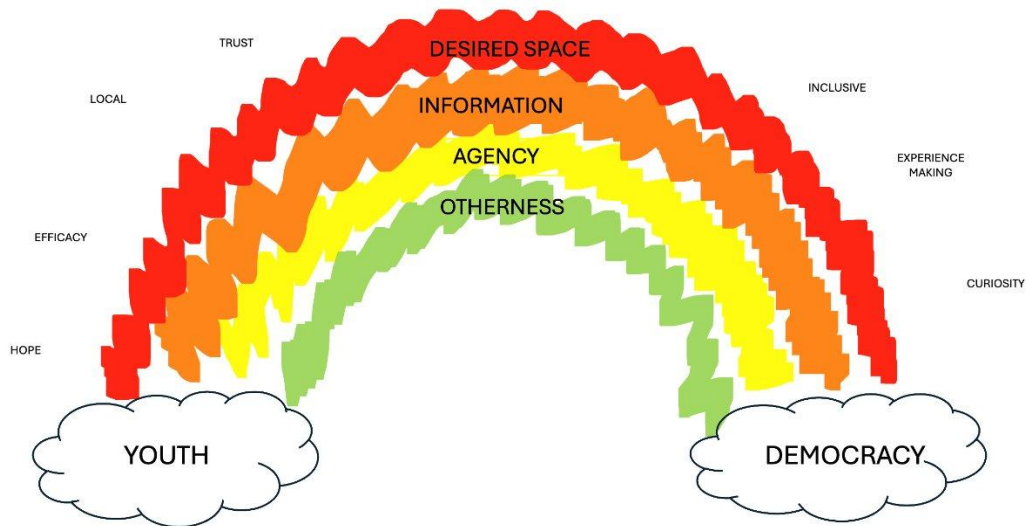


INTERNATIONAL
YOUTH
THINK TANK

THE DEMOCRACY RAINBOW

Every voice adds a color



Aarti Duhan, Adelia Giziatova, Aleksey Pak, Daeun Jung, Dahee Kim, Gayoon Yang,
Habib Raza, Hyeonjun Lee, Hyeyoon Han, Hyunji Park, Jargalan Selenge, Martina
Nansubuga, Marwa Andar, Nayeong Moon, Niu Ke Ting, Richa Singh, Seung Hyeon
Hong, Shakhzoda Khoshimova, Sihyun Kim, Siyoung Ahn, Vinh Leon Daniel Söderlund,
Xuan Huy Le, Yeeun Kim, Yeonsoo Jung

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Introduction

What happens when we stop feeling that democracy belongs to us? Democracy doesn't collapse in a single day. It fades over time when people are disconnected from the real conversation outside the power corridors. Democracy erodes when people stop believing that their voices matter beyond their own front door. We are 24 young people who believe democracy must begin with curiosity and participation: the willingness to ask, to listen, and to act. When that curiosity fades, so does participation and trust, leaving only exclusion. Our ideas work to transform our everyday encounters into spaces where listening is real and the consequences are visible. The goal is challenging but clear, to revive democracy's most basic pulse of belonging.

Where do we belong? We belong with other people, we belong in our communities. We've traded convenience for inefficiency, but we've also traded swiftness for misinformation, isolation for socialization, and chatbots for human interaction. Our circles become smaller, both online and offline. We've built the walls so high that beyond them all we see is indistinguishable hostility. We must tear down these walls and re-connect with those around us, those heard and those who cannot reach out themselves. Caring and communicating are not soft values layered on top of democracy; they are its precondition. Our battle against apathy and pessimism is the starting line for our path towards democracy.

Every voice fills the colors of the rainbow of democracy, turning unheard voices into shared civic agency. When power concentrates in distant and secluded institutions, the public fades into a silence where ordinary people feel unseen and isolated. Revitalizing this democratic spectrum requires the participation of every unique perspective by the same shared table. By gathering personal reflections and turning them into open dialogue and local collaboration, democracy then returns back to its dynamic reality where diversity and everyone's experiences collectively shape decisions and sustain the civic agency of citizens in the neighborhoods.

We, the 24 new IYTT Youth Fellows, are inviting you to be a part of your world. We hail from South Korea, India, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Mongolia, Uganda, Afghanistan, China, Uzbekistan, Sweden, and Vietnam. We want you to navigate various ways that keep you willing to ask, to listen, and to act around desirable spaces at the global level. Information without critical thinking is making society hardly reflect on minorities who have lost their voices. In everyday conversations, it's time to think of otherness with the sense of togetherness. By bringing up the active, lively talk by embracing each other, it can be the starting point to redesign our curiosity. Color the rainbow of democracy with our proposals.

[International Youth Conference 26 Seoul \(Live\)](#)

Theme 1: Desired spaces

1. Mapping together

1.1 Challenge

Democracy needs a place where diverse people can meet. Yet two problems stand in the way. First, information about available spaces is scarce. Even where spaces already exist, most people simply don't know about them. Public facilities are often listed on fragmented, city-specific platforms, or not listed anywhere at all, so genuinely usable spaces go unnoticed and unused. Private spaces, meanwhile, tend to be visible but often come at a cost, putting them out of reach for those who cannot afford them. Either way, spaces that could host democratic discourse end up inaccessible. In short, the real problem is fragmented, inconsistent, and often paywalled information, which prevents these existing assets from being utilized for civic participation.

Second, the people who do show up to existing public forums are almost always those who are already engaged, already informed, already motivated to participate. This leaves out a much larger group who have no prior interest in democracy and would never think to seek out a forum on their own.¹ What's missing is not just space, but also a way to draw in those who don't yet know that democracy has anything to do with them. What if there are spaces that anyone could find, anyone could feel comfortable stepping into, and simply start talking about democracy?

1.2 Proposal

We propose a **centralized platform** that brings together space listings currently scattered across different systems, along with their reservation functions, into a single, map-based platform. Any space that already exists but goes unseen can be found, easily checked for availability, and booked directly. This will be run by local governments to allow direct coordination with the municipalities that already own these spaces, shared responsibility for keeping them open and accurate, and the inclusion of small-scale local facilities that a private company would have no incentive to ever list. While the platform offers a reservation system built around public spaces, it remains open to anyone, including private individuals. Anyone who wants to share their spaces can join the platform, whether it's an apartment, a garden, or any other space they're willing to open up. Beyond simple bookings, the platform doubles as a live directory of civic life where users can browse what is happening across every listed space at any given time.

¹ Rosa, P., Guimaraes Pereira, Â. (2025) *Harnessing innovation on online deliberation : lessons learnt from the on-line citizen engagement process of the conference on the future of Europe*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/1524483>

Short-term bookings remain open to anyone with no prior approval required, keeping the platform easy to enter. Complaints are handled through a reporting system, where repeated or serious complaints trigger a review by civic panels that can suspend a user's access. For spaces that require a longer commitment, the platform opens a subset of listings for long-term rental for civic organizations. With a stable space to operate from, these organizations can run regular programs, such as workshops, discussions, community events, that help draw people. Civic organizations should apply with a proposal outlining their intended use, which is then reviewed by a panel. It will be evaluated based on public benefit, feasibility, and sustainability. Rental fees are kept at management-cost level, covering only basic upkeep such as utilities and maintenance. For long-term rentals, a refundable deposit is required at signing to discourage inactive or bad-faith applications, returned in full once the space is put to genuine use.

Even centralized information is only useful if it reaches people where they already are. Promotion can happen through festivals, parks, and existing communities. Also, it can be linked with Micro-Dosing Democracy (Proposal 3). After responding to a QR-based prompt, users are shown a link to this platform, inviting them to explore spaces where similar conversations can continue in person.

Yet knowing that a space exists is not always enough. A psychological barrier can remain, especially for those unfamiliar with civic spaces. To lower this barrier, organizations with a stable, long-term presence on the platform can host low-commitment, casual events that require no prior knowledge or commitment to attend. Simple incentives, such as certificates or volunteer hour credit, can further encourage first-time attendance. Over time, repeated, low-stakes encounters like these can turn an unfamiliar space into a familiar one, making the step from curiosity to actual participation.

As the platform matures, this shared infrastructure could grow beyond individual bookings into something larger. Spaces and organizations connected through the platform could co-host joint festivals, cross-district civic fairs, or seasonal events that bring together groups who might otherwise never have crossed paths, turning a simple reservation tool into the backbone of a genuinely interconnected civic community.

1.3 Impact

The platform's core goal is simple. Make spaces for democracy easy to access. By consolidating fragmented space information into a single platform, community gatherings become far easier to organize. Anyone, whether already civically active or simply curious, can find a space in minutes instead of navigating separate systems for every district.

Also, it is cost effective because the platform activates spaces that already exist, rather than requiring new construction. By connecting supply with demand, the platform turns idle, underused land into spaces that people actually and actively use.

Finally, this could attract even those with no prior interest in democracy by making civic activity easy to stumble upon in everyday life. It offers them a chance to take part in democracy. Long-term rentals, backed by a review process that favors sustainable, public-benefit-driven groups, give civic organizations a stable base to run recurring programs, turning one-time visitors into consistent participants over time.

2. Public canvas

2.1 Challenge

Democratic participation and public discussion often remain concentrated in formal political and civic spaces, such as town halls, public consultations and community meetings. While these spaces provide important opportunities for civic engagement, they can also create practical and psychological barriers for people who are unfamiliar with political processes or unable to regularly participate in them. Research on citizen participation similarly identifies accessibility, inclusion and the design of participatory processes as important factors affecting who is able and willing to participate².

However, opportunities for participation often remain separate from everyday life. People encounter issues affecting their communities in ordinary public spaces, but may have few accessible opportunities to express their views or engage in discussion about them. This can particularly affect communities that face social, economic, physical or cultural barriers to accessing formal participatory processes.

At the same time, public spaces are shared environments where people from different backgrounds naturally spend time. They therefore provide an opportunity to create alternative and more accessible entry points into civic participation.

2.2 Proposal

We propose **Public Canvas**, a programme that brings democratic participation into everyday public spaces through interactive art.

To identify and support new talent, the programme could organise competitions for local emerging artists, commissioning them to create unfinished interactive artworks around relevant local issues. These works would invite passersby to contribute through simple forms of interaction, such as stickers, tokens, or colours representing different perspectives. In this way, participants' responses would become part of the artwork

² OECD (2022), *OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/f765caf6-en>

itself, making community perspectives visible in public space.

Each installation would respond to the social and spatial context of its location. Artists could work with local residents and communities to develop questions, themes and forms of interaction that reflect issues relevant to the area. In this way, public spaces would be activated not simply as places for displaying art, but as spaces for expression, encounter and civic dialogue. The installations could be placed in everyday public spaces through collaboration with municipal governments and local partners.

To protect artistic independence, the programme could establish a transparent selection process involving artists and community organisations. Municipalities could identify broad local themes and provide space and logistical support, while the specific artistic interpretation would remain independent. Government approval would primarily concern safety, location and legal requirements rather than whether officials agree with a particular viewpoint. This principle is reflected in examples of designated legal graffiti walls in Swedish municipalities, where local authorities provide spaces for artistic expression while establishing rules for their use.³

The programme could also incorporate sustainability into the selection and design of installations by prioritising reusable, recyclable and low-waste materials. Reusable tokens or magnetic pieces, for example, could replace constantly disposable stickers.

Building on this local approach, the programme could operate through a shared international framework while allowing each city to develop its own local version. Public Canvas could therefore be adapted across different cities without requiring the same artwork or content to be reproduced. This model would connect local civic expression to a wider international network of participatory public art.

This approach draws on the model of projects such as Rimini Protokoll's *100% City*, which adapts a common artistic format to different cities by working with local residents and reflecting the specific characteristics of each place⁴. Similarly, Public Canvas would maintain a shared framework while allowing each community to shape its own content and artistic response.

A consistent visual identity would connect Public Canvas installations across cities, allowing people to recognise the programme as an ongoing platform for civic participation. Over time, Public Canvas could therefore develop into a global network of locally rooted civic art projects.

³ Swedish Parliament, *Vissa kulturfrågor* (Betänkande 2014/15), 2015; Malå Municipality, *Malå Graffiti Wall*. [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/betankande/vissa-kulturfragor_h201kru2/h](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/betankande/vissa-kulturfragor_h201kru2/html/) [tml/](https://en.mala.se/kultur-och-fritid/mala-kulturskola/mala-graffitivagg/) ; <https://en.mala.se/kultur-och-fritid/mala-kulturskola/mala-graffitivagg/>

⁴ Rimini Protokoll, *100% City*. <https://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/en/projects/100-stadt-7-1>

2.3 Impact

Public Canvas would lower barriers to participation by creating accessible entry points into civic engagement outside formal political settings. By bringing participation into familiar public spaces, the programme could reach people who may not normally engage with civic processes⁵.

It would also encourage democratic dialogue by creating spaces where people can share different perspectives and encounter views they might not otherwise engage with. Rather than presenting a single interaction as complete democratic participation, Public Canvas would provide an accessible entry point for people to encounter civic issues, express a perspective and engage with others.⁶

Finally, Public Canvas would create engaging participation by making civic issues more tangible, creative and approachable. By connecting art with everyday public life, the programme could make civic participation feel less distant and more relevant to people's daily experiences. Ultimately, Public Canvas aims to create spaces where people can express, interact and participate.

3. Micro-dosing democracy

3.1 Challenge

For democracy to thrive, it is imperative that citizens have meaningful opportunities to influence decisions that affect their everyday lives. Habermas has famously argued for a public sphere where citizens can debate, influence policies, and hold power accountable.⁷ Yet for many citizens, democracy remains a distant and abstract concept happening in parliaments, disconnected from the places and decisions that shape their daily lives. This is not necessarily a problem of political apathy. We have identified two structural barriers:

- People aren't necessarily apathetic toward their communities; democratic participation is often too costly to fit into their lives.
- Even when people do participate, they often cannot see how their participation translates into outcomes.

⁵ Swedish Parliament, *Vissa kulturfrågor* (2014); Malå Municipality, *Malå Graffiti Wall*. OECD (2022), *OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes*.

⁶ Ashley, Amanda J. (2021), "The Micropolitics of Performance: Pop-up Art as a Complementary Method for Civic Engagement and Public Participation," *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 41(2), 173–187.

⁷ de Angelis, Gabriele (2021), "Habermas, Democracy and the Public Sphere: Theory and Practice," *European Journal of Social Theory*, 24(4), 437–447. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13684310211038753>.

Political disengagement, especially on a local level, is reinforced by the many shortcomings of traditional civic engagement models that make it difficult for ordinary people to participate in political decision-making. The most obvious problem is accessibility; in order to participate in traditional decision-making processes, one must physically travel to designated locations such as city halls, school auditoriums, or community centers. Town hall meetings and other formal participation can require hours of the citizens' time outside their work, caregiving, and everyday responsibilities. Furthermore, the legalistic, bureaucratic, and policy-heavy language used in policy documents and public consultation materials creates an impression that participation in public discourse is difficult or tedious. Even if the citizens took the time to participate in these discussions, it takes months or years to witness the policy in practice.

Due to high barriers to participation, only certain groups, namely those who have the time and resources to approach the traditional public sphere, participate disproportionately. Thus, public decisions reflect the voices of the already-engaged instead of reflecting the diversity of experiences and needs within the broader community. This makes other citizens who did not have a say in the decision-making process feel that politics is distant or irrelevant to them, producing low political self-efficacy. This feeds into the vicious cycle of political apathy, leading even fewer people to participate.

With our proposal, we aim to break the cycle by lowering the cost of participation while making its consequences visible. Rather than asking citizens to make a large commitment to democracy, we give them a small opportunity to experience it. By making civic participation *quick, local, accessible, comprehensible, and visibly consequential*, we hope to turn participation from an occasional civic duty into an everyday practice.

3.2 Proposal

Our suggestion, Micro-Dosing Democracy, is a hyperlocal, low-barrier form of participatory budgeting in which residents prioritize small-scale municipal public projects in the places they use every day. The proposal contains four phases as follows.

[Phase 1: Selection]

Firstly, the municipality supplies a pool of eligible, already-planned micro-projects for a city. The budget for these projects will be relatively small, a few thousand dollars per project at most. The relatively small scale is intentional: the project is designed as a low-stakes entry point for people who may care about their communities but do not participate through conventional political channels. The municipality will then propose 3-5 feasible options, having the floor open for suggestions from local community organizations. There will be multiple projects throughout the year ranging from facility improvement to selecting public artwork.

Participation opportunities should be deliberately concentrated in communities whose voices are underrepresented in existing civic processes due to time, mobility, socioeconomic, or accessibility barriers. The projects are distributed based on both geographic coverage and demonstrated participation/resource gaps.

[Phase 2: Micro-Voting]

Once the projects have been selected, the municipality will place QR codes both directly on infrastructures that need improvement and on related facilities. The QR codes should be where the stakeholder is. For example, if the policy is related to childcare, the QR codes could be attached on playgrounds and daycare centers, whereas bus stations and subway stations will be used for issues regarding public transportation. When one scans the QR code, they will be presented with a micro-survey. It will look something like this:

We have \$3000 to spend on this bus stop. Rank your priorities:

1. Plant shade trees behind the bench.
2. Install heated seating for the winter.
3. Improve lighting around the stop.

The questionnaire uses a simple ranked-priority voting system, so citizens can rank the options to their liking. The voting will take 1-2 minutes maximum, and the survey will be written in very simple language, available for translation in multiple languages. To prevent ballot stuffing while preserving anonymity, votes can be rate-limited by device fingerprint or localized IP geofencing. In order to maximise engagement, the webpage should be visually appealing, with accessible design. In regions without internet access, the votes could be done in an analog way as well, such as paper ballots or voting tokens in boxes representing each option.

[Phase 3: Implementation]

Once the residents have ranked their priorities over a predetermined amount of time, the government will put the proposal into action. The highest-ranked option will become the default allocation, unless legal, technical, or equity considerations prevent implementation. In such cases, the municipality must publicly explain why the final decision differs from the community preference. The implementation timeline should be communicated to participants in advance, with consistent progress updates.

[Phase 4: Feedback]

Feedback is going to happen on multiple levels to ensure the citizens are informed about the process of their communities' projects, thus fostering continuing engagement. Immediately after the residents submit their answers, they are presented

with a live tally with statistics of votes so far. This gives people a sense that they are participating in a collective decision. The live tally could look like this:

1,247 people have voted

shade – 47%

heated seats – 38%

lighting – 15%

As stated above, the municipality must provide a decision update explaining which option has been selected and why. After a project is complete, citizens will receive a ‘You Made This’ notification, closing the feedback loop completely.

Micro-participation through online QR-code voting could also lead to deeper offline participation. For example, a notification could be sent informing residents of relevant town hall meetings or democratic involvement events. This way, Micro-Dosing Democracy could serve as a gateway to having the difficult but crucial conversations on democracy.

3.3 Impact

We anticipate the impact of our proposal in three levels: individual, community, and overall democracy.

On the individual level, the immediate experience of participating in a meaningful local decision, followed by visible feedback, can strengthen citizens’ political self-efficacy. By seeing their input contributing to tangible changes in their surroundings, citizens will see a connection between their own participation and the change. This may develop greater confidence in their ability to participate and greater connection to their local communities.

By bringing participation directly to public spaces and lowering the time, mobility, and knowledge barriers of conventional civic engagement, Micro-Dosing Democracy can involve residents who are often underrepresented in local decision making. We can anticipate more participation from actual stakeholders, including time-poor residents or people with mobility/accessibility barriers. Because participation takes place where people actually use public facilities, decisions can also better reflect the needs of everyday users. Eventually, citizens could move from micro-voting to deeper civic engagement as well.

Finally, repeated micro-participation can normalize civic engagement as part of everyday life rather than something reserved for elections, town halls, or politically active citizens. By connecting small acts of participation to transparent decisions and

tangible outcomes, the project aims to create a virtuous cycle of participation: participation → visible impact → self-efficacy → deeper participation. Ultimately, the project seeks to transform democracy from an occasional civic obligation into an accessible, visible, and everyday practice. We need to make democracy live where citizens do.

Theme 2: Information

4. Critical thinking companion

4.1 Challenge

Our generation has grown up immersed in a social media driven world, where exposure to information is constant, algorithmically curated, and rarely neutral. Unlike previous generations, who encountered a relatively limited and more centrally verified set of information sources, young people today scroll through feeds shaped by engagement driven algorithms that do not distinguish between what is true and what is simply compelling.

This creates a fundamental problem. People often cannot recognize what is right or wrong, where credible information comes from, or how to understand the broader reality behind a single post or headline. False or biased information on social media does not stay contained; it shapes political opinion, deepens polarization, and, over time, erodes the shared factual foundation that democratic debate depends on.

Traditional responses to this problem have relied heavily on formal education, teaching media literacy in classrooms as a subject disconnected from students' actual daily media habits. However, misinformation is not encountered in a classroom; it is encountered in the fifteen seconds between one video and the next. Young people need more opportunities to practice critical thinking in real, live situations, at the exact moment they are consuming information, rather than only in a theoretical setting removed from where the problem actually occurs.

4.2 Proposal

We propose the creation of a Critical Thinking Companion: an integrated feature that works alongside users while they consume media on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, or YouTube. Rather than existing as a separate application that users must actively choose to open, the Companion functions as a chatbot-style widget embedded directly into the scrolling experience, meeting users exactly where the misinformation appears.

The core design principle behind this proposal is that the Companion does not tell users what is true or false. This distinction is deliberate. A tool that simply labels content as "true" or "false" risks being dismissed as biased, censoring, or simply another authority to distrust, particularly among audiences already skeptical of institutional fact-checking. Instead, the Companion is built to encourage users to evaluate information independently, prompting them with critical questions such as: "Who created this information?", "What evidence supports this claim?" and "What is the original source of the information?"

To structure this process, the Companion uses the SIFT method, a widely recognized framework in media literacy education: Stop before reacting or sharing; Investigate the Source to understand who is providing the information and why; Find Trusted Coverage by checking whether credible outlets report the same claim; and Trace the claim back to its Original source to see if it has been distorted along the way.

Implementation of this proposal would require partnership with major social media platforms to integrate the Companion at the interface level, as well as collaboration with media literacy organizations and educators to ensure the prompts and questions used are pedagogically sound rather than superficial. A phased rollout, beginning with opt-in availability before expanding to default integration, would allow the tool to be tested and refined based on real user behavior.

4.3 Impact

The Critical Thinking Companion is designed to build a habit, not deliver a one time lesson. By repeatedly prompting users to pause and question information at the exact moment they encounter it, the Companion helps normalize critical thinking as part of everyday media consumption rather than a skill reserved for the classroom.

Over time, we expect this to increase resilience against misinformation among young people, reducing the likelihood that false or manipulated content spreads unchecked through social networks. Because the Companion teaches a transferable method, SIFT, rather than providing verdicts on individual pieces of content, users are equipped to apply these skills independently, across platforms and contexts, long after any single interaction with the tool.

More broadly, widespread adoption of this approach can contribute to a healthier digital information ecosystem. As more users develop the habit of pausing, investigating, and tracing claims to their source, the collective vulnerability of the public to coordinated misinformation campaigns decreases. This directly supports democratic resilience: an electorate that critically evaluates the information it receives is better equipped to participate in informed policymaking and to hold decision-makers accountable based on fact rather than manipulation.

5. Proactive dashboard

5.1 Challenge

Current welfare systems operate predominantly on a reactive, application-based framework. Individual citizens are forced to bear the full administrative burden of navigating fragmented information, comparing complex eligibility criteria, and manually submitting redundant verifications. This design structurally excludes the populations with the lowest administrative capacity, such as the elderly and reclusive

youths, driving higher non-take-up rates.⁸ This failure occurs across different governance models:

- In less digitized administrations, citizens are caught in cycles of physical paperwork and redundant agency visits.
- In digitally advanced states, fragmented public infrastructure prevents the realization of a proactive, unified interface.⁹

Critical citizen data remains isolated across distinct public entities (e.g., tax authorities, municipal offices, and pension administrators). Without standardized interoperability across these institutions, the welfare delivery system remains disjointed¹⁰, eventually leaving eligible beneficiaries behind.

5.2 Proposal

To resolve this universal fragmentation and address non-take-up rates, we propose creating a Proactive Dashboard. Instead of requiring citizens to search for dozens of public institution portals, this platform will serve as an intuitive, one-stop interface that automatically connects individuals with the public benefits they are eligible for. This platform will be integrated directly into each government's primary public portals as a core feature of their user dashboards.

Crucially, this dashboard does not completely rely on AI models nor provide sensitive data automatically. To verify welfare eligibility, it requires additional data and this demands strict transparency, legal accountability, and public trust. Therefore, the dashboard will operate on a practical, rules-based matching mechanism.

- **Standardized Life-Stage Profiles:** Identifies key, non-invasive eligibility criteria across public administrative records; such as age, household structure, verified income tier, employment status, and housing conditions.
- **Life-Milestone Bundling:** Instead of forcing citizens to navigate different websites, the platform brings welfare policies altogether based on real-life milestones, such as entering university, unemployment, parenthood, or retirement.
- **Deterministic Eligibility Engine:** The dashboard avoids AI to access confidential

⁸ Herd, Pamela. (2019). Administrative Burden: Policymaking by Other Means. 10.7758/9781610448789.

⁹ OECD (2019), *The Path to Becoming a Data-Driven Public Sector*, OECD Digital Government Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/O59814a7-en>.

¹⁰ "Lindert, Kathy; Karippacheril, Tina George; Rodriguez Caillava, Inés; Nishikawa Chavez, Kenichi. Lindert, Kathy; Karippacheril, Tina George; Rodriguez Caillava, Inés; Nishikawa Chavez, Kenichi, editors. 2020. Sourcebook on the Foundations of Social Protection Delivery Systems. © World Bank. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/34044> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO."

data. Instead, it relies on pre-programmed, transparent eligibility criteria modeled after public standard calculators like KOSAF's recognized-income framework. This system cross-references clear thresholds, such as household size, asset limits, and verified income brackets and decides the eligibility of scholarship. The system delivers reliable legally compliant results without algorithmic bias.

- **Consent-Driven MyData Framework (Real-Time API Interoperability):** To prevent security threats from centralized data storage, the platform does not store personal or financial records on a single database. Sensitive data remains securely in each originating agency's registry (e.g., tax authorities, civil registries, and healthcare boards). Under the citizen's explicit consent, the dashboard uses secure MyData APIs¹¹ to retrieve and verify these records in real time only during the eligibility check, automatically pre-filling applications and ensuring citizen data sovereignty.
- **Ensuring Offline Accessibility:** Technology is not universally accessible, and the improved system may not be able to reach older adults immediately. Implementing the system through offline channels as well could help address these limitations. For instance, installing an extra booth or adding dashboard access support agent service on the current municipality office desk can be a solution. Additionally, welfare officers can utilize the proactive dashboard to more effectively notify elderly residents of their eligible benefits. Therefore, online and offline accessibility should continue to work hand-in-hand to ensure that the system remains accessible to everyone.

5.3 Impact

The Proactive Dashboard transforms public service delivery from a reactive, gatekeeping model into a proactive, rights-based entitlement system, aligning with international standards for human-centered administration.¹² By automating eligibility cross-checks and offering pre-filled applications, it shifts the administrative burden away from vulnerable citizens and onto an efficient digital infrastructure. Ultimately, this bridges the gap between legal policy coverage and actual recipients, ensuring that individuals who previously missed out due to digital illiteracy or complex bureaucracy are no longer isolated from the social safety net.

However, this proposal is based on digitalization and may not directly tackle the information accessibility problem across generations and the world. A robust level of digitalization of the government system should be established to embody this

¹¹ OECD (2025), *Digital Government Review of Korea: Harnessing Digital and Data to Transform Government*, OECD Digital Government Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9defc197-en>.

¹² OECD (2024), "OECD/LEGAL/0503", in *Recommendation of the Council on Human-Centred Public Administrative Services*, <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0503>.

proposal. Yet, if we start from embodying this transition in a solid background, then it will create the potential opportunity to spread across the world, if it is combined with other efforts. Also, this may face different levels of private data that the government collects and handles in each nation, leaving room to be optimized and reach prior social consensus first hand.

6. AI democracy defender

6.1 Challenge

There is no denying that AI has changed our lives, with benefits and drawbacks. In general, AI and learning algorithms extrapolate from the data they are given and can be easily misused and the rules have not caught up. AI is changing the way political information is created and shared. These days politicians, parties are using realistic videos, audios, ads, speeches, in elections to manipulate voters often without letting people know AI is involved. For instance, a deep-fake AI video falsely depicting an Irish presidential candidate announcing her withdrawal circulated just ahead of polling day in October 2025.¹³ By the time people discover the information is false it may already be spread and reached thousands or millions of people on social media.

The problem becomes more serious when it comes from a person of trust or from a popular influencer. AI makes it more difficult because fabricated content looks or sounds realistic, at the same time citizens might not have technological knowledge to identify AI generated information. This creates a gap between technology experts and citizens, who have less or little knowledge, to judge the information based on their tools. If citizens can't recognise the information they are digesting is real or fake, people are losing the ability to tell what's real. This eventually erodes trust and contributes to weakening democracy.

6.2 Proposal

We are proposing something we call *AI Democracy Defender*, a framework which builds around one simple idea which is promoting AI use transparency in politics and give citizens their way to catch and recognise misinformation before it spreads. Rather than banning AI in politics, the proposal would set standards for politicians, political parties, influencers and other actors who use AI to create or spread political information.

First, legal qualifications for ethical use of AI in political communication would be introduced. Politicians, political parties, campaign organisations, etc who regularly use AI to create political content would be required to have legal qualification. The qualifications must focus on AI ethics, misinformation, manipulation, political bias and

¹³ Liggett, J. (2025, October 22). "Disgraceful" deep-fake ai video condemned by presidential candidate. BBC. Retrieved September 26, 2026, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/czxkn504lqpo>.

responsibility of content creators. These qualifications must be designed by experts from different fields involving legal experts, political scientists, ethicists, media professionals, and technology experts, etc.

Second would be the AI disclaimers, if AI is used for any political communication activity then it should be clearly communicated to the audience that content possesses AI content. A label such as “AI-generated” or “AI-assisted content” could be placed on the content. It doesn’t mean that disclaimer content would be false, rather it would give citizens the information they need to evaluate it more carefully.

The next step would be a simple checklist before posting AI-generated political content. It would act like a final reminder before information is published. It could ask several questions which would make ethical decisions making a part of the normal process rather than something considering only after misinformation has already spread.

An alert system would be introduced when AI-generated misinformation is confirmed so citizens would be able to report suspicious content creators and which could be reviewed through human verification. When content is confirmed to be misinformed then an alert could be placed on the post explaining the content has been verified misleading. In this way the system would work informing citizens rather than deleting the content instantly, it would allow people to develop their own judgement.

Finally, profiles could receive an authenticity ranking based on their history of sharing verified and authentic content. It would give citizens a broad view of profiles, for instance a profile that constantly shares verified information could receive higher rating, while a profile with history of sharing misinformation could be rated low. Together, these five measures would create a system that works before, during, and after political content is published.

6.3 Impact

The expected effect of the “AI democracy defender” is to create a more transparent political information environment. The biggest change won’t be punishment, it will be learning. Every report becomes something people can learn from together, so citizens can get more information on spotting misinformation over time instead of protecting it once. Accountability becomes compulsory where politicians and influencers can’t hide behind “the algorithm did it.” And trust becomes something people can measure. Overall, democracy becomes more resilient, because informed citizens are hard to manipulate, no matter how advanced AI gets.

Theme 3: Agency

7. Keep or toss

7.1 Challenge

The actions we choose to make everyday are not necessarily ours. The ways in which we think and act are generally informed by the choices and experiences made long before we were born. They inevitably inform our understanding of democracy and our own role in its making.

As we grow and learn how to navigate the world around us, we come to rely on the knowledge and experiences passed down across generations. We find ourselves in situations where it is barely possible to differentiate between imposed values and what we as a young generation truly value. We tend to adapt to expectations, follow the existing scripts, and internalize the traumatic experiences of intergenerational inequality that prompt us to comply and accept the current state of affairs as it is. The previous generations' inability to break the cycle and allow themselves to think of relevant and tangible solutions may result in a problem of learnt helplessness.

Learnt helplessness is a state in which repeated exposure to negative experiences perceived as uncontrollable leads individuals to expect that their actions will not affect outcomes, thereby reducing their motivation to continue trying and potentially fostering resignation to persistent social inequalities.¹⁴ Such a pattern of remaining passive and indifferent to the constant pressures eventually solidifies as a habit, consequently normalizing the lack of critical reflection and questioning of the status-quo.

7.2 Proposal

We propose the establishment of an intergenerational dialogue, which provides a space for older and younger generations to share their concerns, experiences, and visions on how to practice democratic principles and facilitate civic participation. Such dialogues have several stages and attempt to bridge not only the generational gap but also resolve the potential problem of low civic participation rates, often associated with the state of learnt hopelessness discussed above. First, we gather people's opinions and ideas in either offline or online format, based on their mobility needs and personal preferences. Second, we identify the common themes within the concerns and suggestions raised in the previous stage and initiate an open dialogue, following the "Keep or Toss" principle. Finally, after a series of negotiations and coming to agreement

¹⁴ Baistow, K. (2000). Problems of powerlessness: Psychological explanations of social inequality and civil unrest in post-war America. *History of the Human Sciences*, 13(3), 95–116.

on the concerns, we develop a project or initiative that bridges the generational gap and directs common effort into tackling the identified issues.

We propose to conduct such dialogues quarterly and check the practical outcomes of the developed initiatives. During these dialogues, the residents will gather around to answer four simple questions: (1) What habit do we have today? (2) Do we like it? (3) Is it intact? (4) Are we gonna keep having it? After the probation period of 3 months, people have agency to decide whether the project is effective and should be continued.

7.3 Impact

The participation of both older and younger generations in a dialogue helps find a common ground in identifying and tackling the issues. Through the dialogue, they are able to share, reflect, and learn from each other, collectively deciding on what to keep and what to toss. Through the creation and implementation of social projects, they practice their agency and come to understand what they are capable of when united. Thus, the helplessness, once learnt, is eventually unlearned and provides a fruitful ground for further positive change on a community level.

8. Civic potluck

8.1 Challenge

Democracy can weaken not only when institutions are openly attacked, but also when citizens experience it as distant from their everyday lives. Many people encounter democracy mainly through elections, technical language, and polarised political debate. As a result, governance may appear to be something managed by experts and institutions rather than a shared practice in which ordinary citizens can participate.

This distance can create discouragement. Citizens may care about public issues but still be unable to imagine how their concerns could influence decisions beyond voting or expressing dissatisfaction. Such disengagement is not necessarily apathy; it can result from a lack of civic confidence and from not seeing oneself as a capable democratic actor.

In some countries and communities, the challenge is even more fundamental. Citizens may wish to imagine democracy, yet have little sustained experience of meaningful democratic participation from which to do so. Where public life has long been shaped by authoritarian rule, conflict, exclusion, or weak institutions, people may not have seen how accountable representation, free deliberation, and collective decision-making can work in practice. The absence of such reference points can limit democratic

imagination—not because people lack the desire for democracy, but because they have had few opportunities to experience or observe it.

At the same time, democracy should not be treated as one fixed model. Different societies have developed different ways to organise representation, participation, accountability, and local decision-making. While core democratic principles—such as inclusion, political equality, and fundamental rights—must be protected, there is no single institutional formula that can simply be transferred from one context to another. Citizens need accessible opportunities to learn from this diversity and to imagine democratic practices that fit their own communities.

8.2 Proposal

Civic Potluck is a network of recurring global and local gatherings where people explore democratic and governance practices from around the world through accessible language and visual formats. The “potluck” metaphor reflects its central idea: everyone brings something to the table. Citizens, educators, civil-society organisations, researchers, and public officials can contribute experiences, questions, and examples of collective decision-making.

The project would require an international coordinating body. Its role would be to collect and assess cases from different regions, ensure that a broad range of experiences are represented, develop translations and visual materials, and connect local hosts. This body would facilitate exchange without imposing a single model of democracy on participating communities.

Every Civic Potluck event must be conducted in plain, inclusive language that can be understood regardless of participants’ educational background or prior political knowledge. Technical and institutional jargon should be avoided or clearly explained, with visual materials, interpretation, and translated resources used where necessary.

Each gathering would introduce selected practices through short stories, diagrams, visual cards, and facilitated discussion. These may include familiar mechanisms such as participatory budgeting, citizens’ assemblies, local consultation forums, and youth councils. However, Civic Potluck would not be limited to conventional images of democracy or formal state institutions. It could also present community-based mutual aid, cooperative governance, local conflict resolution, collective care, or informal deliberation when they enable people to share knowledge, express concerns, and shape common life.

These practices would not automatically be labelled democratic or presented as ideal models. Instead, each case would be discussed critically: What problem did it address? Who was included or excluded? How were decisions made, and what forms of

accountability existed? Participants would then relate these approaches to challenges in their own communities and develop simple proposals for more inclusive local decision-making.

8.3 Impact

Civic Potluck aims first to make democracy more tangible. By encountering concrete examples of participation and governance, citizens may develop a stronger sense that democracy is not limited to voting or party politics. This can strengthen civic efficacy: the belief that people can understand public issues, communicate their views, and contribute to collective decisions.

In the short term, the gatherings could create spaces for constructive public dialogue among people who do not usually meet. They would allow participants to discuss local challenges without immediately reducing them to partisan conflict. In the medium term, some locally developed ideas could lead to small-scale civic experiments through partnerships with municipalities, schools, or community organisations.

In the long term, Civic Potluck seeks to renew political culture by encouraging citizens to see democracy as unfinished, diverse, and collectively shapeable. Its purpose is not to establish one universal model of democracy, but to give people the knowledge, confidence, and imagination needed to create their own democratic practices. To remain meaningful, the project should include inclusive facilitation, follow-up opportunities, and clear links between discussion and local action.

9. People's hackathon

9.1 Challenge

In many societies, unequal access to wealth, status, and public institutions determines whose ideas influence collective decisions. When citizens repeatedly see decisions made without a credible route for their concerns to affect outcomes, they can enter a cycle of resignation—often described as voluntary servitude—in which withdrawal appears more realistic than participation. Conventional consultations may deepen this problem when people are invited to speak but cannot see a traceable response.

The issue is therefore not only that citizens are unheard, but that their voice is not guaranteed to have consequences. Without a clear connection between participation and implementation, political engagement can appear symbolic, while those with existing power and resources continue to shape the public agenda.

9.2 Proposal

People's Hackathon is a recurring *Guaranteed Voice Hackathon* in which a public authority commits in advance to implement one citizen-developed project within a published deadline. Before each event, the authority must reserve a defined budget, name the responsible department, and publicly state the project's scope, legal requirements, and evaluation criteria. This turns participation from a consultative exercise into a binding public commitment.

The process begins with open talking-point sessions, conducted in plain and accessible language, where residents identify a shared problem and form project teams. Experts and experienced practitioners then supervise development workshops and rehearsal sessions, helping teams assess feasibility, cost, equity, and implementation without taking ownership of citizens' ideas. Following public presentations, citizens vote for the project they want to see implemented over a defined period.

The winning eligible project is assigned to the responsible public body, which must publish progress reports at fixed milestones and a final report upon completion. To prevent tokenism, expert assessments, vote results, budgets, and any implementation changes should be public. A project may be altered or halted only for clearly defined legal, rights-based, or demonstrably unfeasible reasons, followed by an independent review and a corrective process.

9.3 Impact

People's Hackathon enables citizens to experience the full path from identifying a public problem to deliberation, decision, and implementation. Seeing a collectively chosen idea produce an observable result can strengthen civic efficacy and give participants the confidence to act again and encourage others to do so.

The project can also interrupt the cycle of resignation. Once citizens have experienced that their ideas can become concrete public action, it may become harder to accept the belief that participation is meaningless. Most importantly, the initiative can build trust between government and citizens—but only if the implementation guarantee is honoured transparently. Fixed deadlines, named responsibility, public reporting, and independent oversight make both success and failure visible, establishing participation as a real part of public decision-making rather than a symbolic gesture.

Theme 4: Otherness

10. Council of the disenfranchised

10. Challenge

Across the world's major destination countries, immigration status is the main reason employers suppress reporting of abuse. Employer- or sponsor-tied visa systems, including the United States' H-2A program, the UK's Seasonal Worker Visa Scheme, and Australia's PALM scheme, make a worker's continued legal status partially or entirely dependent on the same employer they would need to report.

The chilling effect this produces is severe. In the United States alone, an estimated 6 percent of the entire workforce risks deportation simply by filing a claim with a labor agency, and a landmark study of low-wage injured workers found that only 9 percent of those hurt on the job ever claimed workers' compensation, with half of those who did report experiencing retaliation, including employers contacting immigration authorities.

Most country's top federal law enforcement priority is to detain, deport, and prosecute migrants, and to keep them from entering the country without authorization. Protecting workers in the labor market by ensuring that their workplaces are safe and that they get paid every cent they earn is barely an afterthought. This situation leaves migrant workers especially vulnerable to employer lawbreaking. Furthermore, workers who find the courage to speak up can be retaliated against in ways that can set the deportation process in motion.

10.2 The proposal

Democracy is built around representation, yet not everyone affected by public policy has an equal ability to influence it. We therefore propose the creation of an independent committee: a permanent public institution that gives systematically underrepresented groups a protected channel to raise grievances, participate in policymaking and bring overlooked issues to the attention of the government.

The committee would not replace parliament, courts or existing human-rights institutions. Instead, it would operate as an independent democratic safeguard, specifically designed to identify gaps in representation before they become invisible within mainstream political processes. Its initial mandate would focus on groups whose political voice is structurally limited, including: migrant workers and undocumented migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, ethnic, religious and sexual minorities, children and young people and other communities identified as politically underrepresented within each country.

International migrants already represented 167.7 million workers in the global labour force in 2022, yet migrant workers can face significant barriers to accessing justice. The ILO notes that undocumented workers may fear deportation or retaliation when reporting exploitation, even where they retain labour rights. At the end of 2025, the world was home to 41.6 million refugees and 9 million asylum seekers, demonstrating the scale of populations whose relationship with the political systems governing their daily lives may be limited by citizenship, legal status or displacement.

Children represent another fundamental democratic gap. With approximately 2.3 billion people under 18, decisions made by today's governments will profoundly affect people who often have no direct electoral voice in making them. The Council would therefore create a structured mechanism through which being outside the electorate does not mean being outside democratic consideration.

How it would work, each country would establish a Council composed primarily of members drawn from the communities it represents. Rather than having government officials select representatives, members could be selected through a combination of nominations from recognised community organisations, open applications, community elections or deliberative selection, rotating seats to prevent permanent institutional control by a single organisation. The Council should include dedicated representation for migrant and refugee communities, minorities and future generations, while allowing each country to determine its own composition according to its demographic and political context and members would have fixed terms and operate independently from political parties.

The Council would operate a confidential multilingual hotline and digital reporting platform through which individuals could report workplace exploitation or unpaid wages, discrimination, harassment or violence, unsafe working conditions, denial of essential services. Crucially, reporting a labour violation should not automatically expose a vulnerable person to immigration enforcement. This is not a proposal to give undocumented migrants immunity from immigration law. It is a proposal to separate access to protection from the fear of immediately triggering punishment for reporting abuse. The ILO identifies fear of immigration enforcement and employer retaliation as major barriers preventing undocumented workers from exercising their rights so the council could therefore establish strict confidentiality rules and refer cases to the appropriate labour, legal, human-rights or law-enforcement authority when necessary.

The Council would not become another court, Instead, trained case officers would assess complaints and connect individuals with existing institutions: labour inspectors, legal-aid providers, human-rights commissions, courts, refugee services or victim support organisations where several complaints reveal the same systemic

problem, the Council could investigate the pattern and issue a public policy recommendation rather than treating these as ten unrelated complaints, the Council could identify a systemic labour protection failure and formally recommend regulatory or enforcement change which transforms individual grievances into democratic intelligence.

The Council would publish periodic “Voices from the Margins” reports identifying recurring problems and proposing legislative or administrative reforms where government ministries and legislatures would be required to formally respond to major recommendations within a defined period.

The Council could also be given the right to submit policy recommendations, request parliamentary hearings, participate in consultations on legislation affecting represented communities, publish accessibility and representation assessments and trigger independent reviews when serious systemic problems emerge and its influence would therefore not depend on whether a marginalized community has enough political power to attract media attention.

The Council could also encourage countries to expand local political participation for long-term non-citizen residents, where appropriate. Sweden provides an existing example: foreign citizens and stateless residents who have been registered in Sweden for at least three consecutive years can vote in regional and municipal elections, even though national parliamentary voting remains restricted to Swedish citizens. This principle could be explored more broadly: people who live, work, pay taxes and raise families within a community should have some avenue to influence decisions that directly shape their everyday lives, even when national citizenship has not yet been obtained.

The Council would therefore complement rather than replace electoral participation under the guiding principle that it should not speak for marginalized communities when those communities can speak for themselves but create the institutional conditions for them to speak directly as its purpose is not to create a permanent category of “victims,” nor to give one group authority over another but to address a structural weakness in democracy as those who have the least political power can often be the people most affected by political decisions. The Council of the disenfranchised would give those communities a protected route from: experience → complaint → evidence → representation → policy and doing so, it would expand democracy beyond the question of “Who gets to vote?” and ask the equally important question: “Who gets heard before decisions are made?”

10.3 Impact

By separating the channel for reporting abuse from the immigration enforcement system itself, the Council directly targets the mechanism that is the primary driver of underreporting. We would expect a measurable increase in reporting rates for wage theft, unsafe conditions, and workplace discrimination once workers have access to a body that is structurally independent of immigration authorities and cannot itself trigger status consequences.

The jury-style, six-month rotating representative structure is designed to produce a second, distinct effect. Because representatives are drawn from and reflect the actual diversity of the immigrant population, spanning nationality, age, gender, occupation, and immigration status, the Council's policy recommendations carry a legitimacy that appointed advisory boards or advocacy organizations often lack, since they are not speaking on behalf of immigrants but structurally composed of them. Over time, this should strengthen immigrants' political participation and sense of solidarity, converting a population that is currently spoken about in policy debates into one that formally speaks within them.

11. Human library

11.1 Challenge

In today's society, immigrant workers, people with disabilities, and other minorities are technically protected, yet remain structurally excluded from participation in everyday life. These are issues that occur not because protections don't exist on paper, but because the people affected rarely have a chance to make their voices heard to shape how those protections are implemented. More importantly, prejudice persists in ways that are often unconscious rather than deliberate therefore most people simply aren't used to imagining what daily life feels like from another person's position. What makes this problem particularly resistant to change is the near total absence of direct contact between the majority population and the people being affected (the "others").

11.2 Proposal

We propose the Human Library, a program operating on two themes. The first one, a general public track and a dedicated elementary school field trip track in which immigrants, refugees, people with disabilities, and other individuals whose lives have diverged from convention are recruited and paid to hold direct, one-on-one or small-group conversations with the public.

The "Human book" is deliberately broad by design. Rather than drawing exclusively from immigrant and disabled communities, it is built around the organizing principle

that everyone is "the other" in some dimension of their life like career-switchers, estranged family members, and people who have left conventional paths for unconventional ones. This is a structural safeguard, since if "the human books" are limited to immigrants and disabled individuals, there are risks of being perceived as a spectacle organized around a narrow set of identities, whereas a mixed "human books" ensures no visitor can predict in advance what kind of "difference" they will encounter, which is what allows the encounter to be read as a conversation between equals rather than an exhibit. Also, "Human Books" would set their own session schedules rather than being assigned fixed shifts as they may face difficulty regarding conflicting work hours with existing jobs, caregiving responsibilities, irregular health or accessibility needs, or for refugees in particular, unpredictable demands tied to their legal status (immigration appointments or hearings etc). A rigid shift system would effectively exclude many of the very people the program depends on.

To keep costs low and the model exportable across cities and countries, the program is embedded inside existing public library branches rather than requiring new venues. Each session runs approximately one hour and departs deliberately from the seminar or invited-speaker format.

There are no standardized scripts or question cards, and each "Human book" designs their own format. Roles of asking and answering rotate between Book and participant over the course of the session, rather than remaining fixed in one direction. Books are fairly compensated for their time, and verified participation hours are designed to count toward recognized community engagement credit within existing points based migration systems, or toward a renewable visa category tied to continued program participation rather than to a single employer therefore it reduces the vulnerability that comes from immigration status depending on one job.

For elementary schools, a Human Library visit is written into the mandatory civic education curriculum via national or municipal education authorities, rather than left as an optional booking that individual schools or organizations choose to make.

While the model draws its core format from the existing Human Library movement founded in Denmark in 2000¹⁵, it departs from that model in three structural ways. Where existing Human Library events operate on a volunteer basis and are typically organized as occasional events hosted at the discretion of individual libraries, universities, or corporations, this proposal converts the same format into permanent public infrastructure. Books can be paid employees or be granted scholarships depending on the visa situation rather than volunteers, participation is linked to a concrete immigration-status benefit rather than goodwill alone, and school participation is mandated through education policy rather than left to individual

¹⁵ *Unjudge someone*. The Human Library Organization. (2026a, May 31). <https://humanlibrary.org/>

institutions to opt into. These three shifts move the model from an awareness raising initiative into a standing policy with direct material stakes for the immigrant and minority communities it involves.

11.3 Impact

Because the program is embedded in existing public library branches rather than requiring new facilities, it is inherently low-cost to launch. Also it is very easy to replicate across cities and countries with very different migration profiles, from nations defined by refugee intake to those built primarily around labor migration. Because roles of asking and answering rotate within each session, and because sessions are built around genuine two-way exchange rather than a one directional talk, we would expect deeper and more durable shifts in participant attitudes than those produced by passive formats like assemblies or guest lectures, particularly among the student cohorts who encounter the program repeatedly across their school years under the mandatory curriculum track.

For the Human Books themselves, as the program is not merely a volunteer-based model, its impact is more concrete. Fair pay converts what is elsewhere unpaid emotional labor into recognized, compensated work, and the link to a renewable visa category tied to program participation gives immigrant and refugee Human Books a measure of legal security independent of any one job. This is a direct material benefit, not merely a downstream social one, and it distinguishes the program's impact from that of awareness focused initiatives that ask participants to share their story without addressing their underlying legal or economic precarity.

For the long run, as successive groups of students and adult participants accumulate real relationships with a wide range of Human Books, we would expect the broader public conversation around migration and labor policy to shift, creating political space for structural reforms (like fair wage enforcement, safer migration pathways, and anti-discrimination protections) since there is currently a struggle to gain traction in most host countries precisely because they lack a public constituency with any lived connection to the people they would protect. Because the program itself generates that constituency as a byproduct of its everyday operation, it functions as a public education tool and also as a base of political support for the very policy changes immigrant communities most need.

12. Democracy without barriers

12.1. Challenge

Democracy does not begin when a voter enters a polling station. It begins when citizens can hear, see, read and understand the choices available to them yet for

millions of people with disabilities, political information remains inaccessible. Campaign manifestos may not be available in Braille or screen-reader-compatible formats. Political speeches may lack sign language interpretation or captions. Videos may have no audio description. Websites and digital campaign materials may not be designed for assistive technologies.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises accessible political participation as a fundamental right, requiring voting procedures, facilities and materials to be accessible and protecting the right to participate on an equal basis with others. The challenge, however, is not always simply a lack of willingness. **Accessibility costs money.** Producing Braille materials, hiring sign-language interpreters, captioning videos, creating audio-described content, redesigning websites and providing accessible campaign events can create additional expenses for candidates. If those costs are left entirely to individual campaigns, accessibility can become inconsistent particularly for independent candidates or candidates with fewer financial resources.

This creates an uncomfortable contradiction because a candidate should not have to choose between running an affordable campaign and making that campaign accessible to every voter. South Korea demonstrates the problem. The country already requires certain candidates to provide Braille election campaign bulletins, and has introduced measures such as sign-language interpretation for election debates. Yet research examining the 2025 presidential election found that Braille ballots and audio voting devices covered only 45% of polling stations, while 60% of polling stations reportedly lacked sign-language video explanations. Researchers also identified inconsistencies in the quality and formatting of candidates' accessible campaign materials.

In 2023, South Korea's National Human Rights Commission also received a complaint after campaign materials published by the election commission were inaccessible to screen readers, demonstrating that the problem extends beyond printed materials into digital campaigning. The issue is therefore not whether accessibility matters but who bears the cost of making democracy accessible.

12.2. Proposal

We propose the creation of a **Government-Funded Accessible Campaign Fund** administered independently by national electoral authorities. The fund would reimburse candidates and political parties for reasonable, verified costs incurred to make campaign information and activities accessible to persons with disabilities.

Eligible expenses could include: Braille and large-print campaign materials;

professional sign-language interpretation; captioning and transcription of campaign videos; audio description and audio versions of campaign materials; accessible, screen-reader-compatible campaign websites; accessible digital campaign content; Easy Read versions of key policies; accessible campaign events and communication services.

The proposal principle being accessibility should be a democratic requirement, not a campaign luxury. Governments would establish a minimum accessibility standard while providing financial support to candidates who meet it. Candidates would not need to independently absorb the additional costs of compliance. The fund could operate through a reimbursement or voucher model. Candidates would submit eligible accessibility expenses to the electoral authority, which would reimburse approved costs up to a defined limit. Accessibility providers could also be pre-approved to reduce administrative burdens.

The system should be designed around universal standards but local flexibility. Countries would determine the formats most appropriate to their populations and languages, while meeting a common principle being political information must be reasonably accessible to voters with different disabilities. This approach does not require governments to fund political messages themselves. It funds equal access to the democratic conversation. Importantly, persons with disabilities and their representative organisations should participate in developing the accessibility standards. Accessibility should be evaluated not merely by whether a format was provided, but by whether it was actually usable.

12.3. Impact

It creates equal access to political choices. A voter cannot make an informed political decision about information they cannot access. Funding accessible campaigning would allow voters who are blind, visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing to engage with candidates' policies more independently moving accessibility from afterthought to participation.

It removes the financial penalty for inclusive candidates. Candidates should not be financially disadvantaged simply because they choose to communicate with a wider range of citizens. Public support would particularly benefit independent and lower-funded candidates, preventing accessibility from becoming something only wealthier campaigns can provide. There is already evidence that financial support can reduce barriers to political participation. The UK's former EnAble Fund provided disability-related support such as BSL interpretation, transportation, specialist equipment and Braille campaign materials.

It strengthens democracy beyond election day. Accessible campaign information gives citizens the opportunity to compare policies, understand political debates and make informed choices before voting. This is important because a democratic vote is meaningful only when citizens have a meaningful opportunity to understand their choices.

It creates a model that can travel globally. Countries differ in their electoral systems, resources and languages. But the underlying principle is universal. A government-funded accessibility mechanism could therefore be adapted across different political contexts while maintaining the same objective being no candidate should be unable to communicate with part of the electorate because accessibility is too expensive.

It changes how we understand equality. Equal democracy does not necessarily mean giving every candidate or voter exactly the same resources. Sometimes equality requires removing the additional barriers that some citizens face. The goal is not to give persons with disabilities an advantage but rather to ensure that accessibility does not become a disadvantage.

Democracy is often described as the ability to choose our representatives but before citizens can choose, they must first be able to access the choices. If campaign information is inaccessible, political participation is already unequal before a ballot is cast. If making that information accessible creates additional financial burdens for candidates, then inclusion becomes dependent on campaign resources rather than democratic principle. The Accessible Campaign Fund offers a practical response because by publicly supporting the cost of accessible campaigning, governments can ensure that candidates are able to communicate with the entire electorate and that voters are able to engage with political choices on a more equal basis. Democracy should not make candidates pay extra to reach citizens who are already too often excluded.

Concluding remarks

We began this report by asking a simple question: what happens when we stop feeling that democracy belongs to us? Across the twelve proposals gathered here, our answer has taken many forms, yet each one returns to the same conviction. Democracy is not a system to be observed from a distance, but something to be practiced in everyday life. Together they sketch the outlines of a democracy where participation costs less, information is more accessible, and differences become a source of connection rather than division.

We have therefore tried to bring democracy closer to where people already are. Creating spaces where people can gather, deliberate, and feel that their voices matter; making political information fairer and easier to access, understand, and act upon; and building opportunities to encounter perspectives and identities unlike our own. Rather than asking citizens to overcome the many barriers standing in their way, we ask how institutions and communities might meet them halfway.

At the same time, we do not present these proposals as finished blueprints. They are very much a starting point offered in the spirit that shaped them: curiosity, willingness to listen and the belief that small acts of participation can rebuild a sense of belonging. We, the 24 IYTT Youth Fellows, present these proposals in the hope that they inspire and invite conversation about how we can improve our society for ourselves and for those who come after us.

A rainbow appears when sunlight breaks through the clouds. A cloudy day is not an ending, but a moment that holds the possibility of new colors. The same can be said of democracy. When it feels uncertain, we choose not to give up. Instead, we look for new perspectives in each other's voices.

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THE DEMOCRACY RAINBOW



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Contact:
Urban Strandberg
Managing Director / Co-Founder
urban.strandberg@lindholmen.se
+46 (0) 730-59 55 15
<https://iythinktank.com/>