

Description of the working groups

Tuesday, 14 May 2024, 15:00 -17:30

Reykjavik Principles for democracy and young people

The [Reykjavik Principles for democracy](#) (Appendix III Reykjavik Declaration) have been adopted at the Reykjavik Summit of Heads of State and Governments of the Council of Europe with a view to provide the organisation and the member states with guidance on the core elements of a functioning democracy. In these working groups, we will explore the principles, their connection with the daily realities of young people (including the challenges and effects that limited respect leads to) and make proposals on what can be further done.

WORKING GROUP 1 - Democratic participation through free and fair elections

Elections are at the core of democratic systems today. While complemented by other forms of participation in decision making, free and fair elections ensure power distribution in society, and set up political direction. Youth participation in elections remains low, despite efforts to increase it. This low participation covers both voting and standing to be elected. The workshop will explore the challenges young people face in respect to free and fair elections and their participation within and explore solutions or good practices already advocated by youth.

WORKING GROUP 2 - Democratic participation: beyond voting

Democratic participation goes beyond voting and should be encouraged and learnt from early ages. The youth sector has long advocated for structures for participation in decision making for young people, which have translated into local youth councils, national youth councils, advisory bodies, etc. The Council of Europe co-management system of decision-making remains one of the most sophisticated examples in Europe. Other approaches include consultations, randomised assemblies, etc. The working group will explore the importance of democratic youth participation beyond the electoral cycle, the challenges faced and the good practices existent.

WORKING GROUP 3 - Equal chances to participate: combating exclusion, discrimination and violence

Young people are not a unified mass. They face challenges as young people and depending on their background they might face in their life additional hurdles in order to take part in the life of society. Discrimination on all grounds remains a reality for many young people. Those choosing to become politically engaged often are also exposed to harassment, hate speech, violence in many forms. Trust in a system that discriminates is also often enough a cause for disengagement. The working group will explore the challenges faced when ensuring participation of all young people and will explore possible approaches.

WORKING GROUP 4 - Effective democratic institutions are youthful

Democratic institutions ensure the daily running of democratic societies. Effective democratic institutions ensure representation from the entire political spectrum and of the society in general. They are accessible and transparent and their decision-making process and impact

on daily life is clear. This also implies that democratic institutions are accessible to citizens, particularly young people. Their decisions and impact on various groups is well considered as well as communicated. Parliaments, local and regional councils and other elected bodies well represent the entire population. The workshop will explore questions related to challenges young people face in their relation with institutions and the solutions at hand.

WORKING GROUP 5 - Separation of powers is core to democracy

Democratic systems are based on the idea of the separation of powers between legislative, executive, and the judiciary (in the classical scenario) with effective citizen control and checks and balances that block cumulation of power in one side only. As the Secretary General report of 2021 says the democratic decline in Europe is marked by the fact that these checks and balances are not functional anymore and that the different powers enable each other in decline. The workshop will explore how young people are affected by the attacks to effective checks and balances and what they can do about it.

WORKING GROUP 6 - Access to justice

The power of human rights is that they are both law and morals. The justiciability of human rights is an important element in claiming human rights. Young people should also have access to justice system and be able to use the democratic system in its entirety to bring forward justice. This is demonstrated by groundbreaking cases brought forward by young people such as Duarte Agostinho and others v Portugal and 32 others on climate change at the European Court of Human Right or Make it 16 Inc v Attorney General in front of the Supreme Court of New Zealand on discrimination of 16-18 years olds in respect to their voting rights. The workshop will explore the challenges faced by young people with the justice systems, including capacity to exercise access to justice and discrimination faced within the justice system and explore possible ways forward.

WORKING GROUP 7 - Corruption kills democracy

Some of the biggest anti-corruption movements state it clearly: corruption kills. It takes away lives literally, destroys the idea of social and economic equality and intergenerational justice, but also kills democracy in the process as it completely undermines the trust in the fundamental idea that democracy is "the only means to ensure that everyone can live in a peaceful, prosperous and free society." The workshop will explore the challenges young people face in their daily reality with corruption and the ways forward.

WORKING GROUP 8 - Free to express

Freedom of expression is essential in democracy. It allows everyone to receive and impartial information, to hold opinions and express them, even when they are uncomfortable and provocative. Journalists and independent media play an important role in providing accurate information about key issues in society. As the Council of Europe Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists shows every day more and more journalists are attacked, leading to a chilling effect on freedom of expression in society. However, with the advent of social media platforms and artificial intelligence, disinformation and misinformation exploded, providing a platform for amplification of hate speech. The workshop will explore the challenges young people face in respect to exercising their freedom of expression and their right to information.

WORKING GROUP 9 - No one is born a democrat, we all learn!

To secure a democratic present and future, democracy, human rights and the rule of law need to be learnt from an early age. Despite the adoption of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for democratic citizenship and human rights education in 2010 and the subsequent reviews on its implementation, the provisions for human rights education remain fragile in the member states. Youth civil society plays an important role in providing EDC/HRE to young people, but lacks both political and financial support, making initiatives largely unsustainable and limited in impact. The workshop will explore how the challenges young people face both in acquiring the relevant competences to participate in democratic systems and to exercise and access their human rights, as well as in providing EDC/HRE to other young people.

WORKING GROUP 10 - Free to associate: civil society and democracy

Attacks on the freedom to association and assembly of people are among the first ones to be attacked in the process of autocratisation. The past decade has been marked by attacks on civil society, sometimes hidden under the form of administrative and financial procedures, cuts in funding, and restrictions in the capacity to register and run civil society organisations. Youth civil society has been particularly affected by these attacks, significantly impacting on the capacity of young people to organise, defend and promote their interests and set up the public agenda. The situation of trade unions and the connected right to strike is often forgotten and heavily impacted by restrictions and challenges posed by the current economic models (platform economy). The working group will explore how restrictions on the freedom to assembly and association are impacting young people.

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Creating a vision for the future for and with young people

These thematic working groups explore important themes for young people (e.g., climate change, peace) as well the existing standards and work done by the Council of Europe. The working groups will make proposals on what young people need in these areas in order to be (remain) confident in the future and what should the Council of Europe do in order to support it.

WORKING GROUP 1 Peace and War

Peace stands as a foundation for the growth and development of young people. But what truly defines peace? What role do youth play in building and sustaining it? How does our understanding of peace and war evolve through historical perspectives? Amid current conflicts, how can the unique strengths of young individuals contribute to transitioning from war to peace? Furthermore, what role do public institutions undertake during times of conflict, and what collaborative efforts are needed to achieve lasting peace, particularly with the involvement of young people?

WORKING GROUP 2 Climate Crisis and Environmental Degradation

Young people are likely to experience consequences of the ongoing climate crisis and environmental degradation in their lifetime. In this working group participants will discuss the role of young people in the climate crisis and how young voices can help to adopt innovative approaches for combatting climate change. Are more protections needed for people involved in climate strikes? What strategies can be used to help fill generational divides in climate advocacy?

WORKING GROUP 3 Equality and Non-discrimination

Equality and non-discrimination lie at the heart of human rights, yet discrimination continues to persist against various groups, including religious, ethnic, and national minorities, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, migrants, older persons, children, women, and LGBTI individuals. How does the experience of youth intersect with other forms of discrimination, and what measures must various stakeholders undertake to promote systemic equality and non-discrimination?

WORKING GROUP 4 Social and Economic Progress

Students who can't afford housing anymore due to dramatic increases in rent, interns who can't guarantee their internship due to being used as an entry-level workforce without being remunerated, high inflation which makes it impossible to transition from care to independence as a young person. This is just a part of the emerging social and economic issues young people face every day. What are the practices of adapting to extremely rapidly changing social and economic realities? What can support young people in navigating through social and economic progress?

WORKING GROUP 5 Democratic Participation

Young voices in politics are essential for meaningful youth participation. How can we fill the gap between young aspirations and political institutions? What is the impact of cultural diversity and intersectionality on youth political participation? In the working group, participants can discuss good practices of youth democratic participation. What can different countries learn from each other? Is there an ideal standard for youth democratic participation?

WORKING GROUP 6 Digitalization and AI

Young people are particularly affected, both positively and negatively, by the digitalization of virtually all aspects of our societies. Developing their competencies to both engage critically and autonomously in the digital era, and to take part in decision-making about such developments, are necessary components of supporting young people to be fully autonomous and active citizens. How can we empower youth to navigate the digital landscape critically and autonomously? What strategies are necessary to ensure their active involvement in shaping the trajectory of digital advancements while mitigating potential risks?

WORKING GROUP 7 Access to Quality Education

Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals agreed upon by all member states of the United Nations. In 2024, we are still facing the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing open conflicts. Every day we see more and more cuts in education. What are the voices of young people with regards to demanding quality education? And overall, how do we define "quality education"? What is the role of quality education in advancing human rights and democracy in Europe?

WORKING GROUP 8 Young People's Health and Mental Well-being

Younger generations report higher rates of mental ill-health in relation to other age groups. In this working group, the role of public institutions in young people's health and mental well-being is discussed. How can governments help reduce the rise of (mental) illness in young people? What role do young people have themselves? Other questions that may arise include how young people can practice good self-care during distressing times and how cultural backgrounds can influence access to quality health care.