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YOUTH FOR DEMOCRACY FOR YOUTH¹

A Council of Europe youth campaign for revitalising
democracy

INCEPTION SEMINAR

European Youth Centre, Strasbourg, 23-25 November 2021

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

Deadline: **9 November 2021**

A Youth Campaign for Revitalising Democracy

The Joint Council on Youth decided in October 2021 the modalities of a youth campaign for revitalising democracy. The campaign will run between March and October 2022 with a flagship event in Strasbourg in June. The campaign will address three major issues: **revitalising democracy, youth participation and digitalisation**

The Council of Europe Youth sector strategy 2030 recognises young people's "considerable potential and therefore fundamental role in promoting the Council of Europe's core values" and thus aims at enabling young people across Europe to "actively uphold, defend, promote and benefit from the Council of Europe's core values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law".

Rationale

Concerns with the health of democracies in Europe is not new, and while young people are often at the forefront of democratisation processes, these cannot be their responsibility alone, nor can it be implied that young people are responsible for them. This is also what emerges clearly in the 2021 report by the Secretary General "A democratic renewal for Europe", where she points out, among others, the following symptoms of democracy in distress:

- a growing disconnection between public expectations and political institutions;
- historic lows of trust in public authorities and the quality of democracy;
- dissatisfaction with weaknesses in democratic governance;
- shrinking spaces for civil society and curbing of freedom of association and assembly;
- decreases in the public provision of youth spaces and services.

This contributes to a climate where young people fear retribution when exercising freedom of expression and, at the same time, "show a high degree of political interest but a low degree of engagement with essential democratic processes".¹ This sentiment is undoubtedly aggravated by the omnipresence of fake news, conspiracy theories and scepticism due to the Covid-19 pandemic which, what's more, erodes trust in journalism.

Delivering democracy remains certainly a key task for public authorities, but also for civil society, including young people and youth organisations. The 50th anniversary of the youth sector² is an opportunity to renew and deepen what young people bring to the Council of Europe: creativity, commitment, motivation, innovation and participation for and in partnerships for human rights and democracy. It will also be the right moment to highlight what the Council of Europe brings to young people: tailored standards and policies in different fields, drawn up in a unique co-managed fashion, education and training activities, as well as institutional and financial support through the two European Youth Centres and the European Youth Foundation (EYF).

Crises are probably inherent in democracy as an imperfect political system that combines individual autonomy (people should be able to control their own lives) with equality (everyone should have the same opportunity to influence decisions). Despite a broad consensus on the importance of youth participation, it is doubtful that practices for involving young people are improving. The case of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education is also symptomatic: with few exceptions, the time and resources allocated to it in education programmes are being reduced, not increased.

¹ State of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, A democratic renewal for Europe, Report by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe 2021.

² In this respect, it is worth recalling that the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg and the European Youth Foundation were established in 1972.

The effects digitalisation has on democratic participation are still too unknown. Through digital tools, democratisation processes have become accessible in new ways to more people, while shutting others out. Digitalisation of life – in different areas such as democracy, communications, work, culture, education etc – has placed digital environments at the core of an increasing part of people’s lives, Young people have been significantly affected by this trend, being the ones who typically use and integrate digital technologies at the fastest pace. However, this also makes young people most exposed to the challenges emerging from such technologies. Equally challenging is the lack of access of certain groups of young people to digital tools and services and the effects it has on such groups and on our societies (the so-called “digital divide”). The impact on democratic participation and on young people’s rights needs to be closely examined with a view to determining possible measures to maximise opportunities and reduce risks for young people.

The only response to problems of democracy is more democracy; *democracy as a process of democratisation* should thus be present in all processes of the campaign.

The campaign Youth for Democracy for Youth is characterised by being limited in time and by its open aim with regard to what may come after as a follow-up: such follow-up being *if and how young people want (if and how national governments can)*. In this regard, having young people and member States define together the core of the follow-up corresponds fully with the central role of youth participation and co-management in the Council of Europe’s youth policy and the intrinsic role of the current generation of young people in revitalising democracy.

Methodology and Calendar

The campaign will be based on national activities and initiatives, coordinated and articulated by the Council of Europe. The activities will have monthly thematic focus that reflect the main issues covered by the project. National partners will be able to adapt and contextualise the nature and scope of the activities to national issues and realities.

On the theme of revitalising democracy

- March-April: Democracy and access to rights online and offline;
- April-May: Democracy, equality and non-discrimination.

On the theme of meaningful youth participation:

- May-June: Democracy and youth participation at national and European levels (Europe day), including mechanisms to improve them such as co-management;
- June-July: Democracy and young people’s freedom of expression and association.

On the theme of digitalisation:

- August-September: Democracy and digitalisation: the opportunities and risks digital technologies offer to young people, notably as regards democracy and democratic participation;
- September-October: Young people’s rights and digitalisation: opportunities and challenges.

For each thematic month, a list of relevant, existing resources will be published, a common reporting and evaluation grid made available. At the end of each month, the results will be published and compiled so as to create a collective meaning and sense of movement. The activities will be connected through a dedicated Internet site and disseminated on social media. They will be organised at the initiative of national youth councils and national/local governments, coalitions of youth organisations or groups can express interest to the Council of Europe and receive institutional, financial or educational support.

The flagship Youth Event / Youth Week will be held in Strasbourg from 28 June to 2 July and will bring together activists and youth representatives from all member states to discuss results achieved, connect and network individual activists and partner organisations, and to discuss the final months of the campaign, its expected results and follow-up.

The Inception Seminar

Purpose

The inception seminar is organised to plan the campaign in all its aspects together with the main stakeholders and partners at European and regional level. It will be the first opportunity for potential activists and partners to discuss and plan the campaign, develop a sense of ownership and, in some way, to democratise the campaign.

The inception seminar should result in:

- A shared understanding of the rationale, aims and objectives of the campaign
- A plan of key activities at national and European levels reflecting the three themes of the campaign (revitalising democracy, meaningful youth participation, digitalisation)
- A strategy for communication at European and national levels, based on the concept being prepared for and by the Council of Europe
- A clarification of the roles and communication channels between national partners and activists, the Council of Europe and other European partners
- An understanding of the financial resources available and required for the campaign and the possibilities for fundraising for specific activities.

Participants

The participants in the seminar should be future activists and organisers of campaign activities at national level proposed for, or nominated by, national youth councils and/or the governmental authorities responsible for youth policy, typically the members of the European Steering Committee for Youth. Ideally all member states should be represented at the seminar.

Additionally, European youth organisations intending to take part in the campaign or to run specific activities on its themes are also invited to propose and send participants.

Practical conditions of participation

Dates: The seminar will be held on 23, 24 and 25 November. These dates may be slightly adjusted to cover the period 24-26 November.

Venue: The activity will be held at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg.

Accommodation and boarding:

Will be provided by the Council of Europe at the European Youth Centre or at nearby hotels.

Travel expenses

Will be reimbursed by the Council of Europe

Working languages

English and French with simultaneous interpretation.

Covid 19 restrictions

Participation in the activity is subject to restrictions on travel and access to France and other sanitary measures applicable to the European Youth Centre.

Programme

A detailed daily programme for 3 days is currently under preparation and will be shared with participants ahead of the seminar.

Registration procedure

All those interested in taking part in the seminar are invited to apply/pre-register themselves at <https://youthapplications.coe.int/> by **9 November** at the latest. Depending on the number of candidates a pre-selection or prioritisation of applicants may be applied.

Applicants will be informed and hopefully invited by 11 November.