 1.1. *Thematic scope:* Each paper is expected to contribute to the central research question of the project and to one of the five analytical categories (see Annex 1) through which to explore it. In doing so, papers can focus on any thematic area that the author is interested in analyzing. Contributors are particularly encouraged to address “hot topics” that are important to Gen Z young people.
- 1.2. *Temporal scope:* All papers must focus on Gen Z young people. This practically imposes a temporal scope that covers the past five to seven years at the most (i.e. between 2017 and 2024). Empirical data used in the analysis and that relate directly to Gen Z young people’s experiences must have been collected within this timeframe. Data or literature references

relevant to ontology, theory, concepts, historical or geographical contextualisation or discussion that does not directly relate to Gen Z young people's experiences may extend beyond that timeframe and do not need to adhere to the temporal scope indicated above.

1.3. *Spatial scope:* The call for papers is not focused on one specific region. The intention is to receive contributions from and relevant to the different regions of the world. Contributors may propose papers that address the central research question in the context of one of the following geographical spaces:

- A specific country
- Two or more specific countries, comparatively
- A specific region or sub-region
- Two regions, comparatively
- Globally, but with a very specific thematic and temporal angle.

Exploring "hot-spots" / sites where Gen Z political engagement appears most concentrated or seems to be having some direct and observable impacts, is encouraged.

1.4. *Audience:* The selected papers will be included in the global study, as described in the introduction above. The study will be addressed to a diversity of stakeholders and actors that are relevant to civic and political participation of Gen Z young people. This includes Gen Z young people and their constituencies, other youth organizations and networks, policy-makers, civil society, knowledge institutions (academia and think tanks), as well as development and private sector stakeholders at national, regional and global levels.

Ethics: contributors to the call for papers need to ensure that:

- When using primary data from third parties they have and provide the required ethics approval from an academic institution. Particular attention must be paid to sensitive data that may generate risk or harm for either the authors themselves or third parties.
- No plagiarized or self-plagiarized material should be included. Provide a proper credit or citation to the original work of the third parties.
- They clearly report to UNESCO any use of Artificial Intelligence means in drafting or consolidating the paper. This includes details about when authors used such means and for what purpose (e.g. to edit text they authored; to research literature or available data; etc.)

Length: each paper cannot exceed 10 pages (including information on methods, findings and discussion/analysis), single spacing, in Times New Roman 11.

Style: the papers should provide a rigorous presentation of research, per standard academic practice. Authors are also encouraged to consider the [Style Manual for UNESCO publications](#) and the [UNESCO's Guidelines on Gender-Neutral Language](#).

Process and timelines

All applications must be submitted by 30 June, CEST. UNESCO will select 10 papers respecting geographical and thematic diversity. Selected applicants will be notified by the third week of July 2025 and provided with the detailed framing document of the project (with information on concepts and on the five lenses of the project) which they can use as a reference point in their work.

All selected authors would need to submit their paper by 30 November 2025, explaining also any peer-review or quality assurance processes they may have completed by then. UNESCO will review the submitted papers and may revert to the authors for additional adjustments.

Finalized papers will be included in UNESCO's global study "In the minds of Gen-Z : Understanding today's citizens", due for publication in 2026.

Annex 1 – Suggested analytical categories

All papers would need to contribute to the central research question of the project:

"What motivates and affects the civic and political actions of Gen Z and how?"

Contributors may also offer insights to two related sub-questions:

- How can we best understand the variety of civic and political aspirations, values and actions of young people who constitute Gen Z?
- How are members of Gen Z variously acting politically? Are we seeing evidence of 'new' kinds of politics?

Contributors are encouraged to explore the central research question and sub-questions, through the lens of one or more of the following five major categories¹ that may affect Gen Z civic and political actions.

It is understood that these five categories are interconnected. One cannot be considered without the other. Analysis through each of these categories may shed light as to how the others motivate Gen Z civic and political engagement. It may also allow showcasing how each of these categories interconnect.

#	Categories	Tentative Research sub-questions under this lens: (N.b.: there is no leading question amongst these. These are examples, for inspiration that authors may consider, if relevant)
1.	Identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In which ways does identity-building affect Gen Z civic and political actions? • How may a specific identity characteristic (e.g. gender/ background/ class/ ability) motivate and influence the civic and political actions of Gen Z and how? • How is the evolving concept of citizenship affecting Gen Z civic and political actions? • What role does digital media play in shaping and sustaining civic identity? How does digital technology affect the civic and political choices of Gen Z?
2	Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of experiences affect Gen Z's civic and political actions and how? • Do Gen Z experiences of [xxx] shape their civic and political actions? If so in what ways? • How do Gen Z articulate their emotions and how do they say these influence their civic and political actions? • What kind of values inform Gen Z's civics and their politics?
3	Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the most critical types of relationships that influence Gen Z's civic and political behaviour? How and to what extent? • To what extent and in which ways do interpersonal relationships affect Gen Z civic and political attitudes and behaviour? • What type of impact do intergenerational relationships and

¹ These categories were identified at the Expert Group Meeting (September 2024) and built on a preliminary scan of available literature¹ by academics and other researchers (focusing on the period 2019-2024), practitioners (2021-2024) and in media (2023-2024).

		<p>relationships with institutions and government have on Gen Z's civic and political choices and aspirations?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does peer-influence and perception interact with Gen Z decision-making about their civic and political engagement?
4	Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the most critical types of Gen Z action that can impact Gen Z's civic and political behaviour? How and to what extent? • To what extent and in which ways does the pursuit of justice affect Gen Z civic and political choices? • How do Gen Z's actions as economic actors influence their civic and political engagement?
5	Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is growing up in the Anthropocene affecting Gen Z civic and political life and aspirations? If so, how? • In what ways has the polycrisis impacted Gen Z decision making about their civic and political emotions, ideas and engagement? • What role does education play, if any, in informing civic and political ideas, feelings and actions of Gen Z? • To what extent do civic and political actions of Gen Z diverge depending on context? Are there any global similarities across contexts?

Annex 2 – Privacy Notice

Your privacy is important to us. We take every precaution to protect the information you provide in accordance with the UNESCO Principles on Personal Data Protection and Privacy (<https://www.unesco.org/en/privacy-policy>).

In connection to the administration of the Call for Papers under UNESCO's global project "In the minds of Gen Z: Understanding Today's Citizens", UNESCO collects and processes information including personal data such as your name, email address, nationality, age, education level, civic or political activities.

The information you provide will be processed only for the purpose of (i) selecting the papers that will be produced and included in UNESCO global study under the them "In the minds of Gen Z: Understanding Today's Citizens" (due in 2026); (ii) communicating with you to inform you of the outcome of the selection process and, if selected, to share information and exchange on reviewing or finalising your paper; (iii) overall correspondence concerning your cooperation with UNESCO (if selected).

Access to this information will be strictly limited to UNESCO and to the Expert group of 8 scholars (in academic institutions in the US, Jamaica, Chile, Sierra Leone, Morocco, Australia, Singapore, Portugal) who will sign UNESCO confidentiality agreements.

The information you provide will be processed exclusively for the purposes described in this notice. Any other use will always be subject to further consent. Following the call for papers, if you are selected to produce a paper you have the option to author it anonymously or with a pseudonym, especially if the information in the paper may put you at risk or generate harm for you.

We will not process your personal data for direct marketing or other commercial purposes.

Your data will be stored for a [1]-year period for internal audit, reference and statistical purposes. Should you need to contact us for additional information or in order to access, correct or delete your data, please send an email to the following address: m.kypriotou@unesco.org. For any other questions regarding the processing of your personal data, contact privacy@unesco.org.