

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 346 (2012)¹

Youth and democracy: the changing face of youth political engagement

1. The social and demographic structure of European societies is changing: people are living longer and population levels are declining owing to lower fertility rates. Thus, in the future, youth will become a minority in an ageing society, their influence within the democratic system will decrease, and youth-related subjects and needs may lose weight in political debates and the decision-making process. This perceived political marginalisation could lead to political frustration and distrust among young people.

2. Young people are also facing frustration owing to their increasingly difficult transitions to work and adult life. Integration into the labour market is one of the key development tasks on a young person's way to autonomy and independence. However, the labour market has changed radically, having lost flexibility and jobs, and requiring ever higher qualifications. Integration into the labour market for young people has become all the more difficult and, since 2008, youth unemployment has increased substantially owing to the current economic crisis. High qualifications are no longer a guarantee for finding work and access to the job market is not only difficult for young people who lack general or vocational education, but also for those holding higher education degrees.

3. The experience of unemployment, job insecurity and precarious social integration can lead to de-motivation, low self-esteem, psychological distress, physical health symptoms, increased alcohol consumption, criminal behaviour, a downgrading of aspirations or resignation.

4. Young people's interest in conventional political participation, such as voting in elections, has declined over recent years due to increasing disenchantment and cynicism. However, this does not mean young people are no longer interested; they still engage in democratic and civic behaviour and they still believe in democratic values. They engage in different forms of democratic activity appropriate to their own understanding of democracy and citizenship. Young people still identify with their society and they are still prepared to engage: the important issue is to make their voice heard.

5. Newer, more informal ways of participation are preferred, such as the Internet, issue-based participation like signing petitions or spontaneously attending demonstrations, and consumer activism such as making shopping decisions based on political considerations. The new technologies and online social communities, such as Facebook and Twitter, offer young people vast opportunities for personal politics

and for mobilising for political action across communities and borders.

6. Children and minors do not enjoy full political and civic rights. For example they do not have the right to vote in most member States leading to an under-representation of this group in parliaments, both national and regional, and local councils. Young people are thus marginalised from the political process, being treated more as "political apprentices" than "political agents". If young people do not feel they are an active part of the political process, they will find other ways to make their voices heard. The recent demonstrations, protests or riots in many European countries can be seen as young people's answer to a political system that does not really give them their share of power and full citizenship.

7. Young people should learn about democracy and participation in educational institutions such as schools. For this reason education for democratic citizenship has to become a central aspect of education. They also learn about citizenship through the non-formal education they receive elsewhere, such as in local youth clubs and civic organisations, and through participation in local and regional youth councils and parliaments. This is where young people get to know what participation in democracy means: through electing class representatives, meeting with local politicians and engaged local citizens, working in community-oriented service projects or sitting on youth parliaments in the local community.

8. Young people want to make their voices heard and to play a real role in decision making in their societies. The best way to achieve this is to strengthen their social integration by sharing economic, social and political power with them and giving them full citizenship and full access to jobs. Due to the proximity to citizens, it is at local and regional levels that this can best be achieved.

9. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe therefore invites local and regional authorities to:

a. ensure that young people completing compulsory education can secure a suitable offer of education or training in a school, college or work-based training – along the lines of the United Kingdom's "September Guarantee" process – in order that they may develop skills adapted to the labour market and thus facilitating their access to it;

b. co-operate with and support local businesses which offer jobs, on-the-job training or work experience to develop work skills and increase the employability of young people, in particular disadvantaged youth;

c. support youth entrepreneurship through adequate funding conditions and access to business incubators, by integrating entrepreneurship into school curricula and training programmes, and by co-operating with local business partners;

d. offer opportunities to young people to enter into a structured dialogue with local and regional authorities and to participate in politics and policy making by setting up joint decision-making mechanisms, mirroring the Council

of Europe's co-management system, in the form of joint councils composed of elected local/regional councillors and youth representatives;

e. introduce local policy on voluntary activity, while guarding against such voluntary activity being used as a substitute for paid employment, to enable young people to develop personal and professional skills;

f. raise awareness of the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life and ensure its implementation.

10. The Congress recalls its proposals to local and regional authorities relating to improving the employment prospects of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods contained in paragraph 9 of its Resolution 319 (2010).

11. The Congress invites the member States of the Council of Europe to include some young people in their national

delegations to the Congress, both as full and substitute members.

12. The Congress invites the Co-ordinator of the European Local Democracy Week to propose that a future edition of the Week be devoted to youth, youth participation and promoting young people's access to human and social rights.

13. The Congress welcomes the increased commitment of the European Union to lowering youth unemployment figures, as seen in the statement of the members of the European Council of 30 January 2012 and in particular the European Commission's Youth Opportunities Initiative.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 17 October 2012, 2nd Sitting (see Document [CG\(23\)9](#), explanatory memorandum), presented by H. O Bozatli, Turkey (R, EPP/CD) on behalf of E. Ampe, Belgium (R, ILDG), rapporteur.