

**DEMOCRACY
HERE NOW**



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Let's get political!

Seminar on the engagement of young people in political life

27 November – 1 December 2023
European Youth Centre Budapest

Call for participants

Deadline for applications: **17 October 2023**

Rationale

The Reykjavik summit of Heads of State and Governments of the member states of the Council of Europe, held in May 2023, re-affirmed the commitment of the member states to the mission and the standards of the institution. The important role played by young people and youth civil society is also recognised in the [Reykjavik Declaration – United around our values](#):

...youth participation in decision-making processes improves the effectiveness of public policies and strengthens democratic institutions through open dialogue.

The Reykjavik Declaration follows on a process of recognising the importance of youth participation in decision making processes in the last decade and aims to respond to the significant concerns about democratic backsliding and youth disengagement and disaffection with democracy, democratic institutions and processes in Europe.

Political participation is essential to functioning democratic systems, being also an indicator for measuring the support for and opposition to democratic institutions, values and principles. Recent research into political participation of young people highlights what a ‘participation paradox’: young people are active in today’s democracy, but they seem reluctant to take part in conventional democratic institutions and processes. The forms of political engagement that young people resort to are rather associated with self-expressive values and go beyond the formal and institutional forms of participation around the electoral cycle. Their preference goes for protest, volunteering, boycotting, social media activism, staging public performances and so on. Rather than being disengaged or opposing democracy, young people participate in different ways than older generations.

However, in a democratic system largely based on representation and elections and complemented by forms of consultation and participation in between elections, the resort to non-institutional forms of participation affects the legitimacy of decisions stemming from them and risks to further alienate young people from power distribution and exercise. The limited engagement with conventional forms of participation needs further examination in respect to both reasons and possible solutions.

Going beyond voter turnout at elections, a rather grim picture contours: at global level, only 2.6% members of parliaments are under 30, the situation at European level (Russian Federation and Belarus included) the percentage being 4.9%. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe counted in 2022 only 16 members aged under 30 (5 representatives and 11 substitutes) amounts to 2.6%. The figure rises to 10.9% if the threshold is set at 35 years, which is still a low figure.¹ Equally, in majority of countries, the voting age was younger than the minimum legal age to hold parliamentary office (with an average waiting time varying between 3.5 years for lower chambers, and 10.4 years for upper chambers). This gap narrows when it comes to local elections.² Under-representation in the elected decision-making bodies is only one of the causes for lack of participation.

A generalised conception that young people are less experienced and competent for office and political life in general leads to further alienation. Risks and costs associated with political participation are significantly higher if one takes into account criteria for discrimination such as sex, gender, migration background, social class, etc. A certain stigma around political parties can also prevent some young people from engaging.

¹ AS/Pol (2022) 37 PACE Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, [Establishment of a “youth partner” status with the Parliamentary Assembly](#), Introductory memorandum, rapporteur: Anastasios Chatzivasileiou, Greece.

² Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Youth participation in national parliaments](#), 2021.

Political engagement should not be reduced to voting and standing for office. Structures for youth participation (e.g., local youth councils) in decision-making concerning policy allow young people to take part in decisions concerning policies at European, national, and local level. However, these structures and processes vary greatly among member states with mandates that tend to remain mostly at the level of consultation. The [co-management system of the youth sector of the Council of Europe](#) remains still, fifty years after its creation, groundbreaking and unique at global level. It allows young people together with representatives of member states to take part in the formulation of policies and programmes, including participative budgeting. Together with an increase in restrictions on the functioning of youth civil society (shrinking space for civil society), the lack of structures for youth participation is limiting possibilities to express concerns and views and take part in decision making.

Growing levels of inequality between generations and within the young generation and the lack of social and economic security perceived are important factors in the lack of trust in the democratic system and processes. A [recent study of the Youth Partnership](#) also highlights a significant interest in human rights among young people, particularly in social and economic rights reflecting general causes of concern. Equally, a precarious economic situation is likely to constitute a barrier in the political participation of young people as highlighted by the participants in the Council of Europe Youth Action Week (2022).

Several solutions have been envisaged and promoted by youth organisations and young people themselves, as well as by decision makers. They include the removal of barriers to political participation such as lowering the voting age or the age to stand in elections. Incentives to promotion of youth political participation target youth quotas on electoral lists, incentives given to political parties that have young people on lists and the strengthening of political youth organisations.

Youth civil society provides a first place to learn and practice democracy and political involvement, while access to democracy and human rights education remains essential in building the capacity of young people to efficiently take part in the political life of the community at the level they choose for themselves.

Youth Revitalising Democracy is a project led by the Council of Europe Youth Department to restore mutual trust between young people and democratic institutions and processes. The project builds on the results of the youth campaign [Democracy Here | Democracy Now](#) that raised awareness among young people, youth civil society and as well as decision makers on the dangers posed by continued backsliding of democracy in Europe and an increasing mistrust between young people and democratic institutions. The key event of the campaign, the [Youth Action Week](#) (June 2022, Strasbourg) issued a [Call for Action](#) that provides the directions and objectives the project for the period 2023-2027. In October 2022, the Joint Council of Youth agreed to follow-up on the results of the campaign in the form of a pluri-annual and multilateral project focused on:

1. **Democratic youth participation**, by supporting young activists, youth civil society and national authorities to uphold and expand existing standards and good practices.
2. **Citizenship and human rights education**, in response to new challenges and emerging themes, such as digitalisation.
3. **Addressing barriers to youth participation**, notably discrimination in all its forms.

Within the framework of the project, the Youth Department organises a seminar to further discuss the ways in which young people can be empowered and supported to take part in democratic political life and to make recommendations on how to further work within the youth sector of the Council of Europe and beyond.

About the seminar

The seminar aims to contribute to empowering and supporting young people to take part in the democratic political life at local, national and European level.

The objectives are:

- To map the barriers and challenges that young people face when trying to get politically involved, including economic, social, cultural, institutional, and legal.
- To discuss solutions to address the limited political participation of young people, including the lowering the voting age and of the age to stand in elections, the creation of independent and youth-led structures for youth participation in decision-making, deliberative democracy, etc.
- To reflect on the stigma associated with political involvement among some young people and the ways to address it.
- To explore the role played by political youth organisations in advocating for structural changes that enable youth participation and in supporting young people's engagement in politics.
- To elaborate recommendations for actions/activities to be undertaken by the Council of Europe, as well as other international organisations, national and local authorities and civil society to advance youth political participation.

Programme and methodology

The programme of the activity will be based on the principles and approaches of non-formal learning, building from the experiences and practices of the participants. It will feature lectures from experts, sessions to explore deeper and share good practices, as well as to co-create recommendations and initiatives.

The seminar is prepared by a team formed of representatives of Advisory Council on Youth, the European Steering Committee for Youth and the European Youth Forum.

Profile of participants

The seminar is designed to bring together some 50 participants that are either:

- Representatives of, representing youth organisations and movements, including international youth organisations/networks, political party youth organisations, national youth councils and local youth councils, minority youth organisation, and any other youth civil society motivated to advocate for youth political participation, democracy and human rights
or
- Elected representatives (e.g., parliamentarians, elected members of local councils, etc.) interested in advancing youth political participation in a framework of democracy and human rights.
or
- Representatives of national and local authorities responsible for youth.
or
- Representatives of organisations/institutions involved with political education, including political foundations.
or
- Researchers focused on youth political participation in Europe.

And in addition, fulfil the following criteria:

- Are holding a position in their organisations/institutions that allows them to follow-up on the seminar.
- Are committed to the values of the Council of Europe, democracy, human rights and to youth participation and are interested in taking further action.
- Are motivated and able to take in the entire training course and be involved in the project follow-up.
- Are able to work autonomously in either English or French language.
- Are resident in one of the state parties to the European Cultural Convention; exceptions can be made if justified.
- Priority will be given to participants aged 18-30.

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.

Application, procedure and selection of participants

All candidates must apply on-line at <https://youthapplications.coe.int>.

The Council of Europe will select up to 50 participants on the basis of the profile outlined above. It will try as far as possible to respect the organisations' priorities, but also to ensure a balance between genders, geographical regions, different types of experiences, cultural backgrounds and organisations, institutions and projects. A waiting list may be established. Candidates will be informed whether their application has been accepted or rejected, and if they have been put on the waiting list, by 25 October 2023.

The full application form including the support letter from sending organisation must be submitted on-line **before 14:00 (CET), 17 October 2023**.

Practical conditions

Board and lodging

Accommodation and meals will be provided by the Council of Europe in the European Youth Centre Budapest.

Travel

Travel expenses and visa fees for the seminar in Budapest will be reimbursed by bank transfer after the activity according to the rules of the Council of Europe. Only the participants who attend the entire seminar can be reimbursed.

Participants are expected to arrive to the European Youth Centre in Budapest on 27 November and depart on 1 December 2023.

Working languages

The seminar will be held in English and French with simultaneous interpretation.

Questions

If you have any questions about this activity, please do not hesitate to contact us at youthdemocracy@coe.int.