

10th

Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth

**“Young people for Democracy:
Youth Perspectives in Action”**

**Valletta, Malta
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Background document for the Conference



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIAT
FOR YOUTH, RESEARCH
AND INNOVATION



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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
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Introduction

This document intends to provide background information to the delegations on the subjects that will be dealt with at the 10th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth.

It covers:

- I. Thematic session 1: “Young People and the New Democratic Pact for Europe”
- II. Thematic session 2: “Integrating a youth perspective: An opportunity to shape policies together”
- III. The main findings of the revision of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life
- IV. The main outcomes of the 4th European Youth Work Convention (Valletta, 28-29 May 2025)

With regard to the aforementioned thematic sessions, some questions for debate are proposed, with a view to ensuring a more coordinated input to the discussions.

I) Thematic session 1: “Young People and the New Democratic Pact for Europe”

The Council of Europe [New Democratic Pact for Europe](#) is a strategic and political process to reinforce democracy’s foundations, amplify its benefits, and innovate its form as our societies confront challenges like democratic backsliding, disinformation, impunity, and authoritarianism.

The Pact will serve as a collective and inclusive process to boost solutions that work and identify new responses to these challenges. Prospective workshops and thematic seminars will be co-organised to this end with civil society, think-tanks, universities, and international bodies.

All Council of Europe bodies – the Secretary General and the entire secretariat, the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and Convention bodies – are mobilising their capacities and networks to contribute throughout this pilot phase, until the end of 2026, and to help shape the Pact’s long-term direction beyond it. The 10th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers of Youth and the youth event preceding it feature amongst the initiatives that are being undertaken as part of the Pact. The directions set during the consultation phase running through 2026 will shape the work that follows.

The Pact focuses on three strategic pillars.

The first, *Learning and Practising Democracy*, focuses on equipping citizens, particularly

young people, with the necessary skills and opportunities to participate equally and meaningfully in democratic life, given the concerning trend of disengagement from public life. Responses will include promoting media literacy and democratic engagement, as well as advocating for inclusion, equal access and dialogue across political, generational, cultural and digital divides. Particular emphasis will be placed on enhancing youth leadership and participation, and on fostering civic engagement through innovative tools and inclusive narratives that connect younger generations to democratic life.

The second, *Protecting Democracy*, aims to defend institutions against threats such as corruption, disinformation, and electoral interference. This pillar will focus in particular on how to rebuild trust in democratic institutions, counter disinformation and safeguard public debate, defend the rule of law, fight corruption relentlessly, promote social rights for all, and advance equality and inclusion.

The third, *Innovating for Democracy*, promotes new participatory approaches and the use of technology to increase trust, accessibility, and efficiency in governance. It also aims to promote solutions that drive democratic innovation by engaging citizens through deliberative and participatory models that renew and adapt democracy to today's challenges; to showcase promising democratic practices worldwide; to confront the triple planetary crisis – climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss – and to recognise its profound impact on democracy's resilience; and to tap into collective intelligence, using creative tools such as prospective games to imagine, explore, and co-shape the future of democracy.

Dynamic and diverse, young people infuse democratic life with urgency and innovation. Yet many are excluded from formal participation as civic space narrows. The Pact provides a vital opportunity for meaningful engagement, ensuring that their voices influence Europe's democratic future. It also encourages member States to explore innovative ways to promote meaningful youth participation, in line with the Council of Europe's Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective.

This could entail investing in democratic education through formal and non-formal learning, supporting youth-led initiatives and participatory mechanisms, and safeguarding young people online while leveraging their technological skills for democratic innovation. It is also important to take action to ensure young people have access to rights, particularly social rights, as this is a prerequisite for their democratic participation, especially for those with fewer opportunities or in vulnerable situations.

In conclusion, the idea of empowering young people to co-create democratic renewal, supported by the Pact, will help secure a more resilient, inclusive and forward-looking democracies.

Questions for debate:

- What are the main obstacles in your country to young people's and youth organisations' active participation in democratic life, and what do you think can be done to counter them and by whom?

- The [2025 report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe](#) has underlined that “youth disengagement persists, especially among marginalised groups. Young women face added challenges in politics – even as they lead on climate, equality and human rights”. What do you think can be done to engage with disaffected young people and restore their faith and trust in democracy?
- How are you supporting youth civil society and young people in your country in learning and practicing democracy?
- What innovative forms of young people’s participation are you supporting and/or implementing in your country that you would like to share with the other delegations?

II) Thematic session 2: “Integrating a youth perspective: An opportunity to shape policies together”

For over 50 years, the Council of Europe has recognised the crucial role of young people and youth organisations in promoting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, and integrated youth participation and youth perspectives in its work. Its ground-breaking [co-management system](#) is a living example of participatory democracy, in which youth representatives and national Governments decide and implement together, and on an equal footing, on the priorities, policies and budgets of the Council of Europe youth sector.

At the [4th Council of Europe Summit](#), held in Reykjavik in May 2023, the heads of state and government of the 46 member States decided to 'include a youth perspective in the organisation's intergovernmental and other deliberations, as youth participation in decision-making processes improves the effectiveness of public policies and strengthens democratic institutions through open dialogue'. The Reykjavik Declaration therefore expresses the Council of Europe's and its member states' clear commitment to enhancing youth participation in policy and decision-making processes, to address concerns of young people's non-participation in democratic processes and declining trust in public institutions.

The Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) started work on a Reference Framework to integrate a youth perspective across diverse policy areas, particularly its four conceptual elements, shortly after the Reykjavik Summit. In 2024, the Committee of Ministers endorsed the elements to guide the preparation and implementation of the Reference Framework.

Acknowledging the positive contribution and change that young people bring to democracy and European unity, and renewing commitment to the living conditions and human rights of young people, the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a youth perspective envisions:

- Participatory democracy – guaranteeing young people’s meaningful participation in democratic processes, and enhancing the impact, relevance, and resilience of public policies across Europe, and
- Inclusive policies that benefit young people – present and future generations – across

policy fields that affect them, while promoting transparency, equity, and open dialogue with diverse stakeholders.

In the Reference Framework, a "youth perspective" is defined as a strategic approach to policymaking that ensures young people's experiences, needs, and interests are consistently included throughout the various stages of the policy process. A "youth perspective" can be approached through four interconnected conceptual elements:

- Think with young people – Attitude: the mindset recognising young people as active contributors to policymaking.
- Learn from and with young people – Experience: the interactive processes enabling intergenerational learning, fostering mutual understanding and respect between policymakers and young people.
- Participate with young people – Skills: the competencies needed for meaningful youth participation, grounded in democratic values such as inclusion, pluralism, and non-discrimination.
- Act with and for young people – Action: the commitment to actively include young people's views and aspirations in the policy cycle – deliberation, formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

Together, these four conceptual elements lay the foundations for ensuring that young people's voices are meaningfully and sustainably integrated into policy processes. Their effective integration and implementation however, rest on two main factors:

- Recognition of young people's knowledge, skills and perspectives: recognising young people as rights holders, ensuring their active participation in policymaking, from the development of policies to their implementation, monitoring and evaluation, including impact assessment, and
- Commitment and resources: integration of a youth perspective must be sustained over time, requiring both institutional commitment and adequate resources.

The Reference Framework is flexible, allowing users to adapt it to their specific contexts and needs, drawing on the expertise of the Council of Europe youth sector and other relevant experience.

Questions for debate:

- What are ways the Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective can strengthen the participation of young people in democratic process and decision making in your country?
- Which elements of the Reference Framework do you consider need particular focus, in light of your own countries experience?

- In your view, what additional methods to support young people's active participation could help reinforce the Framework?

III) The main findings of the revision of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life.

The European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life has been the key European standard for youth participation since its first adoption in 1992. In 2024, the [Congress of Local and Regional Authorities](#) and the [youth statutory bodies](#) embarked on a process of updating the text to the realities of today through a participatory process that involved youth civil society, young people and local and regional authorities in consultations on the text. This participatory process culminated with the [European Youth Conference](#), "Young people in local and regional life: democracy in action!", held in Braga in February 2025.

The proposed text sets a comprehensive framework for youth participation in decision-making at local and regional level outlining what youth participation and its principles are, sets guidelines for the establishment and functioning local youth councils and for ad-hoc consultations of young people. The Charter recognises the role and support needed by the entire eco-system for youth participation: support to youth civil society, youth work, and youth centres and youth-led spaces, provisions for education and training for youth, elected representatives and civil servants. It places equal emphasis on the need to support youth political engagement, especially at local level, through measures such lowering the voting age and encouraging young people to run for office.

The provisions also set for regular reviews of implementation with a view to support member States in advancing youth participation. The Charter is rooted in a human rights-based approach, where local and regional authorities are the duty bearers, and young people are human rights holders. Particular attention is given to questions of equality and diversity, as well as new developments since 2003 (the last revision of the text).

While the role of local and regional authorities is fundamental in the implementation of the Charter, authorities at national level are key partners in setting up comprehensive legal and policy frameworks, ensuring sufficient resources and enhancing cooperation and coordination.

The text of the Charter will be discussed and proposed for adoption at the Congress plenary session on 29 October 2025. Following the Congress session, the Charter and the accompanying recommendation will be sent to the Committee of Ministers for discussion and adoption.

IV) The main outcomes of the 4th European Youth Work Convention

The 4th European Youth Work Convention (hereafter: EYWC), which was held in Valletta on the 28th and 29th of May 2025, proved to be an intense, vibrant and energising occasion. The Convention brought together over 500 participants from 42 countries across Europe as well as representatives from the European Commission, the Council of Europe, voluntary youth organisations and the wider youth work community to discuss and consider the future of youth work in Europe.

European Youth Work Conventions have been a regular and significant forum for youth work policy makers, practitioners and the wider youth work community, including researchers, voluntary youth organisations and youth service providers, aimed at promoting and strengthening youth work and further development and fulfilling its potential in supporting and empowering young people.

The title of the Convention, 'Youthwork xcelerate - A Roadmap Towards a European Strategy for Youth Work' reflected Malta's commitment to advancing the recognition and development of youth work in Europe and providing the momentum needed to give it both shape and direction in the next five years.

The primary focus of the 4th EYWC in Malta was giving voice to and listening to the youth work community, articulating and arriving at conclusions that could provide the essential features, building blocks, measures and initiatives for developing and implementing an effective youth work strategy. All stakeholders – policymakers, European institutions, authorities at national, regional and local level, the voluntary youth sector and young people – have varying roles and responsibilities in developing and implementing a youth work strategy.

The next five years will see a new EU youth strategy, a new Multiannual Financial Framework, a new generation of European programmes, and a new Council of Europe youth sector strategy.

The EYWC provided the opportunity to set out a strategic vision, objectives and priorities for youth work in Europe over the next five years and a roadmap on how they can be included in and become an essential pillar of all youth policies both at European and national level.

Thematic workshops were the main forum in which participants could consider, discuss and reach conclusions on the three overarching themes of the EYWC.

- Youth work core: A common vision for youth work and its future, which focused on definitions and descriptions of youth work, values and ethics, recognition and visibility, quality and standards, and monitoring and evaluation.

- Youth work environment: Supporting young people by addressing their needs and aspirations, ensuring their access to human rights, inclusion, participation, and empowerment. This includes advocacy in youth work; the role of employed and volunteer youth workers and youth leaders and their education, training, and recognition, as well as youth work methodologies, tools, approaches and new technologies.
- Youth work systems: Policies and strategies at the European, national, regional, and local levels, covering the voluntary youth sector and youth work associations, networks, centres, and service providers. It also includes cooperation between the state/public and voluntary sectors at different levels, the state/public and the EU or European Youth Foundation funding and resources for youth work, as well as the interaction of youth work with other policy fields.

The thematic workshops resulted in 74 conclusions which participants at the Convention considered to be essential features of a future European youth work strategy. A roadmap is currently being agreed upon to follow up the conclusions of the Convention.