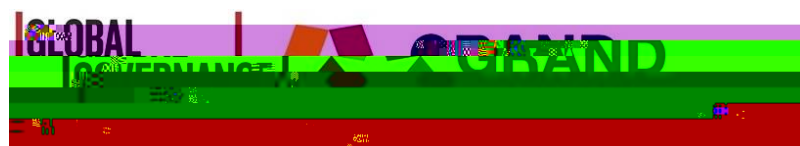


# Climate Governance and Youth Engagement

## Opportunities, Challenges and the Way Forward

Bringing young people to the forefront of international climate negotiations and ensuring meaningful youth engagement was one of the key priorities of the joint UK-Italy Presidency of the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference, commonly known as COP26. In this spirit, a range of youth-led and youth-oriented climate events were held in 2021, including the [Youth4Climate](#) pre-COP summit in Milan, as well as the '[Unifying for Change](#)' youth headline event held on COP26 Youth and Public Empowerment Day. Across these platforms, hundreds of youth climate leaders came together to highlight the importance of intergenerational equity, share their personal experiences of climate change, and call for policy and mindset shifts, in order to address the climate crisis. In response, high-level dignitaries, including COP26 President Alok Sharma and UNFCCC Executive Secretary Patricia Espinosa, recognised the valuable contributions of the youth climate movement and reiterated their commitment to meaningful youth engagement.

Despite the dedication of young people to urgent, ambitious, and equitable climate action, there remain key obstacles to meaningful youth engagement. Most notably, the complex dynamics of climate governance may limit the influence and impact of young people in reality. Furthermore, concerns of youth-washing and tokenism pose a significant challenge to the credibility and effectiveness of processes under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), fuelling doubt as to whether youth climate advocacy can make a tangible difference to the



## Key Insights

**COP26 was a pivotal moment for youth climate leadership.** Through pioneering a youth engagement strategy, the UK COP26 Presidency explicitly sought to amplify the voices of young climate leaders across the globe. Notably, COP26 saw the launch of the [Global Youth Statement](#), which sets out demands endorsed by over 40,000 young climate leaders from across the world. The official outcome document of conference, the Glasgow Climate Pact, also recognises the critical role of youth in addressing climate change and provides avenues for meaningful youth engagement moving forward.

**Despite such efforts, young people continue to be side-lined, if not tokenised, in international climate policymaking.** Opportunities for meaningful youth participation in UNFCCC negotiations remain constrained as many key decisions are still taken behind closed doors. Not all national delegations include youth representatives or provide them with the capacity, knowledge and tools needed for them to play more than an observer role. While opportunities are growing for young climate leaders to make their voices heard, they do not always



generation resides in the Global South, often finding themselves below the poverty line and already experiencing the devastating impacts of climate change.

**An intersectional approach is key**