Youth Engagement Study

YOUTH-LED INITIATIVE

DATA COLLECTION FOR DRAFTING THE YOUTH MONITOR.

Phillipsburg, Summer 2025



Research design, training, and analysis supported by

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Abstract

This exploratory study examined how youth in Sint Maarten experience opportunities to express their opinions and participate in decision-making, and how adults view youth engagement. The youth survey collected responses from 297 young people across a broad and diverse range of demographic groups. Given its size and demographic spread, the youth dataset provides a reasonably robust exploratory picture of youth perspectives on Sint Maarten. In contrast, the adult survey (96 respondents) was recruited through passive, voluntary participation and resulted in substantial overrepresentation of highly educated women and individuals involved in youth work. As a result, the adult findings cannot be generalized to the broader Sint Maarten population and should be interpreted as indicative only.

Youth reported being engaged primarily by peers and parents, while formal actors, especially the government, rarely requested their input. They felt most comfortable sharing their views at home and with friends and expressed limited interest in additional engagement opportunities outside these familiar spaces. Barriers to youth sharing their opinions included adults not allowing them to speak, a lack of opportunities, and fear of public speaking. Awareness of participation platforms and Children's Rights was low. Youth expressed the strongest interest in sharing their opinions on education, youth violence and crime, and safety, and preferred digital communication channels such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok.

The adult survey, which was strongly skewed toward highly educated women, showed strong conceptual support for youth involvement across educational, financial, and daily life decisions. Adults believed youth should be engaged often or very often, but cited barriers such as youth immaturity, lack of time, and insufficient platforms. Awareness and agreement with Children's Rights were high overall, though a considerable group disagreed with some autonomy-related rights such as freedom of expression. Adults overwhelmingly believed that youth should feel heard, yet their reported consistency in acting on this belief varied.

Together, these findings highlight gaps between youth willingness to participate and the limited opportunities available to them, as well as misalignments between youth priorities and adult expectations. The results point to a need for improved communication, more accessible engagement structures, greater awareness of rights, and stronger follow-through when youth share their perspectives.

Research design support, youth research training, methodological guidance, data analysis, and reporting executed by the Research Consultant:

Bart van der Meijden
van der Meijden Graphics & Consultancy

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT
MOST IMPORTANT FINDINGS- DECEMBER 2025

1 Who asks youth to share their opinion?

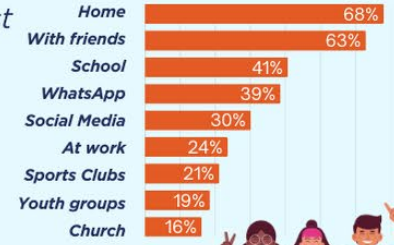
Youth are most often asked for their opinion by their peers, and least by the government



- #1 **Peers**
- #2 **Parents**
- #3 **Own initiative**
  (Not asked, but youth share their opinion on their own initiative)
- #4 **Social Media**
- #13 **Government (last)**
  63% *indicated* ***never*** *to have asked for their opinion by* ***Government.***

2 Where does youth want to share their opinion?

Youth feel most comfortable sharing their opinion at home, and with friends.





3 What prevents youth from speaking up?

#1 reason
Adults won't let them speak

#2 reason
Lack of opportunities

#3 reason
Fear of pubic speaking



4 What happens after youth provide their input on something?

Youth often don't feel heard after they shared their input on something.



They don't always hear what is being done with their input afterwards.



5 What is the youth aware of?

Youth are poorly aware of the existing opportunities to voice their opinions; the best-known platform was with (49% knowing it).

On average youth are only aware of 4 out of the 12 listed ***Children's Rights.***



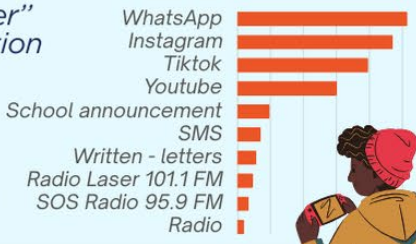


6 What are topics youth want to provide input on



7 How does youth communicate?

Youth prefer "newer" online communication channels and also indicate that they are currently being approached via these channels.



This data is collected by Young People

This youth-led research was designed and carried out by eleven trained youth researchers (ages 15–20), who developed the questions and collected the data themselves to understand how young people in Sint Maarten experience and participate in decision-making

Want to learn more?

Scan the QR code for the full research report

Full report

Adult survey results

Because the adult survey sample was not representative (skewed toward female and highly educated respondents) its findings which can be viewed in the full research report should be viewed as exploratory rather than conclusive.



Introduction

1.1 Background

The meaningful participation of youth in societal decision-making is a cornerstone of inclusive governance and a fundamental right under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Despite growing recognition of this principle, the extent to which young people feel heard, are seen, and are involved in shaping the decisions that affect their lives often remains unclear, particularly in small islands such as Sint Maarten. Without robust data on youth perspectives and experiences, policy efforts may fall short of addressing the real needs and barriers faced by this group.

This project was launched to explore youth participation in Sint Maarten from two critical perspectives: the perspectives of youth themselves and the attitudes and behaviours of adults, including parents, caregivers, and professionals working with youth. By studying both dimensions, this research aims to provide a more complete picture of how youth voice is valued, facilitated, or restricted within the community.

1.2 Objective

The primary objective of this youth-led research initiative is to assess the extent to which young people in Sint Maarten (ages 0–24) perceive opportunities to voice their opinions, whether they are listened to, and how often their input leads to meaningful action or change. While youth are broadly defined as ages 0–24, this study focuses on youth aged 15–24 due to ethical, safeguarding, and practical considerations in data collection. This includes investigating their awareness of their rights and mechanisms for participation, the barriers they face in expressing their views, and the platforms and communication channels through which they are currently engaged or wish to be engaged.

Recognizing that youth participation does not occur in a vacuum, a second objective was introduced during the final phase of the project: to assess adult perspectives on youth engagement. This adult survey (targeting adults aged 25 and older) examines whether and how adults include youth in decision-making, the value they place on youth voice, and the cultural, institutional, or personal barriers that may limit youth participation. It also measures adults' awareness of children's rights and existing participation channels.

1.3 Approach

This research was designed and conducted by a group of eleven youth researchers (ages 15–20) participating in the 2025 Business Outreach and Placement Program (BOPP). Under the supervision of the Department of Youth, the youth researchers were trained by an external research consultant in core principles of social research, including question formulation, bias mitigation, sampling, and ethical data collection. The training was carried out through three interactive workshops, followed by 3 weeks of field-based data collection.

Methods

2.1 Project Design

This project uses a **participatory, exploratory research design** to collect locally relevant data about youth participation in Sint Maarten. The aim is twofold: first, to gather data to inform youth-related policies and to contribute to the upcoming Youth Monitor Report, which will serve as a foundation for discussions at the 2026 Youth Summit; and second, to empower young people by placing them at the center of the research process.

Given the topic of youth engagement, it was essential to use a **youth-led approach**, ensuring that youth were not just consulted but in charge of every step. This includes defining the research question, designing the survey, collecting the data, and reflecting on the findings. The result is a project that not only generates valuable insights but also builds youth ownership, critical thinking, and research capacity.

2.2 Youth Research Training

The youth research team consisted of 10 participants (aged 15–20), all enrolled in the BOPP summer program. Over the course of three interactive workshops, the participants received extensive training in key research skills:

- Workshop 1 (July 7th, 2025) focused on the foundations of research: types of research, the purpose of data, and how to formulate effective and neutral research questions. Participants learned how to break down a broad research theme into measurable components.
- Workshop 2 (July 9th, 2025) centered on bias in research. Through a series of interactive activities, students explored concepts such as confirmation bias, sampling bias, social desirability bias, interviewer bias, and interpretation bias. They also practiced how to recognize and prevent these biases when building their survey.
- Workshop 3 (July 11th, 2025) addressed sampling, data collection, and ethics. The youth researchers learned about representativeness, diversity and inclusion, sample size, and the importance of consistent data collection procedures. They designed their own canvassing plan, learned how to identify underrepresented groups, and practiced how to approach respondents professionally.

  **Visual summaries of each workshop can be found in Appendix A1*

2.3 Survey Development

The two guiding research questions for the project were:

- Youth survey: *"To what extent do youth in Sint Maarten feel they have meaningful opportunities to voice their opinions or input, are heard or listened to, and receive feedback or see action based on their contributions? What barriers prevent them from*

speaking up? And what are the current and preferred channels through which youth are engaged?"

- *Adult survey: "To what extent do adults in Sint Maarten believe that youth should be involved in or engaged in decisions that affect them, and how does that belief translate into behaviour? What barriers exist to including youth, and how aware are adults of children's rights and existing opportunities for youth participation?"*
- **Full questionnaires for both surveys can be found in Appendix C1 & C2*

The youth team collaboratively deconstructed these general questions into relevant themes and workable questions to create two separate surveys:

Youth Survey:

#	Topic	Questions
1	Opportunities for participation	Asked for input by who, which setting most comfortable, what platforms, what topics.
2	Heard	Feeling heard, follow up's
3	Children's Rights	Awareness
4	Barriers	What are barriers for youth to provide input
5	Communication Channels	What are most used channels, through which would youth want to be approached.

Adult Survey

#	Topic	Questions
1	Attitude youth involvement	what topics, what situation/setting, what type/severity of decisions
2	Barriers & real-life allignment	Barriers for adults to involve youth in decision making, acting on their beliefs.
3	Children's Rights	Awareness & which they agree with
4	Platforms for youth participation.	Awareness
5	Feeling heard	Importance for youth of "feeling" heard.

2.4 Data Collection

Target Group

Each survey had a defined target group based on the research goals and practical considerations during implementation.

The youth survey targeted young people aged 15 to 24 living on the Dutch side of Sint Maarten. This age range was chosen because individuals under 15 require parental consent, which is difficult to obtain in real time during on-the-spot public data collection. In addition, respondents needed to speak English, as the survey and data collection were conducted exclusively in English.

The adult survey was open to all persons aged 25 and older, residing on Sint Maarten or on Saint Martin and working on the Dutch side. No further exclusions were applied.

Data Collection Procedure

The youth researchers created a canvassing plan during Workshop 3 on July 11th, in which they divided neighbourhoods and strategic locations among themselves to ensure broad coverage.

A protocol for data collection *(*Appendix A2)* was jointly developed and reviewed, covering ethical behaviour, informed consent, approaches to participants, and the proper recording of responses.

Youth data collection took place between July 15 and August 5, 2025, in locations including Philipsburg, Simpson Bay, St. Peters, and Cole Bay, and was facilitated by the DoY. Researchers worked in pairs and operated primarily in the late morning and afternoon.

On July 22nd, during the mid-way check-in session, the group evaluated its progress to date and, based on the respondents' demographics at that time, discussed any necessary changes to the data collection plan. The group decided that they didn't need to increase a specific group, but that they needed to canvass outside of work hours. Accordingly, arrangements were made to start canvassing from 5-8 PM on Thursday and Friday evenings.
After fieldwork concluded, the survey remained open for additional voluntary participation via a QR code (posted on social media and on posters).

Adult data collection began in mid-August 2025, following the final workshop. The survey was distributed digitally, primarily via a QR code, government social media accounts, and community partners. No canvassing was done for this phase.

Instruments
Both surveys were administered using KOBOToolbox, a secure, mobile-compatible platform that supports offline data collection and centralized data management. Youth researchers used tablets provided by the Department of Youth.

2.5 Analysis
Survey data were exported and analysed using statistical software tools (Excel and SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize responses. The research group decided to include several demographics in the surveys to be able to differentiate between groups for further insights, or to evaluate if the sample size was a sufficient representation of the Sint Maarten population.

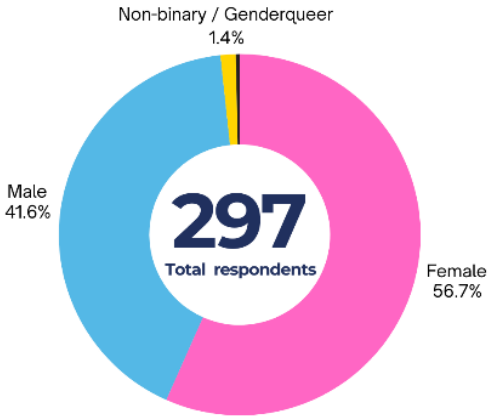
**Full datasets can be found in Appendix B1 & B2*

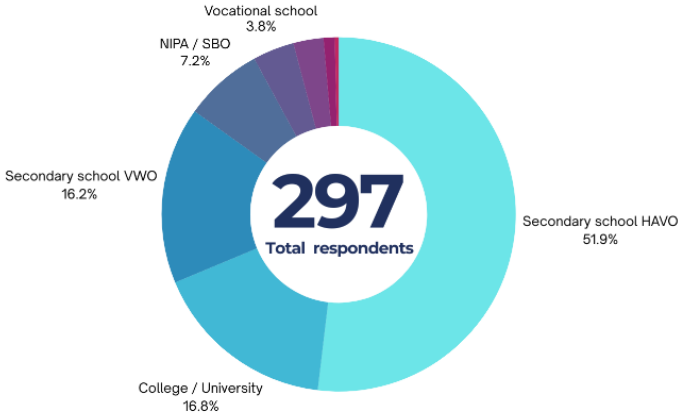
The youth survey collected data on age, gender, education level, and ethnic/cultural background. The adult survey covers the following: age, gender, education level, and whether they are a parent/caregiver, specifically whether they work with youth, or work in a youth-related field.

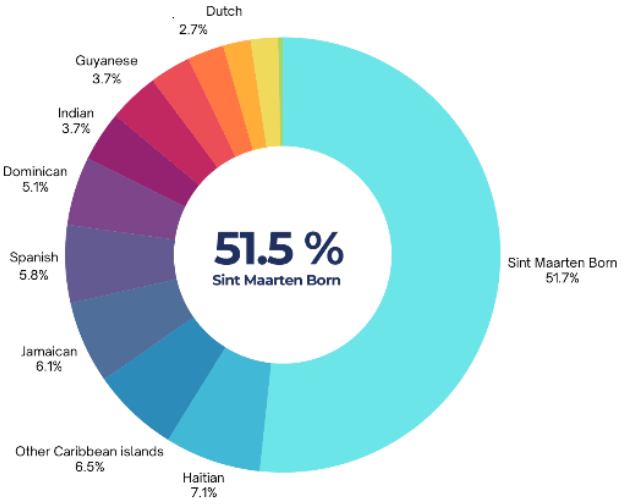
Results – Youth Survey

3.1 Demographics

A total of 297 young people participated in the youth survey. The sample consisted of 41.6% male, 56.7% female, and 1.4% non-binary or genderqueer respondents. Participants represented a broad range of educational backgrounds, with the majority currently enrolled in or having completed secondary school (HAVO) (51.9%). Smaller groups reported college or university education (16.8%), secondary school VWO (16.2%), NIPA/SBO programs (7.2%), or vocational school (3.8%).







The ethnic and cultural composition of the sample reflects the diversity of Sint Maarten's youth population. Just over half of respondents were Sint Maarten–born (51.5%), followed by youth identifying as Haitian (7.1%), from other Caribbean islands (6.5%), Jamaican (6.1%), Spanish-speaking/Latino (5.8%), Dominican (5.1%), Indian (3.7%), Guyanese (3.7%), Chinese (3.1%), European Dutch (2.7%), and French (2.0%). A small group reported being unsure of their ethnic background (2.0%).

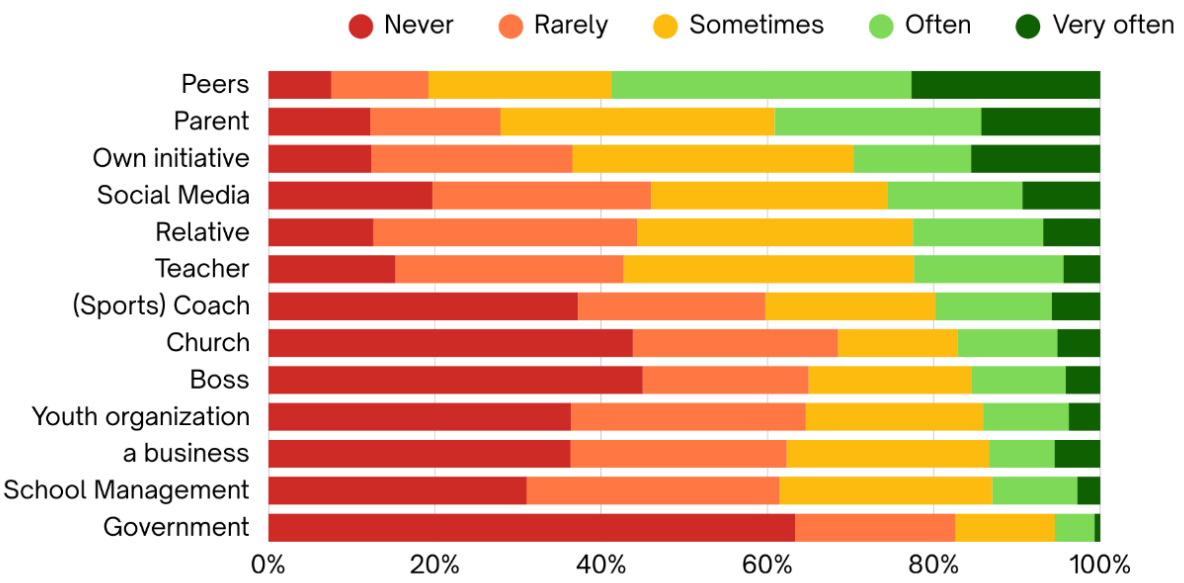
3.2.1 Who engages youth?

Q1: In the past year, how often have you been asked for your opinion or input?

Youth reported that they are most frequently asked for their input by their peers and, to a lesser extent, by their parents, with both groups showing high proportions of *often* and *very often* responses. Many young people also noted that they share their views on their own initiative or through social media.

Engagement was considerably lower in formal or institutional settings. Youth were rarely asked for their opinions by teachers, coaches, church leaders, youth organizations, businesses, or school management, with responses largely concentrated in the *never* to *sometimes* range. The government stood out as the group that engages youth the least, with the vast majority reporting they had *never* or only *rarely* been asked for their opinion in the past year.

Some differences emerged across education groups. Vocational school students were more likely to report being asked for their opinion by school management (40%) than students at other educational levels (8–15%). In addition, NIPA/SBO students reported much higher levels of peer engagement (43%) than other groups, which ranged from 0–28%.

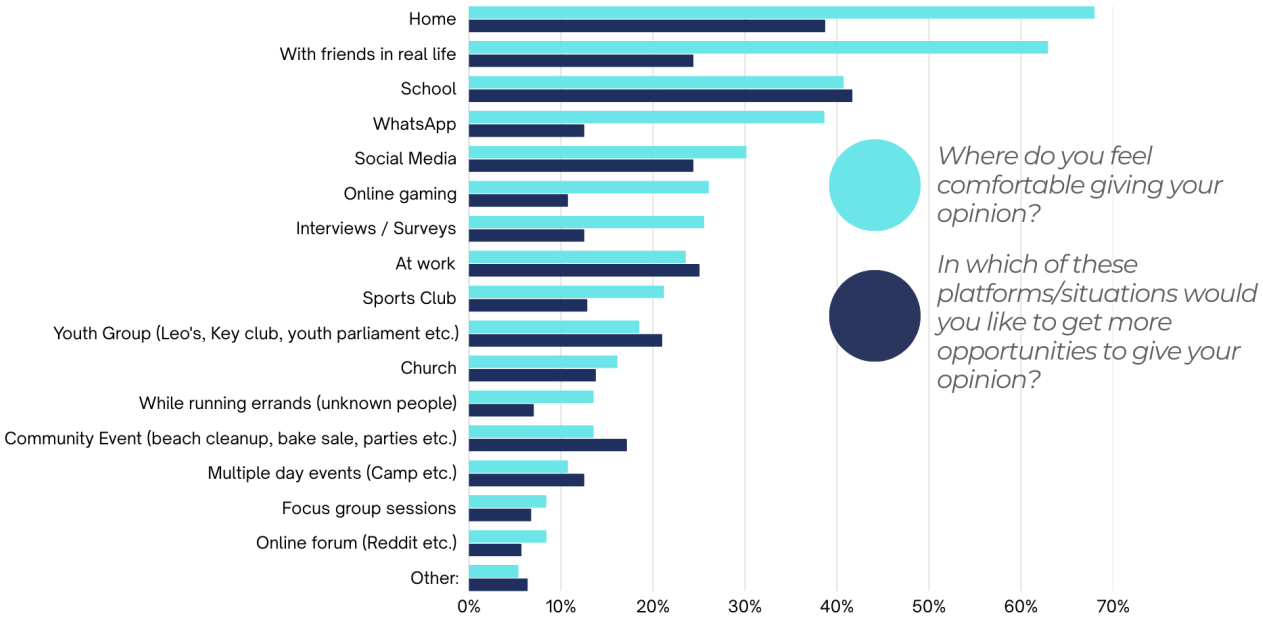


3.2.2 Where does Youth want to share their opinion?

Q2.1: Where do you feel comfortable giving your opinion?
Q2.2: In which of these platforms/situations would you like to get more opportunities to give your opinion?

Youth reported feeling most comfortable sharing their opinions at home (68%) and with friends in real life (63%), with school (41%) forming a distant third. Comfort levels were lower across digital and community spaces, including WhatsApp (39%), social media (30%), online gaming (26%), and structured settings such as sports clubs (21%), youth groups (19%), and church (16%).

When asked where they would *like more opportunities* to share their opinion, youth expressed a relatively low overall desire for additional engagement. Only two out of seventeen spaces reached above 25%: school (42%), and at home (39%). Interest in expanding opportunities in other settings remained modest, generally below 20%.



A few demographic differences emerged. Male respondents were more comfortable sharing their opinions while gaming (42%) than females (14%), highlighting the gendered nature of online gaming spaces. Conversely, female respondents expressed a stronger desire for more opportunities to engage through social media (32% vs. 17% of males).

Several differences emerged across education groups. When looking at the average number of choices per person, Vocational and NIPA/SBO students reported feeling comfortable sharing their opinions in fewer places (averages of 3.0 and 3.1, compared with 4.2–4.7 in other groups) and were also less interested in having more opportunities to share their views (2.0 and 2.4, versus 3.1–3.6 in other groups).

Both groups felt less comfortable expressing their opinions at school (Vocational 18%, NIPA 14%) compared with students in secondary and higher education (39–43%).

In terms of specific platforms, Vocational students expressed no interest in having more of a say in church (0%), while NIPA students recorded a notably high percentage in the “Other” category, suggesting the presence of alternative engagement spaces not captured in the survey. NIPA students also showed no interest in gaming as an additional engagement opportunity (0%), a pattern that was low (but not absent) across HAVO and VWO as well.

3.2.3 Perceived barriers for youth engagement.

Q3: What are things that make it difficult for you to share your opinion?

Youth identified several factors that make it difficult for them to speak up. The most prominent barrier was the belief that adults make decisions anyway and will not allow them to speak (42%), followed closely by a lack of opportunities or spaces to share their opinions (38%). A substantial share (33%) also reported struggling with public speaking, making this the third most common barrier.



A notable gender difference is that female respondents reported more barriers (3.6) on average than male respondents (2.8), suggesting that girls and young women may face a broader set of challenges when expressing their opinions.

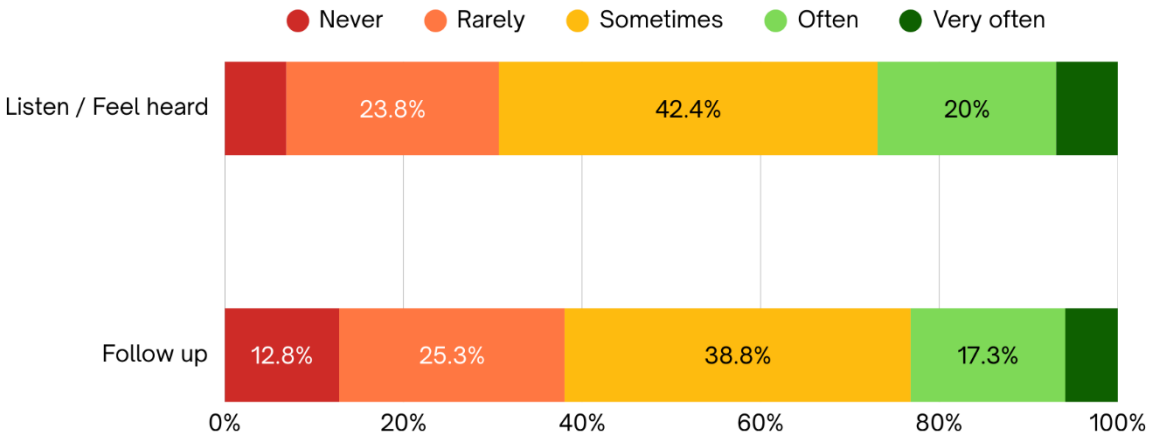
Notable differences also appeared across educational levels, with VWO and University students more likely to identify "lack of opportunities" as a barrier to speaking up (56% and 52%, respectively, compared with 27–38% in other groups). In addition, VWO students reported the highest number of barriers overall, selecting an average of 5 barriers, while all other education groups ranged from 2.5 to 3.8.

3.2.4 What happens after the youth share their opinion?

Q4.1: When you express your opinion, how often do you feel that you are listened to/ or heard?
Q4.2: How often did you receive any feedback on how your input was used?

When youth share their opinions, their subjective experiences of being heard are mixed. About 42% reported *sometimes* feeling heard, while 31% said they *rarely* or *never* feel heard after speaking up. Only a smaller proportion indicated that adults *often* or *very often* listen to them.

A similar pattern emerged regarding follow-up or feedback. Most youth said they receive feedback only sometimes, and roughly one-third reported rarely or never receiving any follow-up on their input.

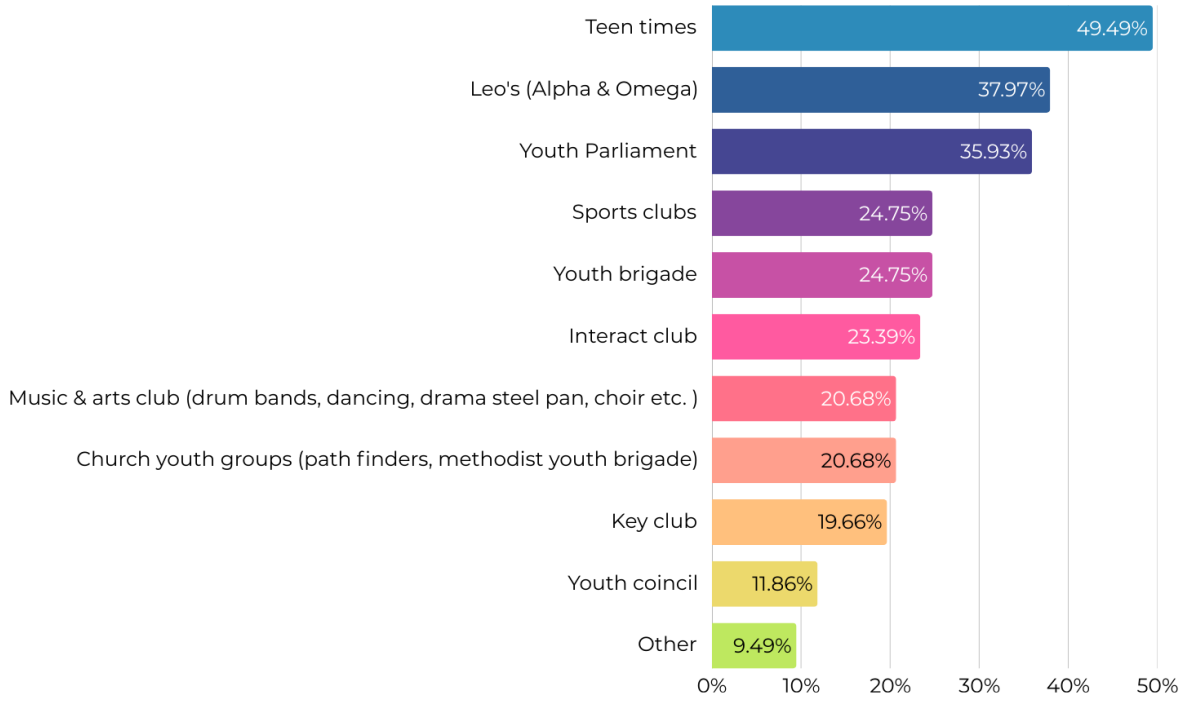


Male respondents were more likely to feel heard when sharing their opinions (40%, compared with 27% of females) and also reported receiving feedback more often (34% vs. 22%). Across education levels, HAVO students stood out, with 58% indicating they receive follow-up or feedback after providing their input, substantially higher than the 14% to 28% across the other groups.

3.2.5 Awareness of existing engagement opportunities and International Rights of the Child.

Q5: Have you heard of any existing programs, platforms, or opportunities on Sint Maarten where youth can share their opinion?

Overall, youth demonstrated relatively low awareness of existing platforms for voicing their opinions or participating. The best-known initiative was Teen Times (49%), followed by Leo's Clubs (38%) and Youth Parliament (36%). On average, awareness was poor, with no platform recognized by more than half of the respondents, and several were recognized by fewer than one in five youth.



NIPA students were far more likely to select "Other" as an engagement opportunity (37%) than in other groups (5–18%), suggesting that at least one platform or space relevant to this group was not included in the survey. Vocational students showed relatively high awareness of music and arts clubs (36%), compared to other groups (16–23%).

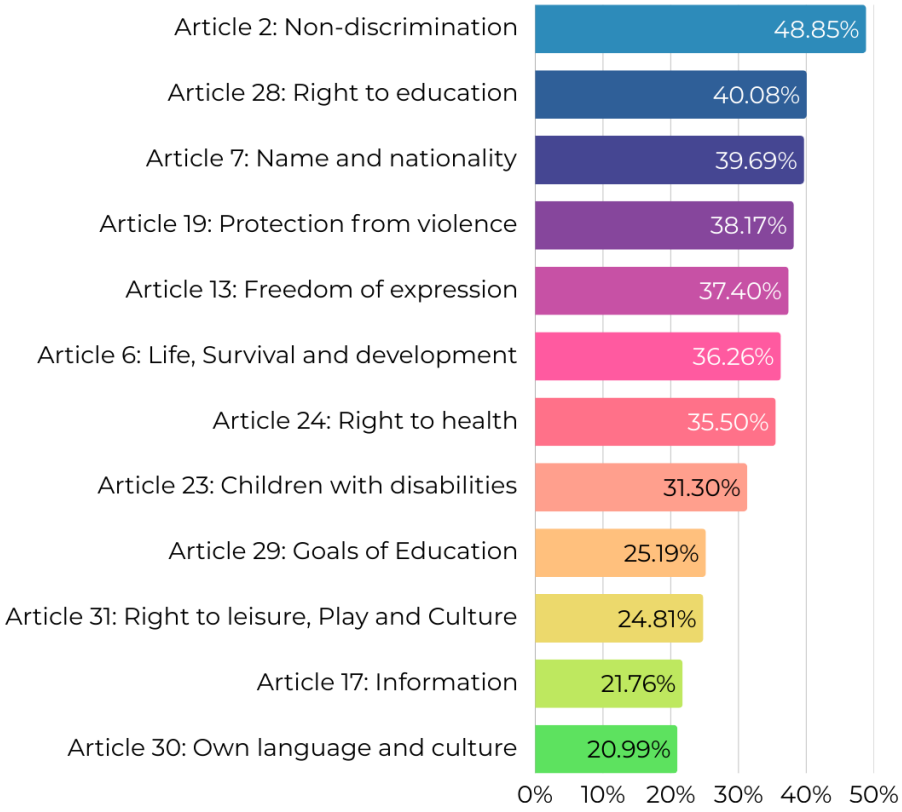
Overall awareness also varied by education level: HAVO students were the most aware of engagement opportunities, recognizing an average of 3.2 platforms per person, compared with 2.6 among VWO, 2.9 among university students, and substantially lower averages among vocational (1.9) and NIPA students (1.7).

3.2.6 Awareness of Children's Rights

Q6: Which of the following Children's Rights through the UN Convention on The Rights of the Child, are you aware of?

A similar pattern emerged regarding knowledge of children's rights under the UNCRC. Youth were familiar with only a subset of the listed articles, with the right to non-discrimination (49%) being the most widely recognized. Awareness of other fundamental rights, such as the right to education (40%), name and nationality (40%), protection from violence (38%), freedom of expression (37%), and survival and development (36%), ranged from moderate to low.

Overall, the youth were aware of only about 4 of the 12 rights, indicating substantial gaps in their understanding of their entitlements and protections.



Female respondents demonstrated higher awareness of children's rights, knowing an average of 3.6 rights per person (out of the 12 listed) compared with 2.8 among males. They were also more familiar with the right to health (41% vs. 28%).

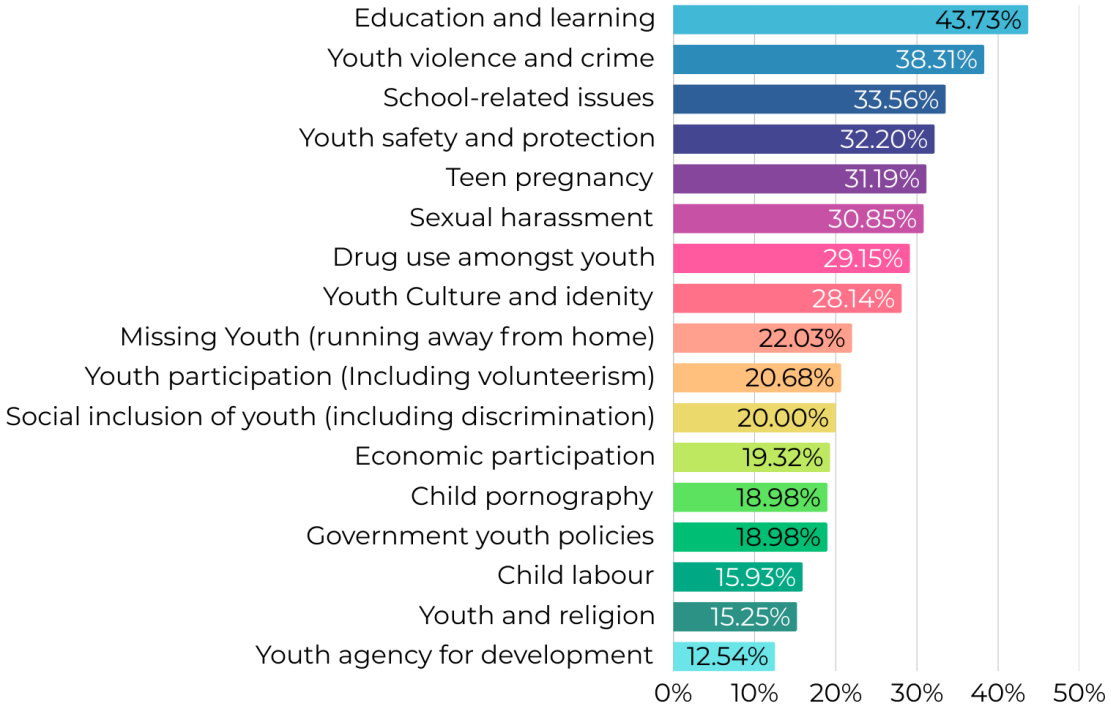
Differences were also visible across education levels. Vocational students showed high awareness of the right to language and culture (36%), ranking it fourth among their recognized rights. In contrast, this article was among the least-known rights across all other groups.

HAVO students had the strongest overall awareness, identifying an average of 4.4 rights per person, compared with 2.9-3.6 in the other education categories.

3.2.7 Topics on which youth want to share their opinion.

Q7: On what topic(s) regarding youth in Sint Maarten would you like to provide input / share your opinion?

When asked which topics youth would most like to provide input on, they showed the strongest interest in education and learning (44%), followed by youth violence and crime (38%), school-related issues (34%), and youth safety and protection (32%).



Female respondents selected more topics overall (5.2 on average per person) than males (3.4) and showed higher interest in issues such as sexual harassment (44% vs. 15%) and teen pregnancy (42% vs. 15%).

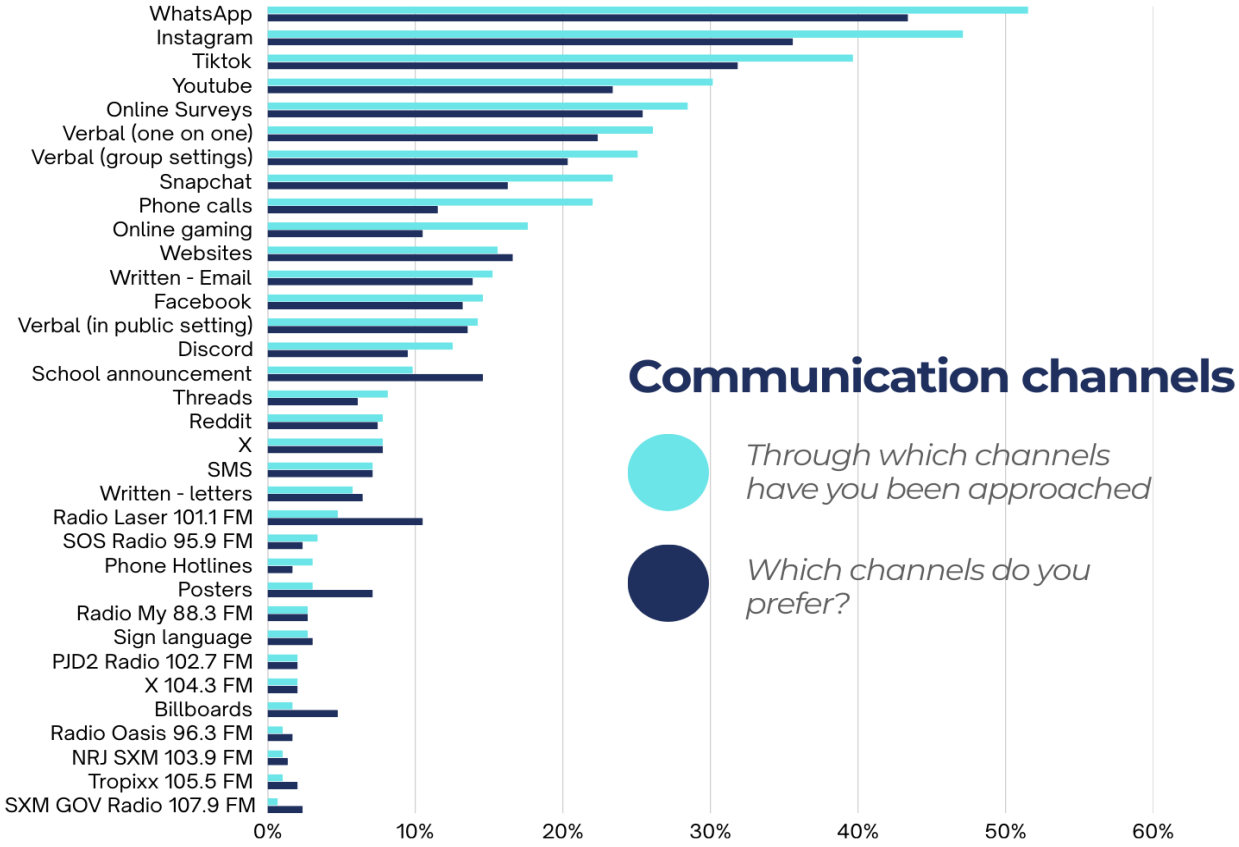
Vocational students ranked youth safety and protection as their top priority, while this topic was second for university students and only fifth or sixth among other groups. NIPA students showed the strongest interest in teen pregnancy (45%), higher than all other groups (18–35%). In terms of overall engagement, Vocational (3.0) and VWO (3.4) students selected the fewest topics on average, while NIPA (4.3), university (4.7), and HAVO students (4.8) selected the most.

3.2.8 Communication channels.

Q7.1: Through which channels have you been approached in the last year?
Q7.2: Which channels do you prefer?

Youth reported that they are primarily approached through newer, digital communication channels. The most common methods in the past year were WhatsApp (52%), Instagram (47%), and TikTok (40%).

A similar pattern emerged when youth were asked which channels they *prefer*. Their top choices again included WhatsApp (43%), Instagram (36%), TikTok (32%), and YouTube (23%), with online surveys (25%) also rated relatively well.



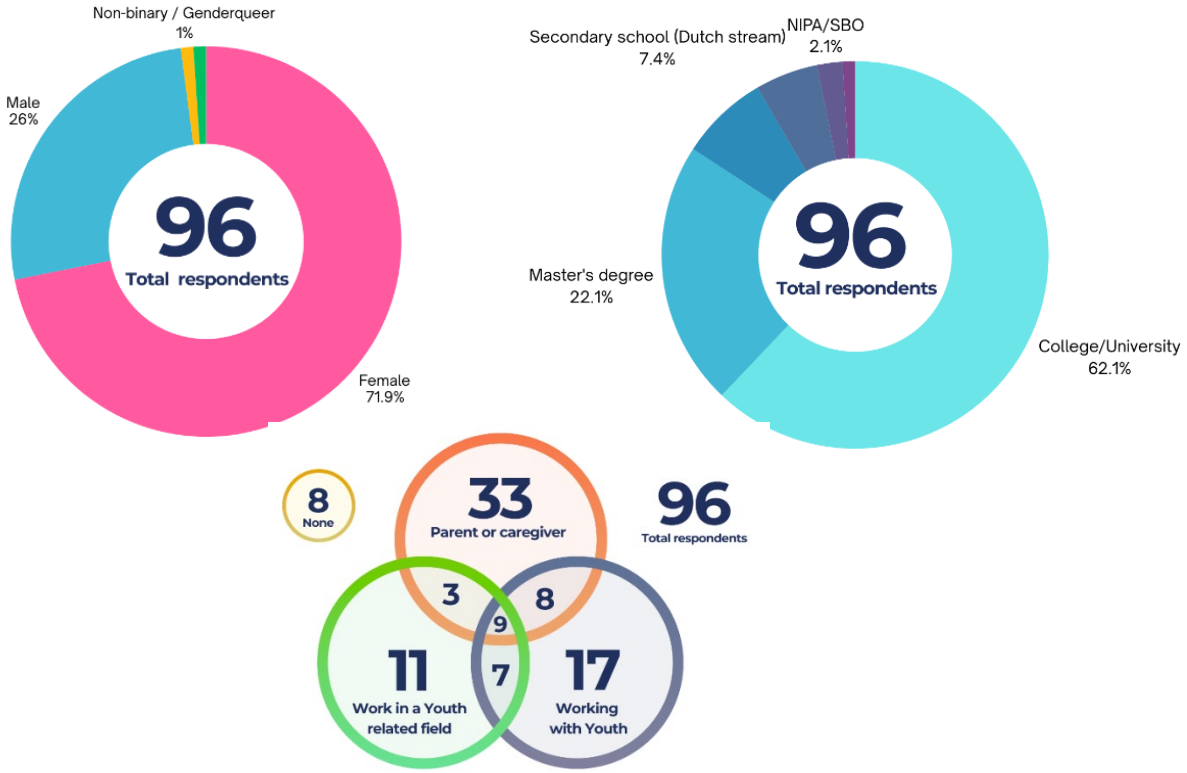
Across education levels, HAVO students reported being approached through the widest range of channels (5.2 on average), more than university students (4.9), NIPA (3.8), VWO (3.7), and especially vocational students (3.1).

In contrast, VWO students indicated the broadest range of preferred channels (6.2 on average), compared with 2.9–3.9 for the other groups.

Results – Adult Survey

4.1 Demographics

The adult survey received 96 responses. Because the data collection process was passive and voluntary, the resulting sample is **not representative** of the adult population of Sint Maarten. Participation was influenced by who happened to see and choose to complete the survey, leading to **overrepresentation of highly educated females** and individuals already connected to youth work. For these reasons, the findings should be interpreted as **indicative only** rather than generalizable, providing initial insights and direction for future research rather than a complete picture of adult perspectives on youth engagement.



Most respondents identified as female (71.9%), followed by male (26%), with a small proportion identifying as non-binary or genderqueer (1%). Educational attainment in the sample was relatively high, with 62.1% holding a college or university degree and 22.1% reporting a master's degree. Only a small share had completed secondary school, either in the Dutch stream (7.4%) or English stream (5.3%), while very few reported NIPA/SBO (2.1%) or vocational education (1.1%).

Respondents varied in their relationship to youth. Among the 96 adults, 33 identified as parents or caregivers, 17 worked directly with youth, and 11 worked in a youth-related field. Several individuals occupied multiple roles: three were both parents and youth-sector professionals, 8 were parents who also worked with youth, and seven worked with youth within a youth-related field. A small group of nine respondents indicated that they were parents, worked with youth, *and* worked in a youth-related field. Only eight respondents reported that none of these categories applied to them.

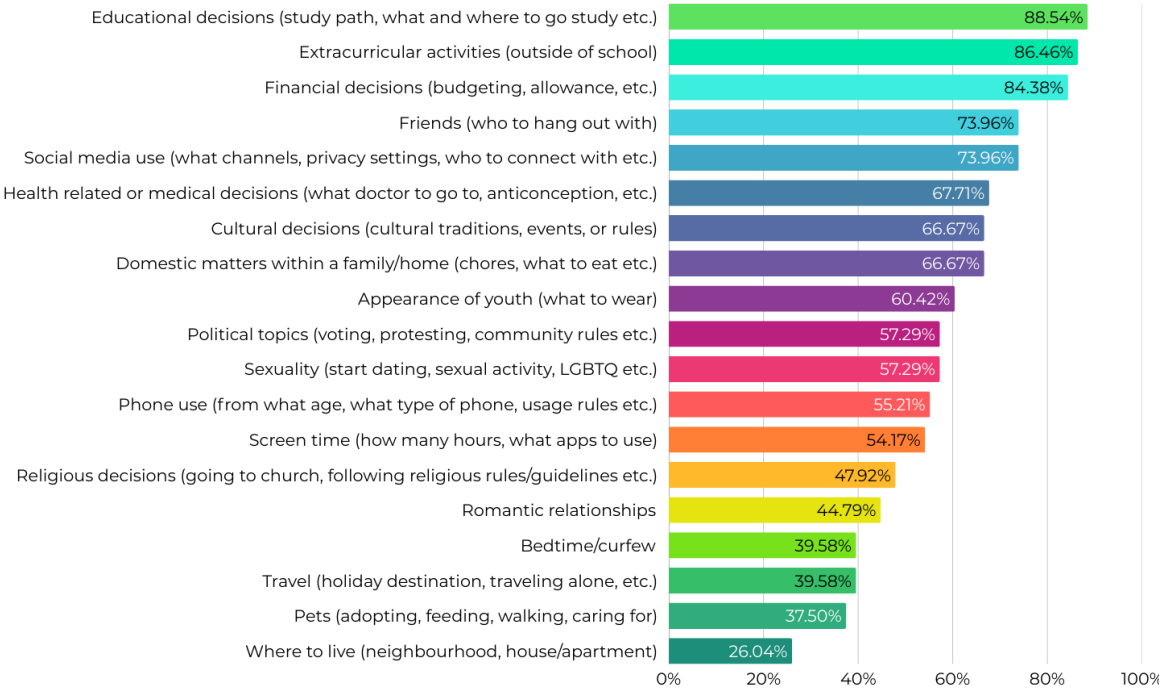
4.2.1 Topics of youth engagement:

Q1: Which of the following topics do you think youth (up to 24) should be engaged in?

In this sample, with an overrepresentation of highly educated women, respondents indicated broad support for youth involvement across several areas. The most substantial endorsements were for participation in educational decisions (89%), extracurricular activities (86%), and financial decisions (84%), suggesting confidence in youth's ability to contribute to choices that shape their development and independence.

High support was also shown for involvement in friendships (74%), social media use (74%), and health or medical decisions (68%), reflecting the belief that youth should have a voice in matters affecting their well-being.

Lower levels of support were observed for youth involvement in political topics (57%), sexuality and dating (57%), and phone or screen-time rules (55% and 54%). The least supported areas were romantic relationships (45%), curfew or bedtime (40%), travel decisions (40%), pet care (38%), and where to live (26%).



Given the low number of male, practically schooled respondents in this study, very limited conclusions can be drawn from demographic comparisons. One small indication stood out: Male respondents were more likely to believe youth should be engaged in cultural decisions, ranking it as their top choice, while among female respondents, it appeared much lower, around ninth place.

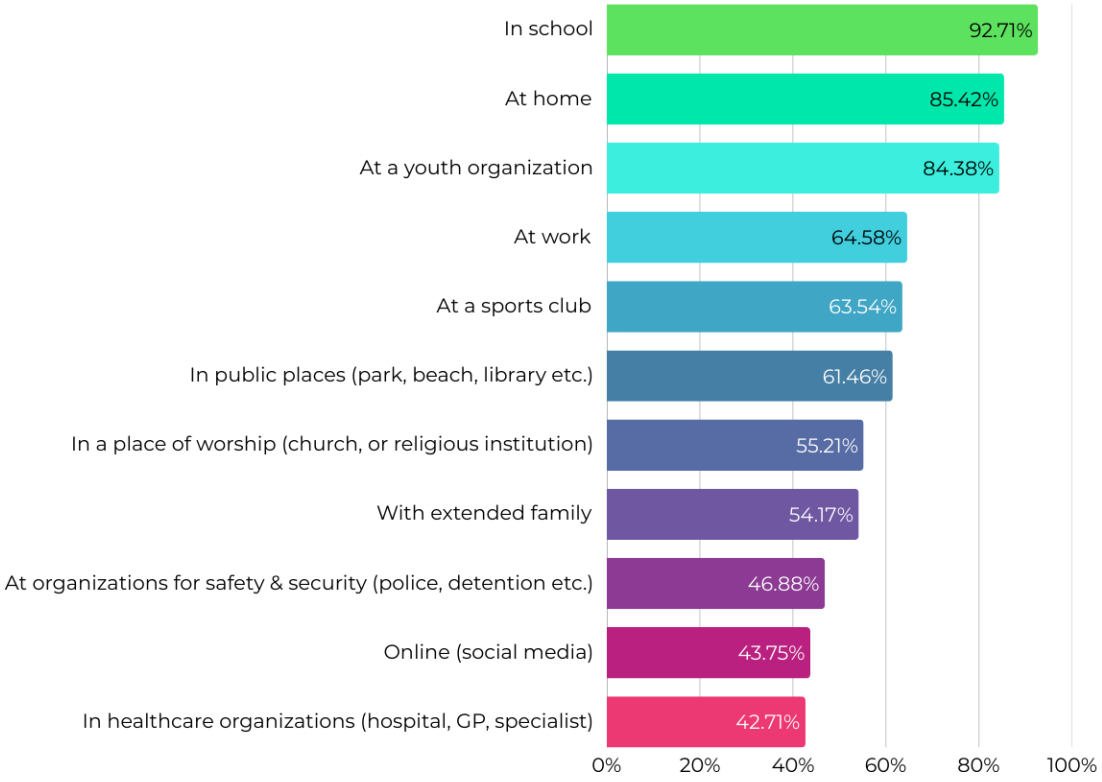
4.2.2 Settings in which adults believe youth should be engaged

Q2: In which of the following situations/settings do you think youth (up to 24) should be engaged in?

This sample of predominantly highly educated women expressed strong support for youth engagement in school (93%), at home (85%), and at youth organizations (84%), suggesting these are the most suitable settings for youth involvement.

Lower levels of support appeared for engagement in safety and security organizations (47%), online spaces (44%), and healthcare settings (43%).

Remarkably**,** respondents ranked healthcare and safety/security settings amongst the least important for youth to engage with, yet these were the youth's top 2 topics/areas in which they would like to share their opinions.



4.2.3 In what type of decisions should youth be involved?

Q3.1: How often do you think that youth (up to 24) should be engaged in decision-making about basic daily things that affect them?

Q3.2: How often do you think that youth (up to 24) should be engaged in decision-making about larger life-changing decisions that affect them?

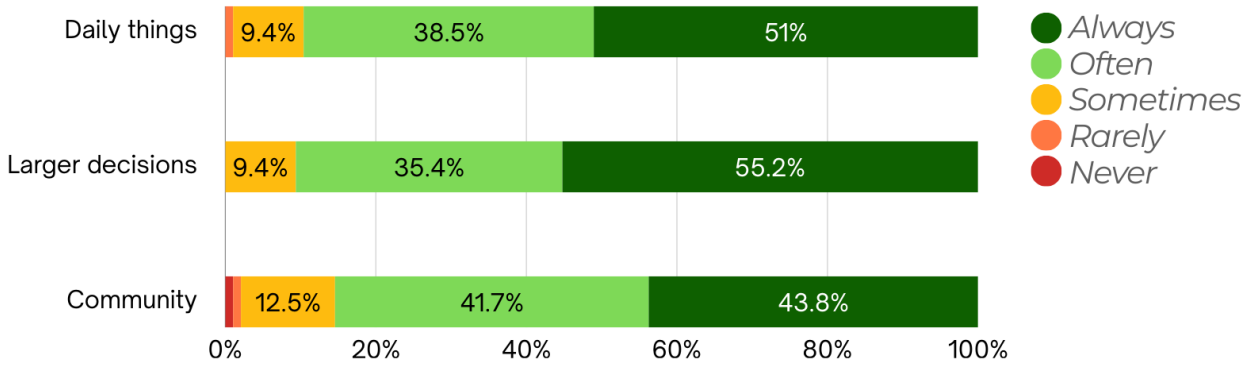
Q3.3: How often do you think that youth (up to 24) should be engaged in decision-making about the future of the community/country?

Across all three decision areas, the respondents consistently indicated that youth should be engaged 'often' or 'very often'.

For basic daily decisions, almost all respondents felt youth should participate regularly, with the large majority selecting '*often'* (37) or *'very often'* (49). Only one respondent selected '*rarely*', and none chose '*never*'.

A similar pattern emerged for larger life-changing decisions, where respondents again overwhelmingly indicated that they occurred '*often*' (34) or *'very often'* (53). No respondents selected '*never*' or '*rarely*', suggesting a strong indication within this sample that youth should have a voice in major decisions affecting their lives.

For decisions related to the future of the community or country, support remained high, though slightly more varied. Most respondents chose '*often*' (40) or *'very often'* (42), with a small number selecting '*sometimes*' *(12)* and only two respondents selecting '*rarely*' or '*never*'.

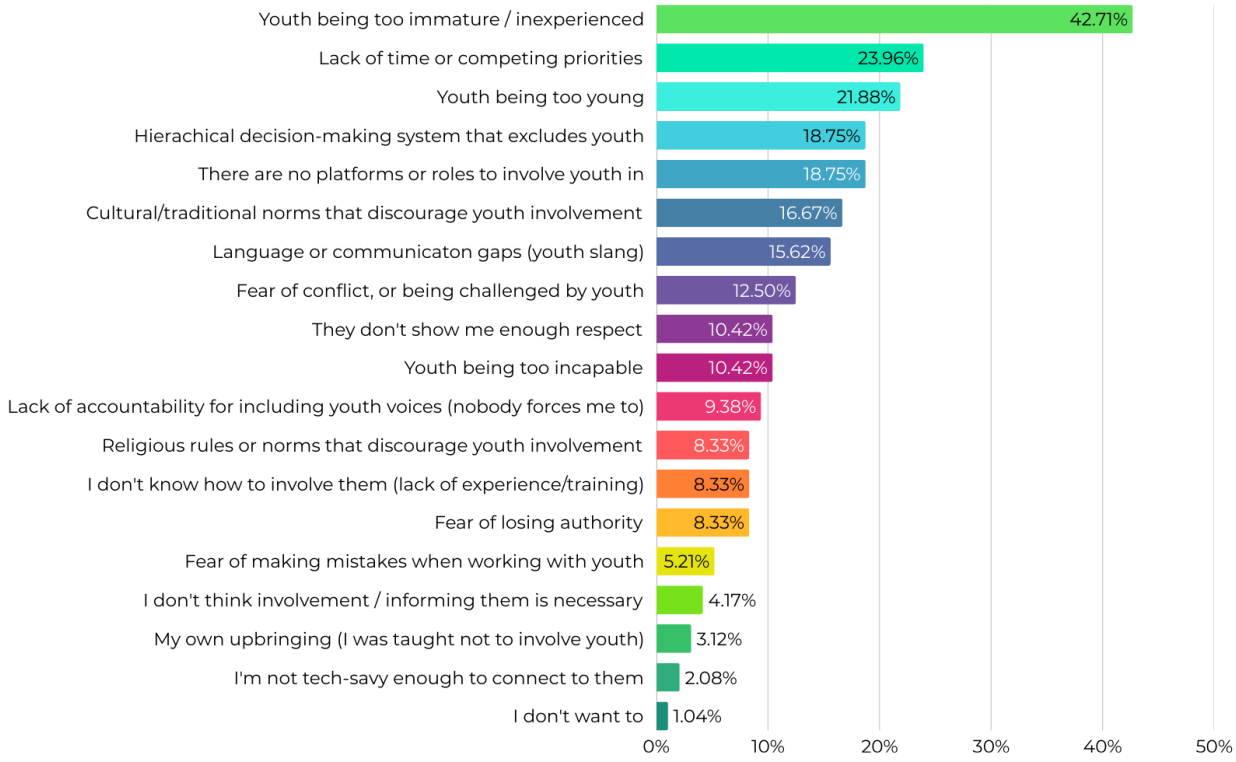


4.2.4 Barriers to youth engagement

Q4: What prevents you from engaging youth (up to 24) in the decision-making process?

Indications from this skewed adult sample suggest that the most frequently perceived barrier to involving youth in decision-making is the belief that youth are too immature or inexperienced (43%). Smaller but notable proportions cited lack of time or competing priorities (24%), and the perception that youth are too young (22%) to meaningfully contribute.

Structural and cultural barriers were also mentioned, including hierarchical decision-making systems that exclude youth (19%), a lack of platforms or roles for youth involvement (19%), and cultural or traditional norms that discourage participation (17%). Some respondents noted communication gaps (16%), concerns about conflict or being challenged by youth (13%), or feelings that youth do not show enough respect (10%) or are too incapable (10%).



4.2.5 Children's Rights

Q5.1: What Children's Rights are you aware of?

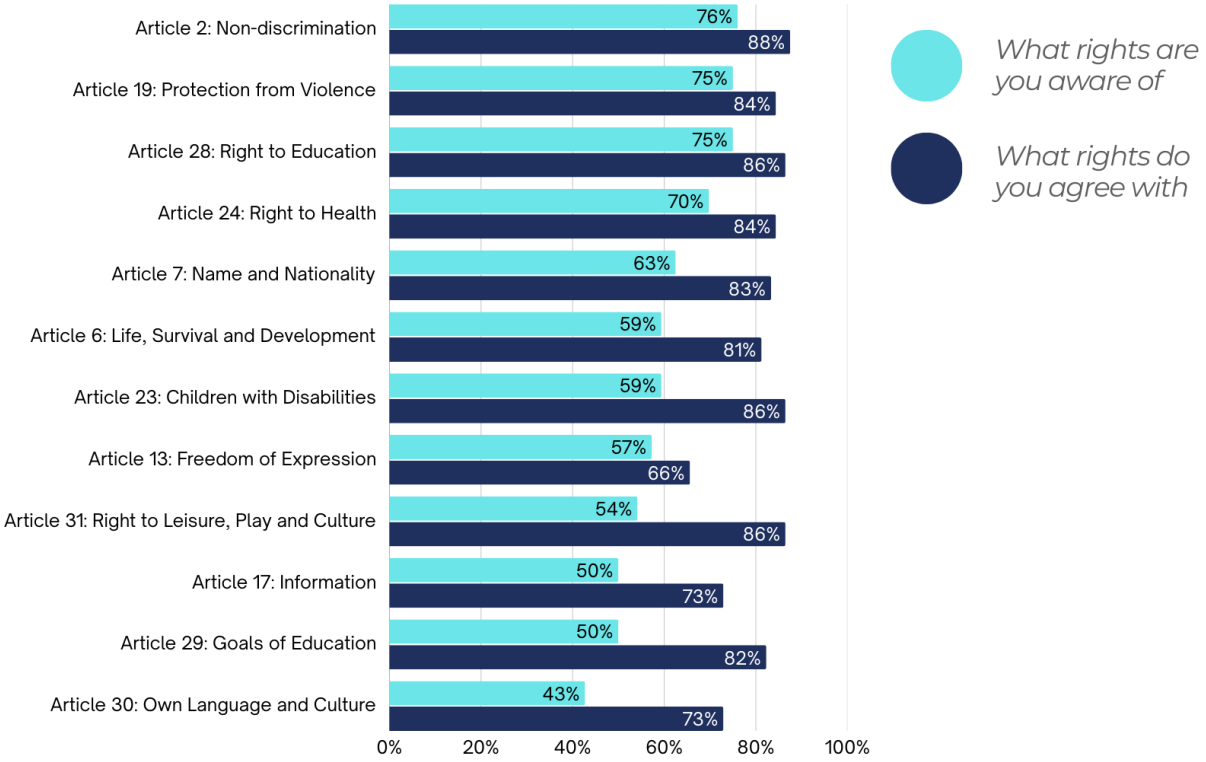
Q5.2: What Children's Rights do you agree with?

The respondents show relatively high awareness of several Children's Rights, particularly non-discrimination (76%), protection from violence (75%), and the right to education (75%).

Awareness levels were somewhat lower for freedom of expression (57%), the right to leisure, play, and culture (54%), and the rights to information and clear education goals (both 50%). The right to language and culture (43%) was the least recognized.

Across all listed rights, agreement was higher than awareness. Most rights received agreement levels between 81 and 88 percent, indicating that although adults may not initially know specific rights by name or article number, they generally support the principles behind them. Exceptions included freedom of expression (66%), which drew the lowest level of agreement, and the rights to information (73%) and to language and culture (73%), which also ranked lower than other rights.

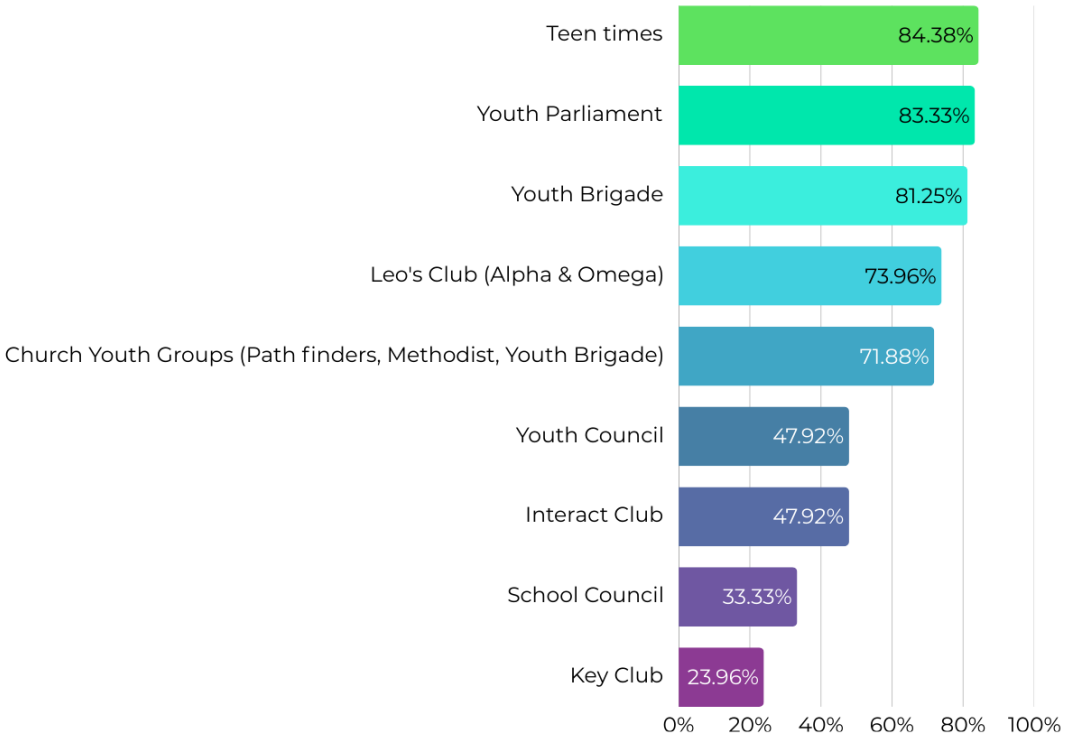
This also means that within this group of predominantly highly educated women, 34% disagree that children have the right to express themselves. 27% disagree with the right to Information, and the right to one's Own language and Culture.



4.2.6 Adult awareness of youth participation platforms

Q6: Which of the following programs or platforms for youth participation are you aware of?

Indications from this skewed sample show relatively high awareness of several youth participation platforms on the island. The best-known initiatives were Teen Times (84%), Youth Parliament (83%), and the Youth Brigade (81%). Awareness was also strong for Leo's Clubs (74%) and church-based youth groups (72%).



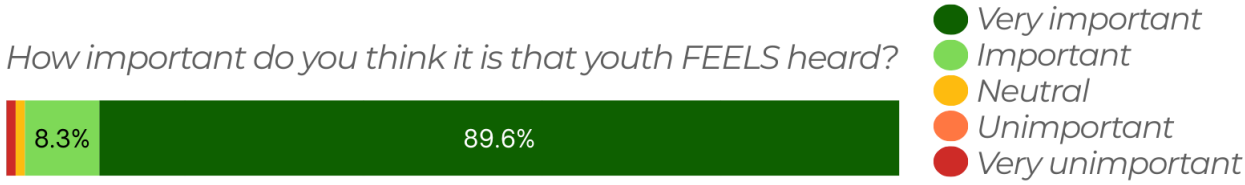
4.2.7 Importance of youth feeling heard, and acting on that belief

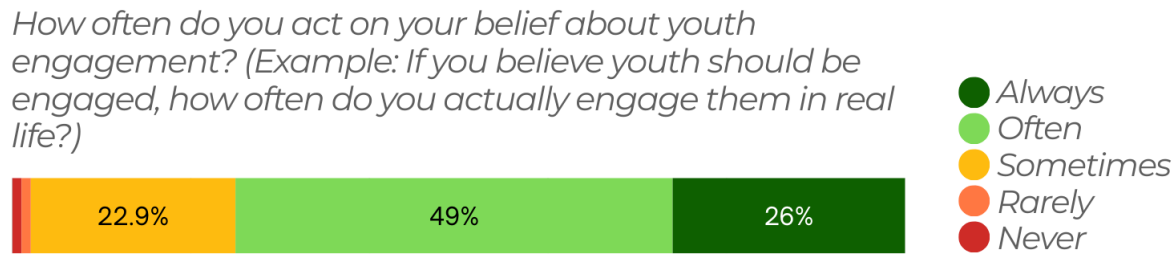
Q7.1: How important do you think it is that youth FEEL heard?

Q7.2: How often do you act on your belief about youth engagement (Example: If you believe youth should be engaged, how often do you actually engage them in real life?)

These respondents strongly believe that it is important for youth to feel heard. Nearly all respondents selected often (8) or very often (86) when asked how important feeling heard is for youth, with only two respondents selecting never or sometimes.

However, when asked how often they act on their beliefs (i.e., when they believe that youth should be involved, how consistently they involve youth in practice), the responses show greater variation. While a substantial number indicated they act on their belief often (47) or very often (25), a considerable share selected sometimes (22), and a small number selected rarely or never.





Conclusion

5.1 Youth Engagement Survey

Youth are most often engaged by the people closest to them. Peers and parents were by far the most common groups to ask for their opinions. Formal actors, such as school management, churches, and businesses, were reported as asking youth for input much less often. Government engagement was the lowest of all.

Youth feel comfortable sharing their opinions primarily in familiar, personal environments. Home (68%) and in-person friendships (63%) are the strongest comfort zones. Desire for more engagement outside these familiar settings was generally low, indicating that comfort and trust strongly shape willingness to participate.

The top barriers to speaking up include adults not letting youth speak (42%), lack of opportunities (38%), and fear of public speaking (33%). Together, these reflect both structural barriers (gatekeeping, lack of platforms) and personal barriers (confidence, fear of judgment).

After having given input, the subjective experience of feeling heard is inconsistent. While 42% sometimes feel heard, nearly one-third rarely or never feel heard when they speak up. Feedback is also inconsistent: the most common response was receiving feedback only “sometimes,” and roughly one-third rarely or never receive any follow-up. This weak feedback loop also affects the subjective experience of feeling heard, and may reduce motivation to participate in the future.

Awareness of participation opportunities is low. No single platform was recognized by more than half of the respondents, and several platforms were known by fewer than 20% of the youth. Youth also showed limited awareness of Children’s Rights, identifying, on average, only 4 of the 12 listed rights.

Youth are most interested in sharing their opinion on topics that directly affect their daily lives and sense of safety. Education (44%), youth violence and crime (38%), school-related issues (34%), and youth safety and protection (32%) emerged as top priorities.

Their preferred communication channels are fast and digital: WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, while traditional channels are largely ineffective.

Overall, the youth survey indicates that young people want to share their opinions, especially on issues that shape their education and safety, but they lack accessible opportunities, consistent follow-up, and trusted institutional spaces to do so.

5.2 Adult Survey about Youth Engagement

The sample size of the adult survey is too small and is overrepresented by highly educated females, making it unrepresentative of the entire population of Sint Maarten. Therefore, the results should be viewed merely as indicative for this specific group (highly educated women) at best.

Adults who participated in the survey expressed broad support for youth involvement across a wide range of decisions. They most strongly endorsed youth participation in educational (89%), extracurricular (86%), and financial (84%) decisions, and believed that youth should be engaged "often" or "very often" in both daily and major life decisions, as well as decisions concerning the community's future.

Respondents primarily associate youth participation with familiar and structured environments, such as school (93%), home (85%), and youth organizations (84%). Support was notably lower for youth engagement in healthcare settings (43%) and safety or security institutions (47%), even though youth themselves identified safety and protection as high-priority topics they want to discuss. This difference highlights a potential mismatch between which areas youth consider important and where adults believe engagement should take place.

When asked what prevents them from engaging youth, the respondents most frequently identified youth immaturity or inexperience (43%), followed by lack of time (24%), and the belief that youth are too young (22%). Structural barriers were also acknowledged, including hierarchical systems (19%) and the absence of roles or platforms for youth involvement (19%). These findings suggest that both perceptions of youth readiness and systemic limitations contribute to inconsistent engagement.

The respondents demonstrated high agreement with most Children's Rights, particularly non-discrimination, protection from violence, education, and health. However, agreement was lower for rights related to freedom of expression (66%), access to information (73%), and language and culture (73%), indicating that some autonomy-related rights are less widely supported within this group.

While the respondents overwhelmingly believe it is important that youth *feel* heard, they do not always act consistently on this belief. Many reported engaging youths often or very often, but a substantial number selected "sometimes," and a smaller portion rarely or never act on their stated belief. This suggests a cautious gap between supportive attitudes and actual practice.

Overall, the adult survey findings indicate that adults in this sample conceptually value youth participation and believe it to be important. However, practical, perceptual, and structural barriers limit the consistency with which youth are involved in decision-making, and there appears to be a disconnect between the areas youth find most important and the settings where adults think engagement should occur.

Limitations

While this project provides valuable youth-generated insights into participation on Sint Maarten, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings.

First, the youth survey strategically canvassed a wide range of public places; certain groups, such as younger teens, youth who are not frequently present in public gathering areas, or those without access to digital devices, may be underrepresented.

Second, while the demographics of the youth survey closely match those of the Sensus office, some demographic groups within the youth sample were small, limiting the reliability of subgroup comparisons across education levels, gender identities, and cultural backgrounds. These comparisons can provide useful indications but should not be interpreted as representative patterns.

Third, the adult survey sample was small and highly skewed. Participation was voluntary and passive, leading to an overrepresentation of highly educated adults, predominantly female, and often already involved in youth work. As a result, the adult findings cannot be generalized to the broader adult population of Sint Maarten and should be interpreted as preliminary signals requiring further investigation.

Finally, awareness of existing platforms and rights may have been influenced by the list provided in the survey. Some youth may participate in spaces not listed, as suggested by high “Other” responses in specific subgroups.

Taken together, these limitations highlight that while the youth study provides a reasonably strong base of support, the adult data should be viewed as an exploratory assessment rather than a comprehensive evaluation. The findings serve as a foundation for future, more representative research and for conversations about strengthening the island's youth participation infrastructure.

Recommendations

After analysing the results of both youth and adult surveys with the research consultant, the Youth Researchers were asked to formulate several recommendations to improve youth engagement on Sint Maarten. Their suggestions emphasize creating more meaningful, accessible, and youth-friendly opportunities for participation.

1. Youth want to be active participants, not observers.
The youth researchers highlighted that young people want to be genuinely heard and included in decision-making processes at all levels, not simply informed after decisions have been made.

2. Government should change how it communicates with youth.
Current communication channels do not effectively reach young people. The youth

recommend using platforms they actively engage with, such as TikTok and Instagram, and presenting information in brief, youth-friendly formats to increase awareness and participation in government processes.

3. Schools should teach the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).
Both elementary and secondary schools should integrate the CRC into the curriculum so that youth understand their rights. The students also recommend mandatory workshops for teachers, parents, and new parents to increase adult awareness of the CRC.

4. Youth safety is a major concern.
Many youth do not feel safe in their neighbourhoods due to ongoing negative activities. The youth researchers emphasized that community safety is essential and should be prioritized in initiatives to create child-friendly environments.

5. Establish functional community councils.
There is a need for community councils that actively represent the needs and interests of local residents, including youth, and communicate these priorities directly to Parliament.

6. Increase inclusion and the visibility of youth voices.
Adults and institutions should create more opportunities for youth to share their perspectives and participate regularly in discussions and decisions that affect them.

7. Improve access to recreational spaces.
Recreational facilities should be safe, well-maintained, and accessible for all youth, regardless of ability or background.

8. Create anonymous ways for youth to share their opinions.
Many youths are afraid of being judged or criticized by adults, which prevents them from speaking openly. An anonymous feedback box or digital tool would allow youth to express their views without fear.

9. Collect more district-level data about youth needs.
The youth researchers stressed the importance of collecting consistent data within neighbourhoods to better understand the specific needs and priorities of young people across different districts.