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Youth Participation in Digital Governance: where to engage?



A consultative meeting about youth participation in Digital Governance and its role in the 2030 Strategy of the Council of Europe youth sector.

European Youth Centre, Strasbourg
29-30 November 2023

CONCEPT NOTE

Call for participants

Deadline for registration: **2 November 2023**

1. Background

Young people in today's Europe are faced with an increasingly digitalised life. While a digitalised world supported young people to stay in touch with their friends and teachers during the Covid pandemic, youth work was faced with increasingly complex questions around online safety, data protection and digital literacy. In theory, digitalisation has a considerable democratising potential. However, the realities of the internet and the artificial intelligence and decision-making around it, looks far more complex. And young people, the most active users of digital services, are often left out of the Internet Governance processes that influence so much of their lives.

Internet Governance is understood as the development and application by governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the internet. In order to ensure a sustainable, people-centred and rights-based approach to the internet, the Council of Europe has engaged in setting and promoting standards, building partnerships and fostering multi-stakeholder dialogue.

The "[Guide to human rights for internet users](#)", for example, elaborates on human rights online, their possible limitations and available remedies for such limitations. Starting from the premise that human rights and fundamental freedoms apply equally offline and online, and based on the European Convention on Human Rights and other Council of Europe conventions and instruments, the Guide constitutes a comprehensive tool for all. The Guide has been widely incorporated in the resources for youth participation in Internet Governance developed by the youth sector.

More recently, recognising the wide impact of digital developments on human rights, the Council of Europe has embarked on developing a Convention on Artificial Intelligence (AI), human rights, and democracy to identify and standardise principles on which we govern the development, the deployment and use of AI in our societies.

The Council of Europe [recommendation CM Rec \(2019\)10 on developing and promoting digital citizenship education](#) provides a framework for development of digital citizenship competences for all forms of education with a view to secure that people can fully exercise their rights and responsibilities, as well as take part in democratic life in an increasingly digitalised world.

2. Digital governance and youth

The Council of Europe has worked significantly in the past 10 years on questions pertaining digitalisation, human rights, democracy, and young people. The No Hate Speech Movement Youth Campaign brought the question of hate speech online and its impact on young people. The campaign also brought to the attention the question of youth participation in decision making concerning the internet, particularly in connection with the Internet Governance Forum and other similar fora.

[A seminar](#) on youth participation in Internet Governance in 2017 resulted in a set of conclusions and recommendations, including the call "to give a priority to youth participation in Internet Governance in youth, education and children policies" and to "include youth representatives in every panel in Internet Governance conferences".

The Youth Department has also approached the topic through [activities](#) on Artificial Intelligence. Rather than a focus on the technical aspect of AI, the Youth Department has

promoted the concept of “AI literacy”, supporting young users of AI to understand the human rights and societal consequences of modern technologies. Digital literacy is a prerequisite to engage in Internet Governance.

The question of digitalisation was furthermore picked up in the campaign [Democracy Here | Democracy Now](#), including the flagship activity of the campaign in 2022, the Youth Action Week. The activity resulted in a [Call for Action](#) that gave special attention to the area of digitalisation. It called, among other things, for stakeholders to secure “Accessibility and free access to Internet and technology” and for clear ways to involve young people in decision-making about the internet.

These priorities are also reflected in the [Youth Sector Strategy 2030](#), in which Internet Governance and AI are understood in relation to their impact on democracy. The strategy furthermore emphasises the importance of youth participation in governance processes and calls for ways to strengthen it.

Externally, Youth Sector of the Council of Europe has previously engaged with the [Internet Governance Forum](#) and [The European Dialogue on Internet Governance \(EuroDIG\)](#); two major international fora for discussions around Internet Governance. As a partner, the Youth Department has contributed to discussions on topics of particular interest to youth; human rights questions such as data protection and security, artificial intelligence, internet regulation and policies, cybercrimes, online hate speech and access to services.

3. About the consultative meeting

This consultative meeting will explore current and emerging opportunities of youth participation in Digital and Internet Governance processes. It will support the Youth Department in engaging meaningfully with the relevant questions concerning young people and their participation in digital governance and suggest priorities within this area of work. It will furthermore seek synergies between the existing processes and the priorities of the Youth Sector.

The conclusions and proposals from the consultative meeting will be presented to the Joint Council on Youth and support the implementation of the Youth for Democracy programme.

The consultative meeting will bring together youth workers or experts in the field of youth participation in digital and Internet Governance:

- To review the current and recent developments in Digital Governance, especially those connected with youth participation and young people’s access to rights;
- To create a common understanding and overview of how the topic of youth participation in digital governance relates to the work of the Youth Department, especially in relation to the current priorities of the Youth Sector and in relation to connected topics (Artificial Intelligence Literacy, digital citizenship education, youth participation...);
- To make proposals to consistently integrate a focus on digital governance in Youth for Democracy programme in the period 2024-2027, particularly in respect to non-formal education and youth work, human rights education and youth participation;
- To provide direction for future contributions to, or participation in, external processes on digital governance, and identify spaces and conditions for meaningful youth participation.

A detailed programme of the 2-day meeting will be shared closer to the meeting itself.

4. Participants

The consultative meeting will bring together some 15-20 experts and practitioners, representing a wide range of stakeholders involved in youth participation in digital governance with the Council of Europe and its partners, including:

- youth organisations and civil society actors implementing programmes, research in the field of Internet Governance and connected fields
- representatives of the statutory bodies of the Youth Department
- trainers, youth workers and educators active with the Youth Department of the Council of Europe or with experience in external digital governance processes

All interested candidates must apply on youthapplications.coe.int by 2 November.

5. Practical and Financial Information

The meeting will be held at the European Youth Centre Strasbourg. Board and lodging will be provided and paid for by the Council of Europe.

The European Youth Centres are accessible to people with disabilities and can take measures to accommodate for any specific needs of participants in this respect. Please provide all the necessary information in your registration form.

The working language of the meeting will be English.

Travel expenses and visa fees will be reimbursed according to the rules of the Council of Europe. All participants are expected to arrive on 28 November and depart on 1 December (or in the evening of 30 November).

HOW TO APPLY

Everyone intending to take part in the Consultative Meeting is kindly invited to fill in the online pre-registration/Application form available [here](#).

The Council of Europe secretariat may pre-select and prioritise participants in view of complying with the available financial resources, securing diversity and representation of various stakeholders and areas of expertise as well as geographical representativity of the whole group.

The Council of Europe welcomes applications from all candidates who fulfil the specific profile of the activities, irrespective of gender, disability, marital or parental status, racial, ethnic or social origin, colour, religion, belief or sexual orientation.

Deadline for pre-registration: **2 November**, 23:59 CET