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# European Youth Conference

## Young people in local and regional life: Democracy in action!

5-7 February 2025  
Youth Centre Braga  
Portugal

### Call for participants

Deadline: **4 November 2024**

In partnership with



The European Youth Conference takes place in Braga, between 5 and 7 February and is co-organised by the [Council of Europe Youth Department](#) and the [Braga Youth Centre](#), and in partnership with the [Congress of Local and Regional Authorities](#), the [Municipality of Braga](#), the [Portuguese Institute for Sports and Youth](#) and the [European Youth Forum](#).

The conference aims to strengthen youth participation in decision making at local and regional levels, and therefore contribute to the revitalisation of democracy. It will bring together approximately 100 young representatives of local and regional youth councils, youth civil society and local authorities to learn from practices of youth democratic participation and to take part in the consultations concerning the revision of the [European Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life](#) carried by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in partnership with the [Joint Council on Youth](#).

#### Aim and objectives of the conference

The conference aims to strengthen youth participation in decision-making at local and regional levels, and therefore contribute to the revitalisation of democracy.

#### Objectives

- To discuss the practices, challenges and opportunities for youth participation in decision-making at local and regional levels with view to critically reflect and learn from each other;
- To provide participants the opportunity to contribute to the revision of the European Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life ;
- To reflect on and prepare the grounds for the future implementation of the revised Charter and the possible support measures for young people, local youth councils and organisations, as well as local authorities;
- To learn about youth realities in Braga and the initiatives on youth participation of the municipality;
- To motivate participants to take action to strengthen the local youth participation in the follow-up of the conference.

#### Programme and methodology

The three-day programme of the conference is designed as a participatory experience approaches characteristic to non-formal education and youth work. The programme will feature plenary sessions, working groups on the Charter, as well as networking and sharing moments, including visits to learn from the reality of youth participation in Braga. The programme will also feature youth cultural events in the framework of Braga National Cultural Capital 2025, recognising the importance of artistic and cultural initiatives in the creation of a culture of democracy.

The programme is prepared by a group composed of representatives of the Joint Council on Youth of the Council of Europe and of the partners involved.

#### Participants – profile and selection

The participants in the conference will have to fulfil the following profile:

- Be
  - o Members/representatives of local and/or regional youth councils (or similar structures) and/or associations of local/regional youth councils;
  - o Representatives of national youth councils, particularly those having a role in local youth participation in decision-making;
  - o Representatives of youth civil society, including international youth organisations, active in the development of local youth participation and/or

- young activists and representatives of youth movements, social and cultural collectives, active at local and/or regional level;
  - Elected officials at local and/or regional levels, including members of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and public servants of local authorities particularly responsible for youth policy and youth participation;
  - Representatives of youth centres with a role in supporting youth participation at local/regional level, notably youth centres holding the Quality Label for Youth Centres of the Council of Europe;
  - Representatives of organisations representing minority and/or marginalised youth;
  - Young activists and representatives of youth movements active at local and regional level;
  - Members of the Advisory Council on Youth or European Steering Committee for Youth;
  - Youth delegates to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.
- Be aged between 18-30 years, exceptions allowed if justified;
  - Be motivated and in a position to follow-up to the conference to advance local youth participation;
  - Be able to take part for the entire duration of the conference;
  - Be resident in a state party to the European Cultural Convention, exceptions allowed if duly justified;
  - Be able to work in English or French autonomously.

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

All candidates must apply online via relatively available form at <https://youthapplications.coe.int/> by **is 4 November 2024, 13:00 hrs CET**. The candidates who are using the platform for the first time are required to create an account by the link.

### Practical aspects

#### *Travel*

Participants are expected to arrive to Braga on 4 February and depart on 8 February 2025. Travel expenses are reimbursed according to the Council of Europe rules to the selected participants.

#### *Board and lodging*

Participants will be accommodated in twin rooms in a hotel nearby Braga Youth Centre. Meals will be ensured in the Braga Youth Centre and other venues.

#### *Working languages*

The conference working languages are English and French. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided.

### Questions and inquiries

For questions and inquiries, please contact the secretariat of the project Youth Revitalising Democracy at [youthdemocracy@coe.int](mailto:youthdemocracy@coe.int).

## Background

The fourth [Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe](#) (Reykjavik, May 2023) recognised the importance in investing in a common democratic future by securing that everyone can play their role in the democratic process and giving priority to the participation of young people in decision-making processes.

Young people “care deeply about democracy”, as they have said in the message of the youth event [Confidence in tomorrow \(May 2024\)](#), but ask themselves: “How can we have confidence in tomorrow when we cannot contribute to it today? Young people risk losing confidence in institutions, when their capacity to protect and uphold human rights and the rule of law, to promote peace, to prevent war is undermined.” In a context marked by backsliding of democracy, war, social and economic hardship, it seems at times that youth is withdrawing from the practice of democracy or questioning it altogether.

The work of youth movements, youth workers, youth centres and youth organisations come to contradict this assumption. Youth calls for a practice of democracy where young people are recognised as actors of today, not only as learners for tomorrow. Youth participation remains essential for building a democratic present and future. The praxis of democracy is first and best experienced at local level where one can learn to contribute and take part in decisions concerning community’s daily life, being able to see the impact of one’s decisions.

The Revised European Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life is the reference standard for youth participation at local level. The Charter preamble defines that youth participation is about:

*“having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society. [so called RMSOS model]”*

In 2024, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has initiated the revision of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, immediately associating the Joint Council on Youth as the main partner of the process, to better reflect and respond to challenges faced by young people, as well as to include new practices of youth participation, ways to monitor and support the implementation. The process of revision, to be concluded at the end of 2025, is designed to be consultative inviting a variety of actors to make their contribution towards a better instrument that can serve both young people and local authorities in making democracy and democratic institutions stronger and more inclusive.

The Council of Europe Youth Department has been working on the issue of youth participation at all levels throughout its existence of over fifty years, from the co-management of the priorities and resources to the educational programme and the grants offered by the European Youth Foundation. Recent developments include the development of a [recommendation on Roma youth participation](#), study sessions and training programmes on the topic, as well as strengthening youth work and youth centres as primary support systems, notably through the [European youth work agenda](#) and the [Quality label for youth centres](#). In the framework of its project Youth revitalising democracy, it has particularly pursued the issue of local youth participation through a seminar on the role of local youth councils in strengthening democracy, as well as through consultations on the potential development of a standard and support measures for both local youth councils and local/regional authorities.

The European conference on local and regional youth participation intends to make a substantive contribution to the process of consultation on the revised version of the Charter, allowing a diversity of actors to meet, learn, share, and provide input on the contents of the text, as well envisage ways to make it a reality following its adoption.

### [The European Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life](#)

The original [Charter](#) was already prepared by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in close collaboration with the Joint Council on Youth (therefore with young people). Revised in 2003, following its 10th anniversary, the Charter sets out a widely used definition of youth participation, key principles, sectoral policies and ways to structurally organise youth participation in decision making. In 2024, the Congress has initiated a new revision process for the Charter with a view to strengthen youth participation and democracy at local and regional level.

### [The project Youth revitalising democracy](#)

Led by the Youth Department, the project aims at strengthening processes of revitalising democracy through youth participation and agency, directly responding to the priorities set by the Reykjavik Summit of Heads of State and Governments, in particular the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy. It builds on the successful implementation of the youth campaign Democracy Here | Democracy Now (2022) and its follow-up (2023). The campaign resulted in a [Call for Action](#), containing 50 proposals for actions to revitalise democracy to be implemented on medium term by youth civil society, member states and the Council of Europe. The first proposal clearly states:

*“Independent and youth-led youth councils should be created and supported in every municipality in every Council of Europe member State. Participation in decision-making is a cornerstone of both democracy and human rights.”*

### [Braga and youth participation](#)

Braga has a solid tradition of youth participation and local youth policies, resonating in the city, in the region, in Portugal, in Europe, and in the world. For several years, it was the youngest city demographically in the EU (at 15). It hosts strong local branches of the main international youth organisations and has a vibrant local youth and student associative life with organised interactions with the municipality and the University of Minho. In 1998, Braga hosted the World Youth Forum of the United Nations System, which adopted the UN Braga World Youth Action Plan, setting important youth-led global aspirations for the new millennium. In 2012, Braga was the European Capital of Youth and in 2016 the Ibero-American Youth Capital. The headquarters for the EU National Agency for Erasmus+ Youth/Sport and European Solidarity Corps in Portugal are in Braga, and since April 2024, the Braga Youth Centre holds the Quality Label for Youth Centres of the Council of Europe.

### [Braga Youth Centre](#)

The Braga Youth Centre is an instrument of the municipality’s local youth policy with the mission of ensuring working conditions, including providing accommodation, to promote youth work, non-formal education, citizenship, human rights education, and the development of creativity and entrepreneurship for young people. The Centre is the result of urban requalification, carried out by the Municipality with the rehabilitation of a building that functioned as Braga’s Youth Hostel and accommodated the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth regional services. Opened in 2019, it offers services and opportunities of interest to young people and the general public, integrating also services of the Portuguese Institute of Sports and Youth. The Youth Centre of Braga is among the 14 Youth Centres in Europe that hold the Quality Label for Youth Centre of the Council of Europe, being the second in Portugal, after the Lisbon Youth Centre, being awarded with the Quality Label.