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STUDY SESSION

LOCAL YOUTH COUNCIL AS ADVOCATES FOR DEMOCRACY

22nd – 29th November 2025
European Youth Centre
Strasbourg, France

Report of the Study Session held by
DYPALL Network in co-operation with the
European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe

This report gives an account of various aspects of the Study Session. It has been produced by and is the responsibility of the educational team of the Study Session. It does not represent the official point of view of the Council of Europe.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The study session Local Youth Councils as Advocates for Democracy was organised by DYPALL Network in cooperation with the Youth Department of the Council of Europe and brought together 25 young people from 19 countries at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg. The activity addressed two strategic priorities of the Council of Europe youth sector: revitalising pluralistic democracy and strengthening young people's access to rights, with a specific focus on the role of Local Youth Councils (LYCs) as democratic actors at the local level.

Throughout the week, participants explored the realities, challenges, and potential of youth participation structures across Europe. The programme combined conceptual inputs, peer exchange, practical exercises, and encounters with institutional actors to support participants in developing advocacy, communication, and leadership skills relevant to their work within LYCs. Particular emphasis was placed on quality standards for youth participation, democratic trends and risks, and the use of Council of Europe frameworks and DYPALL Network tools to strengthen the legitimacy and impact of youth councils.

The study session also contributed to reinforcing the European Network of Local Youth Councils (ENLYC) by fostering cooperation, peer learning, and a shared understanding of advocacy as a long-term democratic practice. Participants left the activity with increased confidence, concrete tools, and renewed motivation to advocate for youth rights and democratic participation in their local contexts.

2. INTRODUCTION



This report presents an overview of the study session Local Youth Councils as Advocates for Democracy, outlining its rationale, objectives, learning process, and outcomes. It reflects the content and methodology of the programme, the contributions of participants and experts, and the main results achieved during the week.

The study session responded to ongoing challenges affecting democratic participation across Europe, including declining trust in institutions, shrinking civic space, political polarisation, and the risk of tokenistic youth involvement. Within this context, Local Youth Councils play a crucial role as structured mechanisms enabling young people to engage with local decision-making processes, articulate collective interests, and contribute to democratic culture.

The overall aim of the activity was to strengthen the capacity of LYC members and similar youth representatives to act as advocates for democracy at the local level. This included improving their understanding of democratic systems and actors, enhancing advocacy and communication skills, and familiarising participants with European standards, tools, and resources supporting meaningful youth participation.

2.1 Presentation of the organisation

WHO WE ARE



The session was organised by DYPALL Network (Developing Youth Participation at Local Level), which is a European platform of civil society organisations, local authorities and research institutions focusing on youth participation in decision-making processes at the local level. We stand for active and meaningful involvement of young people in local democracies through cooperation with local authorities and we provide the space and the resources for capacity building and exchange of good practices among our members.

YP Lab is a resource and mobility centre within DYPALL Network with a focus on research development and capacity building in the field of local youth participation.

4

PROGRAMME AREAS

60+

PROJECTS

220+

ACTIVITIES

WHAT WE DO



Capacity building

We offer mobility opportunities for municipality representatives, youth workers and youth leaders with the aim of building their capacity for effective engagement of young people in local policy and decision-making.



Research and Innovation

We produce innovative resources, guidelines and educational publications in the field of youth engagement in local governance. We collaborate with research institutions and various stakeholders to collect data and document best practices of youth participation in local decision-making.



Consultancy

Our consultancy service offers tailor-made support to municipalities in developing sustainable involvement of youth in decision-making processes such as youth policy design or establishing structures for youth participation at the local level.

OUR VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

01

Democratic values

02

Respect for diversity

03

Complementarity between public & private sector

04

Shared decisions

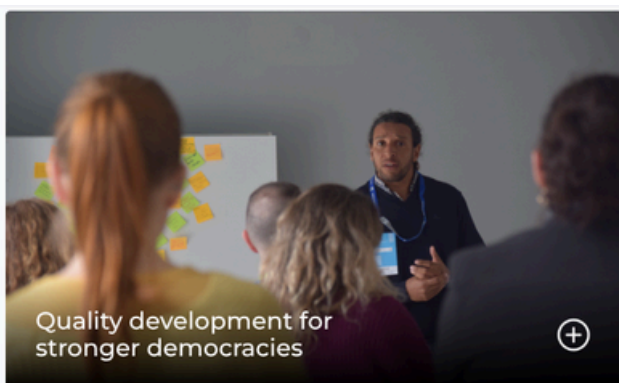
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Equal opportunities

06

Sustainability

OUR PROGRAMME AREAS



1. Quality development for stronger democracies

Building democracies resilient to the increasing threats should be at the heart of public policies. We believe that by supporting the quality development of structures, processes and mechanisms that allow young people to experience democratic participation we are increasing their level of understanding and engagement in democratic institutions. Through this, we are also ensuring that decisions in our communities address the different needs and interests of youth and bring their full potential into public policy development.

2. Youth empowerment

Young people are always at the core of our programmes, but within this area there are various programmes where they are not only the primary target group but also the ones leading the activities. Based on non-formal and peer education, these programmes support youth engagement in democratic processes from a youth perspective, being youth-led and youth-driven.

3. Inclusive democracies

Inclusive democracies should promote diversity, equity, and social justice, continuously working to create a society where everyone's voice is heard and valued. We can not consider having quality democracies without actively engaging and representing all segments of society, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, or age. The focus of this programme area is ensuring that marginalized and underrepresented youth have equal opportunities for participation in decision-making processes and access to shaping public policy and services.

3. Innovating democracies

Young people have always been the primary source of societal innovations and transformations. Therefore, using the creativity and innovation potential of young people to incorporate new technologies and experiment with new participatory approaches can contribute to increasing their engagement in decision-making as well as identify more effective and meaningful approaches for citizens' participation in democracy.

2.2 The need for this study session

Across Europe, young people are increasingly affected by democratic challenges, including declining trust in institutions, political polarisation, misinformation, shrinking civic space, and limited opportunities for meaningful participation in public life. At the same time, many local authorities struggle to engage young people beyond consultation or symbolic involvement. Within this context, Local Youth Councils (LYCs) remain one of the most relevant and structured mechanisms for enabling young people to participate in local-level democratic decision-making.

However, the existence of a Local Youth Council alone does not guarantee meaningful participation. In many contexts, LYCs face structural and operational challenges that limit their impact, including unclear mandates, lack of legal recognition, insufficient resources, limited access to decision-makers, and weak cooperation with municipal authorities. These challenges are often compounded by high turnover among members, participation fatigue, and a lack of systematic capacity-building for young people involved in youth councils.

Beyond structural constraints, Local Youth Councils increasingly operate in complex democratic environments that require them to go beyond representation and consultation. LYCs are expected to act as advocates for youth interests, democratic values, and inclusive policies, engaging with a wide range of stakeholders such as elected representatives, public administration, civil servants, civil society organisations, media, and the wider community. This advocacy role requires a combination of hard skills—such as understanding policy processes, legal frameworks, institutional structures, and funding mechanisms—and soft skills, including communication, negotiation, leadership, empathy, resilience, and the ability to build trust-based relationships.

Many young people involved in LYCs report feeling insufficiently prepared to navigate these dynamics. While they are motivated and committed, they often lack access to tailored training that connects democratic theory with practical advocacy tools and real-life scenarios. Moreover, youth councils frequently lack opportunities to exchange experiences with peers from other countries, despite facing similar challenges across different political and administrative systems.

Building on previous work, the 2024 DYPALL's study session focused on strengthening the foundations of youth participation and supporting the involvement of young people in Local Youth Councils, one of its key follow-up results being the creation of a European Network of Local Youth Councils (ENLYC). The 2025 study session built on this achievement, shifting the focus towards strengthening the network itself and developing the advocacy skills and competencies of its members. Particular emphasis was placed on enabling young people to engage strategically with stakeholders, navigate policy processes, and position Local Youth Councils as proactive advocates for democracy within increasingly complex local governance environments.



3. PREPARATION

3.1 The team preparation

From 28 to 31 August 2025, the preparatory meeting for the Study Session Local Youth Councils as Advocates for Democracy took place at the European Youth Centre Strasbourg.

This meeting marked the first in-person collaboration of the educational team and constituted a key moment for establishing a shared vision for the study session. The team engaged in comprehensive planning of the programme and the overall learning flow, with particular attention to ensuring coherence between objectives, methods, and expected outcomes.

Methodological choices were guided by the principles of non-formal education, intercultural learning, and experiential approaches. The team worked on sequencing sessions in a way that would allow participants to gradually move from sharing their local realities to analysing democratic systems and, finally, to developing advocacy-related skills and tools applicable to their own contexts. The preparatory meeting laid the foundation for a structured yet flexible programme capable of responding to participants' needs while remaining aligned with Council of Europe quality standards.

Following this initial meeting, the team continued its preparation through regular online coordination meetings and a final preparatory phase at the European Youth Centre immediately before the start of the study session. Throughout the process, the Educational Advisor provided guidance and feedback, supporting the team in maintaining educational coherence and institutional alignment.



3.2 Profile of the participants and selection criteria

The Study Session targeted members of local youth councils or similar youth participatory structures at the municipal level, local and/or regional, young people actively involved in youth policy-making or youth advocacy at the local and/or regional level, participants who are between 16 and 25 years old, participants with a strong interest in youth advocacy and policy, and motivated to build their capacities to represent youth in democratic processes effectively.

Moreover, participants needed to be able to work in English, the working language of the study session, be residents of Council of Europe member States, or Belarus, the Holy See, or Kazakhstan, and be available to attend the full duration of the study session.

The selection of participants was carried out by the preparatory team in accordance with the fundamental principles of gender balance and non-discrimination based on sexual orientation, disability, marital or parental status, ethnic or social origin, colour, religion or belief. Particular attention was paid to ensuring a diverse group in terms of geographical representation, institutional contexts, and experiences of youth participation.

The call for participants generated approximately 500 applications, reflecting a high level of interest in the topic of local youth participation and democratic advocacy. From this pool, 25 participants were selected based on their demonstrated involvement in Local Youth Councils or similar participatory structures, their motivation to strengthen their advocacy capacities, and their ability to contribute actively to the learning process.

The resulting group was characterised by a high level of preparedness, professionalism, and commitment. Participants demonstrated strong engagement throughout the study session, actively contributing to discussions, group work, and reflection spaces. Their experience and motivation significantly enriched the quality of exchanges and supported the achievement of the study session's learning objectives.

Age profile

Average Age: 19.4 years

Range: 16 – 24 years

Primary Group: 56% are between 18 and 21 years old.

Geography

Total Countries: 19

Top Representation: Albania, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Poland, and Romania (2 participants each).

Gender balance

- Female: 13 (52%)
- Male: 12 (48%)

Roles & responsibilities in Local and Regional Youth Councils

- Leadership (Chairs/Presidents): 36%
- Executive (Vice-Chairs/Secretaries): 32%
- Representatives (Members/Delegates): 32%

Focus Areas: Policy advocacy, youth civic engagement, social media management, and intercultural dialogue.



4. PROGRAMME - INPUTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The programme of the study session was structured as a progressive learning process, combining conceptual reflection, experiential learning, peer exchange, and skills development. Each day addressed a specific dimension of youth participation and democratic advocacy, gradually equipping participants with the understanding and competencies needed to strengthen the role of Local Youth Councils in democratic life.

The specific objectives of the study session were successfully achieved:

- Enhancing the advocacy capacity of Local Youth Council members by improving their communication with stakeholders and soft skills.
- Testing and exploring tools and resources for quality development of LYCs, such as the Quality Charter on participatory and inclusive LYCs, the User guide for the Quality Charter and the Toolkit for upgrading local youth councils developed by DYPALL Network.
- Strengthening the European Network of Local Youth Councils (ENLYC) as a space for quality and inclusive youth participation and fostering collaboration and intercultural understanding among LYCs from various Council of Europe countries.
- Exploring the agenda of the Council of Europe on youth participation, through its manuals, the co-management system, tools and opportunities and getting familiar with the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life.



DAY 0

Arrival of participants

Participants arrived at the European Youth Centre Strasbourg in the afternoon and evening. The informal welcome evening created the first opportunity for participants to meet in a relaxed setting and begin building social connections. This initial moment was essential for establishing trust and openness within the group, laying the groundwork for meaningful exchange and collaboration throughout the week.

DAY 1

Welcome and Opening of the Study Session

The study session officially began with the arrival of participants at the European Youth Centre Strasbourg and an initial welcome by the educational team. Following a short introduction round, participants were formally welcomed by **Stefano Dominioni**, Executive Director of the European Youth Centre Strasbourg. In his opening address, he presented the Council of Europe's youth sector, the educational mission of the Centre, and the broader institutional framework in which the study session was embedded. His intervention situated the week within the Council of Europe's priorities on democracy, peace, participation, and youth rights, highlighting the relevance of Local Youth Councils as actors in strengthening democratic culture at the local level.



The educational team then introduced the objectives, structure, and learning flow of the study session, explaining how the programme was designed to progress from shared understanding and conceptual grounding towards practical advocacy tools and collective reflection. Practical information regarding the Centre, daily rhythm, and expectations for participation was also shared, ensuring clarity and a safe learning environment from the outset.

Setting the Framework: Expectations, Fears and Contributions

This session invited participants to reflect on their expectations, fears, and contributions in relation to the study session. Facilitated by the educational team, the exercise aimed to establish a shared baseline and to surface assumptions, motivations, and concerns within the group.

Participants expressed fears mainly related to communication challenges, time management, social integration, and doubts about the real impact of youth participation on political decision-making. Expectations revealed a strong interest in cross-country exchange, capacity-building, and acquiring concrete tools applicable to their Local Youth Councils. Contributions reflected the diversity of the group, including experience in youth representation, cooperation with municipalities, student governance, NGO management, local advocacy, and a wide range of personal skills.

Collectively mapping these elements helped build trust, acknowledge the value of each participant's experience, and reinforce a shared sense of purpose for the week.



Icebreaker and Introduction to the Institutional Context

An initial icebreaker supported group cohesion and informal interaction, reinforcing the importance of collaboration and mutual support throughout the learning process. This was followed by a structured introduction to the Council of Europe’s institutional framework, including the co-management system, the role of the Advisory Council on Youth, and the link to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

The session provided participants with essential institutional context to understand how youth participation is embedded within European governance structures and prepared them for the institutional visit and exchanges later in the programme. The forthcoming contributions of Véronique Bertholle and Maren Lambrecht were also introduced to situate their role within the overall learning journey.

Presentation of DYPALL Network

The session continued with a presentation of DYPALL Network by Emma, who introduced the organisation’s mission, governance, and strategic areas of work. The presentation emphasised DYPALL Network’s commitment to strengthening youth participation in local decision-making, with a particular focus on the quality and inclusiveness of Local Youth Councils. This provided participants with a clear reference framework for understanding the rationale of the study session and its connection to DYPALL’s long-term objectives.



Team-Building Activity – “Mission Impossible”

Participants reflected on the definition of "youth", and discussed different forms of youth participation, and the key actors involved. By applying the RMSOS framework (rights, means, space, opportunity, and support), they assessed how each of the five core factors contributes to youth participation in their community. This exchange of experiences and best practices provided a comprehensive overview of the local context and empowered participants to identify challenges, explore solutions, and critically evaluate the RMSOS framework's applicability to their reality.

Based on the growing cohesion of the group and the introduction of various models and tools for youth participation, the final session had a strong emphasis on participants' local realities.



The Participation Puzzle: Defining Youth’s Role – “Where Do I Stand?”

Facilitated by Andrea, this session invited participants to physically position themselves along a spectrum of agreement in response to statements related to youth participation. The exercise stimulated personal reflection, revealed diverse perspectives, and introduced key tensions present in local youth participation.

Discussions addressed issues such as the balance between resources and political will, the balance between educational and recreational elements in youth councils, institutional willingness to listen to young people, and the actual influence of youth councils on policy-making. Andrea introduced the Ladder of Participation as a conceptual tool to analyse the depth and quality of youth engagement, supporting participants in critically assessing their own experiences.

Exploring the Glossary of Youth Participation

In this session, participants worked in small groups to explore key concepts and terminology related to youth participation. The activity aimed to establish a shared vocabulary across different national and institutional contexts, clarifying roles such as youth activist, youth worker, youth leader, and municipal officer.

Participants also analysed tools such as the Thermometer of Participation and connected theoretical concepts to concrete experiences from their Local Youth Councils. The shared glossary developed during the session became a common reference point for discussions throughout the week.

Models and Mechanisms of Youth Participation

TV Debate

Facilitated by Bilal, this session focused on comparing different youth participation mechanisms. Participants analysed eight models, including youth councils, participatory budgeting, youth parliaments, forums, and digital platforms, preparing short pitches highlighting strengths, challenges, and contextual relevance.

The TV debate simulation required participants to present arguments under time constraints and respond to critiques from peers, mirroring real advocacy settings. Key insights included the understanding that participation mechanisms function as ecosystems, that political will and implementation capacity are decisive, and that accessibility, transparency, and evaluation are essential for success. The exercise significantly strengthened participants' communication and argumentation skills.



Reflection Groups

The day concluded with reflection groups, providing participants with space to consolidate their learning, share feedback, and express their needs for the coming days. Participants highlighted group cohesion, clarity of facilitation, and methodological diversity, while expressing interest in further practical tools and youth-led discussions. This feedback informed the ongoing adaptation of the programme.

DAY 2

The second day opened with a welcome from the educational team, reaffirming inclusion as a foundational principle of meaningful youth participation. An organisational reminder regarding safeguarding procedures for under-age participants ensured clarity and shared responsibility. A short physical energiser helped the group reconnect and prepare for a day of deeper analytical work.

Local Realities of Youth Participation – Living Map of Youth Participation

This session used a living map methodology to visualise the geographical, cultural, and political diversity of participants' contexts. As participants positioned themselves according to their country or region, the group identified clear patterns and contrasts in youth participation ecosystems across Europe.

The exercise highlighted the complexity of Local Youth Councils, ranging from well-established structures with legal recognition to informal bodies relying entirely on volunteer engagement. It set the foundation for a deeper exploration of shared challenges and strategies.



Challenges and Strategies of Local Youth Councils Across Europe

Building on the living map, participants engaged in structured discussions on the current realities of their Local Youth Councils. Common challenges included participation fatigue, lack of legal frameworks, limited resources, and uneven institutional support. Participants also identified the importance of strategic documents and clear mandates in strengthening legitimacy and sustainability.

Different support models were analysed, including political champions, NGO advisers, municipal secretaries, and the absence of formal support. These reflections were synthesised into a collective visual map capturing both obstacles and opportunities for youth participation.

Reflections from Participants

Participants shared personal reflections on their achievements and challenges within Local Youth Councils, expressing pride, motivation, and a renewed sense of purpose. Andrea concluded the session by inviting participants to reflect on future possibilities based on past achievements, reinforcing a forward-looking and empowering perspective.



Democracy

Risks, Threats, and Opportunities for Local Youth Councils

This session explored democracy beyond electoral processes, beginning with a collective reflection on its core elements. Participants examined democracy as a dynamic and non-linear system, existing on a spectrum rather than as a fixed state.

Working in groups, participants analysed risks, threats, and opportunities at local, national, European, and global levels. Issues such as polarisation, misinformation, shrinking civic space, and geopolitical instability were discussed alongside opportunities for collective action and European cooperation. The role of Local Youth Councils in addressing these challenges through advocacy and community engagement was strongly emphasised.

Democratic Actors

Roles, Responsibilities, and Challenges

The final session of the day focused on mapping democratic actors using interactive tools. Participants identified a wide range of actors and recognised themselves as key democratic stakeholders. Through group work, they analysed the relevance, responsibilities, and challenges of each actor at different levels.

The resulting synthesis provided a comprehensive overview of the democratic ecosystem, highlighting entry points for youth advocacy and coalition-building. The session strengthened participants' strategic understanding of stakeholder engagement and reinforced the advocacy role of Local Youth Councils within democratic systems.

DAY 3

Introduction to the Council of Europe and Visit to the Palais de l'Europe

The third day marked a transition from analytical and skills-oriented work towards direct engagement with European democratic institutions. The session was facilitated by members of the educational team, who introduced the institutional architecture of the Council of Europe, with a particular focus on the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and its relevance for local democracy and youth participation.

Participants explored how European standards on democracy, participation, and human rights are developed, monitored, and promoted, and how these standards can be used as advocacy tools by Local Youth Councils at local and national levels. The visit to the Palais de l'Europe provided a tangible connection between local democratic action and European governance, reinforcing the idea that local youth advocacy is part of a wider democratic ecosystem.



Exchange Session with Representatives of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

This exchange session was facilitated by the educational team and brought participants into dialogue with **Véronique Bertholle**, Deputy Mayor of Strasbourg and Thematic Spokesperson on Youth of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, and **Maren Lambrecht**, Secretary of the Committee on Social Inclusion and Human Dignity of the Congress.

Participants raised concrete questions related to democratic backsliding, the role of municipalities in safeguarding youth participation, election monitoring processes, and the visibility of Council of Europe standards within member States. The discussion also addressed challenges faced by Local Youth Councils when municipalities are reluctant to engage with young people or when youth participation is treated as symbolic rather than substantive.

The speakers emphasised the importance of multi-level engagement, encouraging participants to see themselves not only as local representatives but also as actors connected to national and European democratic processes. They highlighted that advocacy requires persistence, strategic communication, and the ability to translate European standards into concrete local demands.

This exchange strengthened participants' understanding of how institutional actors operate and reinforced the legitimacy of youth councils as partners in democratic governance.



DAY 4

Soft Skills Workshop

The fourth day focused explicitly on advocacy-related competencies, beginning with a soft skills workshop facilitated by Andrea and Bilal. The session aimed to help participants identify the personal and interpersonal skills required to advocate effectively for youth interests and democratic values.

Through interactive reflection exercises, participants explored a wide range of soft skills, including communication, negotiation, empathy, leadership, confidence, adaptability, and resilience. The facilitators encouraged participants to connect these skills to real situations faced by Local Youth Councils, such as engaging with sceptical decision-makers, mediating internal conflicts, or maintaining motivation over long advocacy processes.

The session highlighted that advocacy is not only about formal knowledge or institutional access, but also about the ability to build relationships, manage emotions, and create trust-based dialogue with stakeholders.



Role Play on Soft Skills

Building on the previous session, Rafaela and Ole Martin facilitated a role-play exercise designed to translate identified soft skills into practice. Participants worked in groups on simulated scenarios reflecting realistic challenges encountered by Local Youth Councils, including negotiations with municipal authorities, public criticism of youth participation structures, and internal disagreements within councils.

The role plays allowed participants to experiment with different communication styles, test negotiation strategies, and reflect on the impact of tone, body language, and listening skills. Facilitators supported participants in analysing the dynamics of each scenario, identifying successful approaches and areas for improvement.

This practical exercise reinforced the importance of preparation, adaptability, and emotional intelligence in advocacy work, and strengthened participants' confidence in engaging with (often unequal) power relations.

Developing Checklists for Effective Youth Councils

In this session, facilitated by Bilal and Andrea, participants worked collaboratively to develop practical checklists aimed at strengthening the internal functioning and external advocacy capacity of Local Youth Councils. Drawing on the DYPALL Quality Charter and the experiences shared throughout the week, groups identified key elements needed for effective youth councils.

The checklists addressed areas such as organisational structure, inclusiveness, communication with stakeholders, decision-making processes, continuity, and visibility. Participants reflected on how these tools could be used both internally, to improve their own councils, and externally, as advocacy instruments when negotiating support with municipalities or other partners.

The session emphasised the role of clear frameworks and shared standards in increasing the credibility and sustainability of youth participation structures.

Guest Lecture

Advocacy in Politics – Linking Local Action to European Impact

The guest lecture by **İlayda Nijhar-Minet** provided an in-depth and personal perspective on advocacy in political and institutional contexts. The session was moderated by the educational team and focused on advocacy as a long-term, non-linear process requiring resilience, strategic thinking, and continuous learning.

İlayda addressed topics such as building trust with decision-makers, using storytelling to humanise policy demands, managing failure and criticism, and preventing burnout among active young people. Particular attention was given to the emotional dimension of advocacy, including the importance of self-care, support systems, and celebrating small achievements.

The session resonated strongly with participants, many of whom recognised similar challenges in their own advocacy experiences. It reinforced the idea that effective advocacy combines political awareness, personal resilience, and strong networks.



DAY 5

Exchange on Co-management

The fifth day focused on linking local advocacy to European governance structures. The session on co-management was facilitated by the educational team and featured an exchange with **Emma Wedner**, Bureau Member of the Advisory Council on Youth.

Participants explored the Council of Europe's co-management system, including the roles of the Advisory Council on Youth, the governmental committees, and joint decision-making bodies. The discussion highlighted both the opportunities and challenges of shared governance, including negotiation, consensus-building, and balancing youth perspectives with governmental priorities.

Emma emphasised the responsibility and influence of youth representatives within co-management structures, encouraging participants to use Council of Europe standards and recommendations as advocacy tools at the local level. The session strengthened participants' understanding of institutional advocacy and demonstrated how local youth councils can align their demands with European democratic frameworks.



Exchange on the New European Charter on Youth Participation and the European Youth Foundation

This session provided participants with concrete tools to support their advocacy work. **Anca-Ruxandra Pandea**, Senior Project Manager at the Youth Department, introduced the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, highlighting its renewed focus on inclusiveness, co-decision, and accountability.

Participants discussed how the Charter can be used by Local Youth Councils to legitimise their demands, influence municipal policies, and advocate for structural improvements. The session was complemented by a presentation from **Beata Owsiana**, Programme Officer at the European Youth Foundation, who outlined funding opportunities supporting youth-led democratic initiatives.

Together, these inputs demonstrated how standards and resources can reinforce each other in strengthening youth participation.

European Network of Local Youth Councils (ENLYC) Workshop

The ENLYC workshop focused on strengthening participants' sense of belonging to a European network of Local Youth Councils. Using reflective tools and group exchange, participants reviewed their learning journey and explored how to remain engaged beyond the study session.

Participants shared personal action plans, identified areas for future cooperation, and discussed how ENLYC can serve as a platform for peer learning, advocacy, and collective representation at the European level. The session reinforced the value of networking as both a learning resource and an advocacy asset.



Evaluation and closing

The study session concluded with a closing reflection and evaluation facilitated by the educational team. Participants reflected on their learning outcomes, personal development, and future steps, while also providing feedback on the programme and methods.

This final moment marked the transition from the study session to continued action, reinforcing participants' role as advocates for democracy within their Local Youth Councils and communities.



5. FOLLOW-UP PLANNING

The follow-up of the study session is closely linked to the strategic work of DYPALL Network and the European Network of Local Youth Councils (ENLYC). The organisers intend to integrate the outcomes, learning points, and tools developed during the study session into future capacity-building activities, advocacy and lobbying initiatives, and network-based cooperation at local, national, and European levels.

In the short term, the study session results will inform upcoming ENLYC meetings, online exchanges, and training activities, particularly those focusing on the quality development of Local Youth Councils, youth advocacy, and lobbying in local and European decision-making processes. The educational content and methodological approaches tested during the study session will be further adapted and reused within Erasmus+ projects and other European cooperation frameworks coordinated by DYPALL Network.

During the study session, dedicated sessions addressed advocacy and lobbying as core tools for youth participation, exploring how Local Youth Councils can influence policy, engage with public authorities, and navigate institutional frameworks. The contribution of external guest Ilayda, a city councillor in London and government affairs practitioner, offered a concrete example of how youth advocacy can translate into effective political engagement at local level.

Before and during the study session, reflections and exchanges took place regarding the potential for future cooperation with the Council of Europe Youth Department and with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, particularly in relation to the role and development of Local Youth Councils. These discussions highlighted a shared interest in further exploring how Local Youth Councils can be better understood, supported, and strengthened as democratic participation structures across Council of Europe member States.

In this context, a possible area for deeper exploration concerns the mapping and analysis of Local Youth Councils, to identify existing models, challenges, good practices, and advocacy approaches, as well as examining pathways for their effective implementation and quality development. Such work could also contribute to reflection on the practical application of the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life at local level.

Building on the exchanges initiated during the study session, further dialogue may facilitate the identification and evaluation of specific areas of collaboration, thereby contributing to the continued strengthening of Local Youth Councils as key actors in advocacy, lobbying, and democratic governance.



6. RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS



6.1 Main outcomes and learning points

The study session Local Youth Councils as Advocates for Democracy confirmed the relevance of Local Youth Councils as key democratic actors at the local level, particularly in contexts where young people's participation in public decision-making remains fragile or insufficiently institutionalised. The programme demonstrated that Local Youth Councils can play a meaningful role in strengthening democratic culture when they are supported by clear mandates, quality standards, and adequate advocacy capacities.

A central outcome of the study session was the strengthened understanding among participants of democracy as a multi-level and dynamic system. Through analytical work, institutional exchanges, and skills-based sessions, participants deepened their awareness of the roles, responsibilities, and limitations of democratic actors at local, national, and European levels. This understanding supported a more strategic approach to youth advocacy, enabling participants to situate local action within broader democratic frameworks.

The study session also highlighted the importance of combining hard and soft skills in the advocacy work of Local Youth Councils. Participants developed greater confidence in engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, drawing on both policy-related knowledge and interpersonal competencies such as communication, negotiation, and resilience. The practical use of quality tools, including the DYPALL Quality Charter, reinforced the value of structured self-assessment and strategic development for youth participation structures.

Beyond individual learning outcomes, the study session also functioned as an important space for institutional networking and dialogue. The activity enabled sustained exchange between DYPALL Network, representatives of the Council of Europe Youth Department, and the European Youth Foundation (EYF). In particular, the presence of an EYF representative throughout the entire week in the framework of a job-shadowing arrangement added significant value to the study session. Continuous exchanges and feedback provided by the EYF representative contributed to reflection on programme quality, learning processes, and future cooperation perspectives.

The study session also opened space for exploratory discussions on possible future directions of cooperation at European level, including reflection on Local Youth Councils as democratic participation structures, their mapping and quality development, and their connection to European standards such as the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, in dialogue with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

7. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY SESSION TO THE COE YOUTH PRIORITIES

The study session made a direct contribution to the Council of Europe youth sector priorities, particularly the revitalisation of pluralistic democracy and the promotion of young people's access to rights. By focusing on Local Youth Councils as democratic actors and advocates, the activity supported meaningful youth participation in decision-making processes at the local level, where democratic engagement often begins.

The programme reinforced the principles of co-management by promoting shared responsibility, dialogue, and cooperation between young people and public authorities. Through direct engagement with Council of Europe institutions and representatives, participants gained a deeper understanding of European democratic standards and the practical application of these standards in local contexts.

The study session also contributed to the implementation and dissemination of the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life. Participants were equipped to use the Charter as a reference framework for advocacy, supporting the development of inclusive, transparent, and accountable youth participation structures within their municipalities.

Furthermore, the activity strengthened intercultural learning and solidarity among young people from different Council of Europe member States. By fostering peer exchange and networking, the study session supported the development of a shared democratic culture and reinforced the role of youth as active contributors to democratic life across Europe.

Overall, the study session aligned closely with the Council of Europe's long-term commitment to democracy, human rights, and youth participation, contributing both to individual capacity-building and to the strengthening of sustainable democratic structures at the local level.

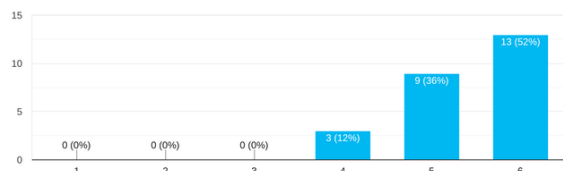


8. PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION

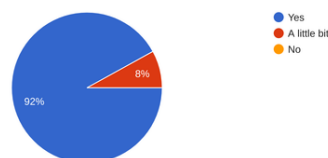
The study session Local Youth Councils as Advocates for Democracy was evaluated through an online evaluation form completed by participants between 28 and 29 November 2025, immediately following the end of the activity. The evaluation combined quantitative ratings with open-ended qualitative questions, providing both measurable feedback and reflective insights.

The aggregated quantitative results indicate a very high level of satisfaction across all evaluated areas. The overall quality and success of the study session received an average score of approximately 5.4 out of 6, while the extent to which participants' expectations were met was rated at around 5.5 out of 6. Participants also assessed very positively the achievement of the main aim of strengthening Local Youth Councils, as well as the specific objectives related to advocacy skills, use of DYPALL Network tools, peer learning, and understanding of youth participation frameworks, all scoring close to or above 5 out of 6.

What is your OVERALL OPINION on the quality and success of our study session?
25 responses

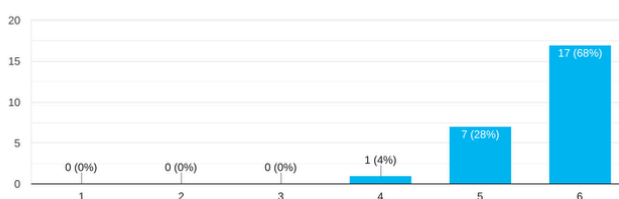


I have increased my capacity to understand young people's access to rights especially right to meaningful participation.
25 responses



Preparation, organisation, facilitation, and the diversity of methods used were also rated highly. Informal moments were recognised as important for learning and networking.

How do you evaluate the competences of the FACILITATION TEAM, their methods and their contributions?
25 responses



Notably, all respondents stated that they would recommend the study session to others, and the majority expressed interest in participating in future activities organised by DYPALL Network, ENLYC, and the Council of Europe.

Would you consider participating in another DYPALL Network activity?
25 responses



Would you consider actively participating in ENLYC's activities in the future?
25 responses



Would you consider participating in another Council of Europe activity?
25 responses



Qualitative feedback confirmed the strong relevance and impact of the programme. Participants highlighted the balance between theory and practice, the practical value of advocacy-related sessions, and the opportunity to better understand their role as democratic actors within Local Youth Councils. Peer learning and exchange were repeatedly mentioned as key strengths, helping participants feel less isolated and more confident in their work.

Some quotes:

- *Overall, I believe that this session was really meaningful and there was a lot of value in it for all the participants - being able to meet people who are in LYCs in so many different places and areas always gives you numerous different perspectives on this topic, and I believe that it's very important for us to understand the differences between LYCs on the European level*
- *I loved the interactive approach of the session, and I always felt encouraged to freely express my opinion. I am sure there will be room for improvement, but my experience was absolutely amazing.*
- *Every single evening and break, I had the opportunity to better know new people, until the moment when I had some great talks with most of my colleagues and some of the facilitators; these moments played an essential role in the success of the session.*
- *Thank you so much for all the opportunities and the unwavering support (especially the support for Ukraine), the wonderful diversity of participants, and the perfectly chosen timing to hold this study session in Strasbourg. It truly created a space where everyone felt seen and valued. And please, take a moment to rest after all of this. I know how demanding and exhausting organising such a meaningful activity can be. Your effort, dedication, and heart are felt in every detail; they genuinely make a difference*

The quality of facilitation and the supportive learning environment were also emphasised, with participants noting that the educational team created a safe and inclusive space for discussion, reflection, and experimentation

In addition to the written evaluation, the final session included an in-person reflection using Dixit cards, facilitated by the educational team. This creative method allowed participants to express their learning experience through images and emotions, leading to a moment of deep sharing and emotional connection within the group. Participants articulated feelings of belonging, inspiration, and empowerment, reinforcing the sense of community developed throughout the week.

The evaluation confirms that the study session successfully met its objectives and had a meaningful impact on participants' skills, confidence, and motivation to act as advocates for democracy within their Local Youth Councils and communities.



9. RECOMMENDATIONS AND FORESEEN FOLLOW-UP

The study session Local Youth Councils as Advocates for Democracy proved to be a relevant and impactful learning experience for both participants and organisers. Based on the implementation of the programme and participant feedback, several recommendations and follow-up actions have been identified.

Participants highlighted the importance of the participatory and flexible approach adopted throughout the study session, which allowed the programme to remain responsive to group dynamics and learning needs. For future editions, an earlier start to the preparation phase is recommended in order to allow more time for in-depth exploration of advocacy strategies, stakeholder engagement, and the practical use of European standards at the local level. Clearer advance communication regarding procedures related to the participation of under-18s is also recommended. The educational team also recognised the added value of having the support of a trainee during the activity, whose contribution supported logistical aspects and the overall implementation of the programme. At the same time, it is recommended that future activities include clearer planning and a shared understanding of the trainee's role and responsibilities in advance, as some uncertainty regarding tasks and positioning created moments of confusion during the week. Clarifying expectations beforehand would allow this support role to be used more effectively.

In terms of follow-up, participants expressed strong motivation to apply the acquired knowledge, tools, and skills within their Local Youth Councils and to act as multipliers at the local level. The continued use and dissemination of the DYPALL Quality Charter, the Revised European Charter, and advocacy tools introduced during the programme are encouraged.

From the organisers' perspective, the outcomes of the study session will feed into future ENLYC activities, training initiatives, and European cooperation projects coordinated by DYPALL Network. Future cooperation with the Council of Europe Youth Department could also be envisaged, particularly in relation to mapping Local Youth Councils across member States and further advancing work on strengthening youth participation at the local level.



APPENDIX 1

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Albania / Albanie

Oriado Asanbejilli, Municipal Consultative Council on Youth Affairs to the Mayor of Dobrich Municipality
Mandis Brucaj, Tirana Local Youth Council

Armenia / Armenie

Ani Yuzbashyan, Youth Advisory Council under the EU delegation to Armenia

Bulgaria / Bulgarie

Vilislav Stambolov, Municipal Consultative Council on Youth Affairs to the Mayor of Dobrich Municipality

Czechia / Tchèque

David Kaszper, Youth council of Ostrava - Parlament mládeže města Ostravy

Denmark / Danemark

Sofia Voravong, The Danish network of local youth Councils

Estonia / Estonie

Alisa Sinani, Saku Noortevoikogu
Liisi Kauber, Alutaguse Municipality's Youth Council

Finland / Finlande

Ramona Kaapu, Nokia City Youth Council (Nokian nuorisovaltuusto)
Erika Järvinen, Paimion Nuorisovaltuusto/ Paimio Youth Councils

France / France

Maéva Kamokwe Yuemo, CRJ (Conseil Régional de la Jeunesse)

Germany/ Allemagne

Meryem Sen, Jugendbeirat von Jugend für Europa

Georgia / Georgie

Kristine Surmava, Poti Youth Council

Greece / Grece

Stravros Peresinidis, Youth Council of Kavala Municipality
Maria Papaefthymiou, Youth Municipality Council of Ellassona

Italy / Italie

Brahim Baalla, Comune di Montecalvo in Foglia

Poland/Polonie

Dawid Hadas, Poznań Youth City Council
Karol Warda, Poznań Youth City Council

Romania / Roumanie

Valeria Ababii, Youth Council of Costesti
Bogdan Mihet, Municipal Students' Council of Bucharest

APPENDIX 1

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Serbia / Serbie

Jovan Aksentijevic, Municipal Administration of the Municipality of Arandjelovac - Youth Council

Slovak Republic / République Slovaque

Vladyslava Balera, Municipal Office in Nitra

Spain / Espagne

Enrique Medina Ortiz, Murcia City Council - Youth Service]

Türkiye / Turquie

Melike İbrahimoglu, Kadıköy Municipality Youth Council

Ukraine / Ukraine

Anastasiia Pasheshniak, Youth Council under the Chernivtsi Regional Military Administration

Preparatory team

Emma Genovese

Rafaela Nunes

Ole Martin Melbøe Nygård

Andrea Borraccetti

Guest speaker

Ilayda NIJHAR-MINET, Elected local councillor in London and government affairs lobbyist

Course director

Bilal Ata Aktas

Council of Europe Youth Department

Patrick Norlain, Programme Assistant

Ramon Tena Pera, External Educational Advisor

Sulkhan Chargeishvili, Educational Advisor

Sophie Kwasn, Head of the Education, Training and Cooperation Division

Bente Aretz, Trainee

Council of Europe

Véronique BERTHOLLE, Congress Spokesperson on Youth and Strasbourg Deputy Mayor

Maren LAMBRECHT, Secretary of the Social Inclusion Committee (SOC), Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Emma WEDNER, Youth Advisory Council member

Anca-Ruxandra PANDEA, Youth Department of the Council of Europe

Beata OWSIANA, European Youth Foundation

*All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

APPENDIX 2

PROGRAMME

Study Session “Local Youth Councils as Advocates for Democracy”

Study session organised within the Youth for Democracy programme in cooperation with
DYPALL Network

European Youth Centre Strasbourg 3rd Floor, Room 3.1 / 3.2

23 - 29 November 2025

Sunday, 23 November 2025

Arrival of participants

- 19:00 Dinner
- 20:30 Welcome evening

Monday, 23 November - Day 1

- 08:30 Participants' registration at the dining area, with Patrick Norlain, Programme Assistant, Council of Europe Youth Department
- 09:30 Opening and Introduction to the study session with Stefano DOMINIONI, Executive Director of the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg, Council of Europe and presentation of the aims and objectives of the study session, expectations from participants, and an overview of the programme.
- 11:00 Break
- 11:30 Team-Building Activity - Interactive activity to help participants get to know each other and build a sense of trust and cooperation.
- 13:00 Lunch
- 14:30 What Is Youth Participation? - Exploring the concept of youth participation and participatory methods through group discussion and examples.
- 16:00 Break
- 16:30 Models and Mechanisms of Youth Participation - In-depth exploration of various participation models through an interactive TV debate simulation, where each group represents a different model.
- 18:00 Reflection Group - Daily reflection session to share insights, feedback, and personal learning.
- 19:00 Dinner
- 21:00 Free Time

Tuesday, 24 November - Day 2

- 09:30 Local Realities of Youth Participation - Understanding local structures of youth participation through a “living map” exercise to visualise and compare realities across regions.
- 11:00 Break

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PROGRAMME

- 11:30 DYPALL Quality Charter and SWOT Analysis - Testing the DYPALL Quality Charter to assess Local Youth Councils (LYCs). Discussion on aspects such as age limits, decision-making power, mandate duration, and inclusiveness of LYCs.
- 13:00 Lunch Break
- 14:30 Democratic Trends: Risks, Threats, and Opportunities for LYCs - Mapping current democratic trends and their impact on youth participation at local, national, and European levels; identifying potential solutions.
- 16:00 Break
- 16:30 Exploring Democratic Actors - Interactive mapping of stakeholders, media, and decision-makers to identify key advocacy targets for youth organisations.
- 18:00 Free Time
- 19:00 Dinner
- 21:00 Intercultural Night – Celebration of cultural diversity through food, music, and informal exchanges.

Wednesday, 26 November 2025 - Day 3

- 09:30 Introduction to the Council of Europe and Visit to the Palais de l'Europe – Presentation on the structure and role of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, followed by a field visit.
- 10:00 Exchange Session - Meeting with Ms Véronique Bertholle (Deputy Mayor of Strasbourg, Thematic Spokesperson on Youth of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities) and Ms Maren Lambrecht (Secretary, Committee on Social Inclusion and Human Dignity, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities).
- Location: Room 9, Palais de l'Europe
- 11:30 Guided Tour of the Palais de l'Europe - Insight into the Council of Europe's institutional framework and working environment.
- 12:30 Return to the European Youth Centre
- 13:00 Lunch
- 14:30 Free Afternoon in the City
- 19:00 Dinner Out in the City

Thursday, 27 November 2025 - Day 4

- 09:30 Soft Skills Workshop - Interactive session introducing key soft skills relevant to youth participation and stakeholder engagement.
- 11:00 Break
- 11:30 Role Play on Soft Skills - Practical exercise allowing participants to apply identified soft skills through role-play scenarios.
- 13:00 Lunch
- 14:30 Developing Checklists for Effective Youth Councils - Through reflection and group discussions, participants analyse current practices, identify capacity-building needs, and draft checklists for stronger youth council operations.
- 16:00 Break
- 16:30 Guest Lecture: İlayda Nijhar-Minet on the topic "Advocacy in Politics: Linking Local Action to European Impact".
- 18:00 Reflection Group - Creative reflection session using visual tools to evaluate daily learning.
- 19:00 Dinner

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PROGRAMME

Friday, 28 November 2025 - Day 5

- 09:30 Exchange with Emma Wedner (Bureau Member, Advisory Council on Youth) - Dialogue on the role of the Advisory Council and co-management, followed by a Q&A session
- 11:00 Break
- 11:30 Exchange on the New European Charter on Youth Participation Session with Anca-Ruxandra Pandea (Senior Project Manager, Youth Department) tbc focusing on the Charter's renewed ambitions, main changes since 2003, and opportunities for local implementation.
- Presentation of the European Youth Foundation (EYF)'s funding opportunities with Beata Owsiana, Programme Officer, EYF
- 13:00 Lunch
- 14:30 European Network of Local Youth Councils (ENLYC) Workshop - Interactive exploration of ENLYC's work and how participants can engage and contribute to the network.
- 16:00 Break
- 16:30 Closing and Evaluation
- Final reflection and evaluation of the study session. Participants share takeaways, outcomes, and recommendations for the future.
- 18:00 Free Time
- 19:00 Dinner
- 21:00 Farewell Party

Saturday, 29 November 2025 - Day 6

Departure of participants

APPENDIX 3

VISIBILITY

Visibility and communication were integrated throughout the study session as part of a coordinated dissemination effort involving both the educational team and participants. During the week, photos and short written updates were produced to document the learning process and to highlight key moments of the programme.

Live coverage of the study session was shared on DYPALL Network's social media channels, particularly Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn, featuring posts and stories from different sessions and activities. Relevant hashtags were used consistently to increase outreach and engagement. All communication materials included the appropriate logos and disclaimers, and the activity was systematically tagged using @coe_youth and @dypall_network.

In addition to social media coverage, an article presenting the study session, its objectives, and learning process was prepared and published on DYPALL Network's website, and included as well in the monthly newsletter. Once finalised, the activity report will also be published in the organisation's catalogue of resources, ensuring longer-term visibility and access to the outcomes of the study session.

Posts can be found here:

- https://www.instagram.com/p/DMNqt_Ysr0q/
- <https://www.facebook.com/DYPALLNetwork/posts/pfbid0WJZGwpCom5nPXrpbG6PjQHANJ29BzjQg9bbWRbjjYihVSYnPa9XANybxRZm5532l>
- https://www.instagram.com/p/DSSlv8ciCFY/?img_index=1
- <https://www.facebook.com/DYPALLNetwork/posts/pfbid0nCj7uuYf5PaJtugCBmaeZeQYBiVsVwsDGF4ghKPs7XNwcUhRieyeT7irvdQ1ZDvJl>
- <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7406351350097420288>
- <https://dypall.com/activity/study-session-local-youth-councils-as-advocates-for-democracy-in-strasbourg/>



LEARN MORE ABOUT DYPALL NETWORK

