



YOUTH PERSPECTIVES IN ACTION

VISION AT A GLANCE



Democracy is at stake!

Challenged by successive crises, European states are struggling to satisfy people's aspirations to economic growth, social justice and political stability. In a context of uncertainties, conflicts and hardship, some use fear and anger to polarize societies, to manipulate public opinion and to justify violations of human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. The erosion of public trust in institutions and growing disaffection with democratic processes demand urgent attention. Moreover, the current demographic outlook shows an aging society in which young people's concerns risk being increasingly overlooked and marginalised.

Young people face significant barriers to democratic participation

- ◆ legal, administrative and practical obstacles to access human rights;
- ◆ a shrinking civic space;
- ◆ an unsafe digital environment;
- ◆ absence of participation opportunities and funding for their initiatives;
- ◆ challenges around information, education, vocational training and employment;
- ◆ economic insecurity;
- ◆ vulnerability to poverty, homelessness, and health issues (both physical and mental);
- ◆ combined effect of multiple forms of discrimination of young people with intersecting identities.

Despite these obstacles, young people are powerful agents of change and lead movements for democracy, social justice, environmental protection, and peace. Their commitment can come at a high cost. Increasingly, young people who take a public stand risk facing reprisal, including imprisonment and direct threats to life.

The Council of Europe **proposes a New Democratic Pact for Europe**, a pact that values and amplifies young people's contribution to achieve a more resilient democracy, a pact that supports the integration of youth perspectives in politics, policy and decision-making.

What's the youth perspective?

A youth perspective is the expression of the needs, interests and views of young people in the framework of politics, policy making and decision-making processes. As young people are not a homogeneous group, we often refer to youth perspectives (plural) and focus on those expressed through independent, democratic youth-led civil society organizations.

Why do youth perspectives matter?

Youth perspectives improve the quality and scope of democracy and policy making:

- ♦ reducing the risk of stagnation;
- ♦ shaping more forward-looking, inclusive and resilient policies;
- ♦ enhancing trust in institutions and policies;
- ♦ increasing the legitimacy of decisions;
- ♦ strengthening intergenerational dialogue and solidarity.

The integration of youth perspectives reinforces young people's agency:

- ♦ creating conditions for them to exercise their rights and influence politics, policies and decisions;
- ♦ strengthening their sense of belonging and ownership in a community/society;
- ♦ developing civic skills and competences in society;
- ♦ expanding their networks.



How can youth perspectives be integrated?

To remove the barriers to young people's democratic participation, the integration of youth perspectives should be a **clear policy objective at all levels and rely on two key factors:**

- a) the recognition of **young people as right holders**;
- b) a **sustained commitment** grounded in intergenerational solidarity and collaboration, supported by adequate financial and human resources.

The Council of Europe proposes a new framework to increase the depth, breadth, impact and sustainability of the integration of young people's perspectives in policy and decision making. Adopted by the Ministers responsible for Youth on 9 October 2025, the reference framework on the integration of a youth perspective is an **innovative instrument for strengthening democracy through youth participation**, and for developing just and inclusive policies that benefit both current and future generations.

Four conceptual elements:

1. **THINK with young people** - focuses on developing the attitude and mindset needed to recognise young people as active contributors to policy-making.
2. **LEARN from and with young people** - creates interactive processes enabling experience of intergenerational learning, fostering mutual understanding and respect between policy-makers and young people.
3. **PARTICIPATE with young people** - strives to develop the skills and competencies needed for meaningful youth participation, grounded in democratic values like inclusion, pluralism, and non-discrimination.
4. **ACT with and for young people** - operationalises the political commitment to action youth views and aspirations in the policy cycle - deliberation, formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

The youth perspective must be integrated throughout **three consecutive phases:**

1. Preparation
2. Design and implementation
3. Monitoring and evaluation

And uphold the following **Principles:**

1. Young people as right holders
2. Human-rights based approach
3. Cross-sectoral approach
4. Intergenerational justice and solidarity
5. Interdisciplinarity and multistakeholder cooperation
6. Intersectionality
7. Multilevel action
8. Sustainability.

WHO is called on to implement the reference framework?

The Council of Europe

A Strategy will be developed to implement the framework through the integration of youth perspectives in Council Europe's work. It will:

- ◆ Adopt a step-by-step approach, taking into account each sector's specificities and young people's priorities
- ◆ include measures to develop skills, share knowledge, create opportunities, assess impact, show results and lessons learned
- ◆ rely on the expertise and networks of the Youth Department and the active contribution of the Advisory Council on Youth
- ◆ build upon the many success stories of youth participation in the Council of Europe.

Member States

The Reference Framework will also guide member States in the integration of a youth perspective at national level. To support their efforts, the Council of Europe will:

- ◆ offer advice on participatory mechanisms and identify good practice;
- ◆ continue empowering young people, promoting transfer of knowledge and competence;
- ◆ step up policy assistance measures for member States;
- ◆ develop new tools to facilitate the practical implementation of the framework.

Youth at the Council of Europe

The mission of the Council of Europe's youth sector is to inspire and empower young people across Europe to live by and champion human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. By boosting young people's access to rights, expanding their knowledge, and supporting their competence development, it creates conditions for young people to become active and confident shapers of democratic life. Beyond this, it is committed to ensuring young voices are genuinely heard and valued in decision-making at every level.

At the heart of this effort is an innovative co-management system that brings together young Europeans and public authorities in a unique space for shared reflection and co-decision-making. Made up of 30 representatives of youth NGOs and networks, an Advisory Council of Youth brings the voice of young Europeans. The European Youth Centre, present in Strasbourg and Budapest, provides a platform for co-creation, enabling young people to pilot initiatives, develop skills, and engage with policymakers to advance democratic citizenship in practice. The European Youth Foundation provides financial and educational support for European youth activities.



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