

# Children and youth strategies for self-representation: Young migrants in Sweden

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## **Abstract**

This paper focuses on how young migrants seek new forms of political representation in a time of global migration. It uses the case of a group of young Afghans in Sweden and their political mobilization for a right to stay to analyze strategies for self-representation. In dialogue with contemporary debates in democratic theory and political representation (Disch et al 2019, Saward 2010, 2020, Laclau 1996) the paper examines how young political actors contest and reject dominant forms of political representation by government and civil society actors to claim political space and a voice of their own. The chapter suggests the concepts of grouping and re-grouping as key to theorize how processes of authorization, accountability and claim-making take form and transform children and youth politics and representation. Three decades after the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the concept of human rights for children have largely come to be equated with how they are conceptualized in the convention through processes of mainstreaming in a wide range of political areas and systems globally (Holzscheiter, Josefsson and Sandin 2019, Josefsson 2019, Quennerstedt 2013, Reyneart 2012). However, at the same time as the global diffusion of children's rights norms have made possible some certain new forms of recognition, participation and political representation of children and youth, the ways young people are represented have also become integrated parts of political mechanisms, systems and instruments that govern, control and limit young people and their rights (Holzscheiter, Josefsson and Sandin 2019). In these systems of governance, we can note how children and youth through contentious political protests and political action are contesting and making claims around how and by whom their rights are politically represented. A challenge that also influence and transform current political and representative arenas. For example, in global school strikes in relation to climate emergency, in young workers struggles for decent working conditions in south America, in marches against gun violence and racism in the US, in street protests for democracy in Hong Kong and in young migrants struggles for asylum in Global North. In the first section I provide an overview of some discussions around the concept of political representation in the fields of political and democratic theory and childhood studies. In the second section I use the case of global youth migration to elaborate on the governing power of representing rights of young people and how certain forms of representations can be a tool for liberal democratic states to exclude and undercut fundamental rights for this group. In the third part, the strategies of regrouping advanced by young Afghan migrants organizing a sit-in strike in Sweden are analyzed as a way to theorize more generally about the political representation of rights for young people in liberal democracies. This chapter contributes to the edited volume by putting focus on how children and youth mobilize politically and what strategies they use to claim political self-representation in a time of global migration. By centering the political action taken by the group of young migrants this study offers important insights, conceptually and empirically, about the limits and opportunities for

how and by whom the rights of young people are represented and influence modern democracies of today.

## References

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## Presenter - Bio

Jonathan Josefsson is Associate Senior Lecturer at the Department of Child Studies, Linköping University. His research focuses young migrants' activism, children, voting rights, age, political representation and democratization. Jonathan is PI for the research project: “Youth Representation in Global Politics” and was 2019 Post doc at the FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, Harvard University. His publications include “Empowered Inclusion: Theorizing Global Justice for Children and Youth”, “Child Rights Governance: an introduction” and “Age as a Yardstick for Political Citizenship: Voting Age in Sweden During the Twentieth Century”.

## Discussant - Bio

Sanna Vestin biography: 1971-1972 College of Journalism. 1975-1999 Blue collar work as mechanic and NC programmer. In addition she has been active in grassroots movements, mostly on solidarity, anti-racism and refugee issues. Since 1999 Sanna has produced articles on asylum rights, refugee issues and Fortress Europe. HE/SHE has also provided legal advice on these subjects. Between 1993 and 2004 Sanna was the Editor of *Artikel 14*, magazine of FARR, the Swedish Network of Refugee Support Groups. Between 2005 and 2008 HE/SHE was the Coordinator of the helpline for undocumented children at Save the Children Sweden. Further, between 2013 - 2018 Sanna held the position of Chair of FARR. In 2015 HE/SHE was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Malmö University. Since 2019 Sanna has served as an Initiator member of the Asylum Commission.