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30 March 2026

Youth Innovating Democracy

Youth Event of the New Democratic Pact for Europe

European Youth Centre
Strasbourg

24 – 26 June 2026

Call for applications



Why a New Democratic Pact for Europe?

Democratic backsliding, disinformation, impunity, and authoritarianism are undermining democracy in Europe. People are increasingly afraid and frustrated. It comes at a time when democratic security – the resilience of our democratic institutions, freedoms, and values – is our first line of defence against the threats we face. A collective response is needed. There is no quick fix and no single solution. With the New Democratic Pact, the Council of Europe unites with its partners to boost solutions that work and create new responses. To identify them, consultations are needed. The Pact will serve as a collective and inclusive process – not to reinvent democracy, but to reinforce its foundations, amplify its benefits, and innovate its form to make it tangible for everyone, especially younger generations. The directions set during the consultation phase running through 2026 will shape the work that follows.

About the Youth Event

The youth event is the key youth event of the consultation phase leading towards the New Democratic Pact for Europe, being organised in the framework of the Presidency of Monaco of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The youth event will further strengthen the ties between the Council of Europe, its mission, and young people. The event is designed to discuss the aspirations, challenges and proposals of young people to innovate and renew democracy, building on the commitment and experience of a long-standing partnership in the field of youth.

The Council of Europe has been leading the way in youth participation and engagement in democratic decision-making, starting with its co-management system. More recently, the [10th Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth](#), held in Malta in 8-9 October 2025, recognised the important role of youth participation. The national delegations included in their composition representatives of youth civil society, in their vast majority national youth councils or similar platforms, where national youth councils do not exist. The Council of Europe [Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective](#) sets an innovative and high standard for the integration of young people's views in decision-making in all policy areas, not only in the youth sector. This offers the possibility of a strengthened role for national youth councils to play an important role in organising youth participation and consultation in member States across policy areas beyond the youth sector. In 2026, the Committee of Ministers joined the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in responding to the needs and aspirations of young people through the adoption of the [Recommendation CM/Rec \(2026\)3 on the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life](#), an innovative standard that completes a multilevel framework of governance.

The event also builds on the experience and models tested by youth organisations, laboratories for democratic participation and innovation addressing the full spectrum of youth engagement.

The youth event will develop proposals, as well as creative outputs to be included in the New Democratic Pact, notably in respect of its pillar on Innovating democracy.

The youth event builds on the key proposals and achievements made by young people and youth civil society in the last four years in respect to revitalising democracy. Starting with the Youth Action Week: Democracy Now! (2022, Strasbourg) within the campaign Democracy Here | Democracy Now, young people have raised public attention to the need for urgent action to recommit to democracy. They have made concrete proposals as showcased by the [Call for Action \(2022\)](#), the [Message of the youth event, Confidence in tomorrow \(2024\)](#) and the conclusions of the [youth event](#) of the 10th Conference of Ministers responsible for.

Building on these achievements, but also on the challenges faced by young people today, the youth event will be shaped around three key themes that emerged as areas where innovation is needed.

1. Juvenate politics: innovating the system

Only 2.8% of the world's parliamentarians are aged 30 and under.¹ This amplifies the perception that young people are often absent from the chambers of power where decisions are made. On the other hand, young people are politically interested, they are the driving force of movements against climate change, corruption, and for human rights and democracy. Youth organisations are often targeted in anti-democratic crackdowns, further aggravating their particular vulnerability. The European Youth Forum and young people have long campaigned for a reform of the core element of political systems – elections - advocating for lowering the voting age, as well as for the inclusion of youth quotas on the electoral lists, and for education for democratic citizenship and human rights. This thematic strand will develop through plenary sessions and workshops proposals on how to bring young people into the centre of politics, looking at examples already tested and innovative proposals and practices that could be upscaled.

2. Live equality: the promise of democracy

The promise of equal treatment and chances is core to the democratic objective. Much of the disenchantment with democracy of young people is also connected with their perspectives for an independent and decent life. Recent studies reveal a strong connection between distance and distrust in representative democracy and the experience of exclusion and marginalisation by young Europeans. The life prospects of younger generations, the shocking increase in cost of living have been severely impacted by the accumulated impact of a series of economic, sanitary, political crises and wars. Young people, especially those with a minority background, or coming from low-income households, are most severely, also increasing potential mental health distress. The Council of Europe attaches the utmost importance to access to social rights, as again demonstrated in 2026 through the [High Level Conference on the European Social Charter](#) (Chişinău, Republic of Moldova, 18-19 March 2026) or the work done in the youth field on the implementation of the [Enter! Recommendation CM/rec \(2015\)3 on access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights](#). Discussions on economic policies and public investment are heavily impacting young people, however, they rarely consider their input, aspirations and concerns. This thematic strand will address concerns of young people in respect of equality and economic justice and make proposals on how the Council of Europe, member States and youth civil society can act in the upcoming years.

3. Empower communities: an eco-system for youth democratic participation

Youth democratic participation requires an eco-system in place to thrive. The recently adopted CM/Rec(2026)3 Recommendation on the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life stresses the importance of youth civil society and their roles as laboratories of democratic learning and practice, youth centres and spaces, and opportunities for learning and engagement offered through youth work and democracy and human rights education. Reports on the state of democracy show that in the process of autocratisation and democratic backsliding, the first rights to be attacked are the freedom of association and assembly. This strand can also provide for more practical outputs, such as artistic expression, workshops on participatory arts, etc. and also support engagement with local and regional authorities.

¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, Youth participation in national parliaments 2025, available [here](#).

Objectives

- To engage young people and youth organisation in shaping the New Democratic Pact for Europe with critical discussions and proposals on how to innovate and rejuvenate democracy, ensuring inclusive youth participation.
- To highlight practices and initiatives of young people and youth civil society on the relevant content strands of the event
- To provide a space for advocacy, networking and dialogue between young people and political representatives at Council of Europe and member States level.
- To associate young people and youth civil society, as key partners, with the Council of Europe values and work, notably the New Democratic Pact for Europe.

Programme and outcomes

The youth event will bring together some 120 young people, representatives of youth organisations in their full diversity, including youth initiatives and movements, as well as representatives of national authorities and elected officials, for a three-day programme that will be a strong experience of participation, democratic deliberation, creativity and action characteristic to non-formal human rights education approaches of the youth sector of the Council of Europe. The programme features plenary sessions focused on exchanges with the political leadership of the Council of Europe, as well as democratic dialogue and debates on the key three themes addressed.

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

Participants profile

The youth event is primarily designed to bring together a diverse group of participants who are either:

- representatives of an international youth organisation or network;
- representatives of national youth council or local/regional youth councils;
- young activists for democracy and human rights, members of youth movements or initiatives, including those associated with projects supported by the European Youth Foundation or the project Youth revitalising democracy;
- representatives of youth centres in the Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres network;
- members of the Advisory Council for Youth or the European Steering Committee for Youth;
- youth delegates to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities;
- young artists, young journalists and content creators whose work addresses the themes of the youth event.

And, in addition, fulfil the following criteria:

- Are in a position to multiply and follow-up on the conclusions of the youth event;
- Are resident on a state party to the European Cultural Convention, exceptions are possible if duly justified;
- Are aged between 18-35 years old, exception are possible if justified;
- Are able to work autonomously in English or in French;
- Are available for the entire duration of the youth event.

Application procedure and selection of participants

All candidates must duly complete the online application form. The deadline for submitting the applications is **Sunday, 19 April 2026**, at [THIS LINK](#).

The Council of Europe will select up to 120 participants based on the profile outlined above, ensuring a balance between genders, geographical regions, levels of experiences, cultural backgrounds and organisations. A waiting list will be established.

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.

Practical conditions

Board and lodging

Accommodation will be provided in the European Youth Centre Strasbourg or in a hotel nearby in twin rooms. Meals will be provided in the European Youth Centre. Participants will be informed after the selection on the place of accommodation. All meals and accommodation are provided by the Council of Europe.

Travel

Travel costs are covered by the Council of Europe on basis of its rules. Further information will be communicated to the selected participants, pre-paid tickets can be offered following the rules of the Council of Europe. Participants should arrive to Strasbourg on 23 June and depart on 27 June 2026.

Working language

The working languages of the youth event are English and French.

Further inquiries

For questions, please contact the Council of Europe Secretariat at youthdemocracy@coe.int.