

## Youth Partnership

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Partnership between the European Commission  
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



EUROPEAN UNION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Young people's political  
participation and  
shrinking space

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## EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership

### Themes and objectives

1. Participation and democratic citizenship
2. Social inclusion
3. Strengthening youth work

#### Youth **POLICY:**

informing youth policy by offering relevant knowledge and building capacity of youth policy actors.

#### Young **PEOPLE:**

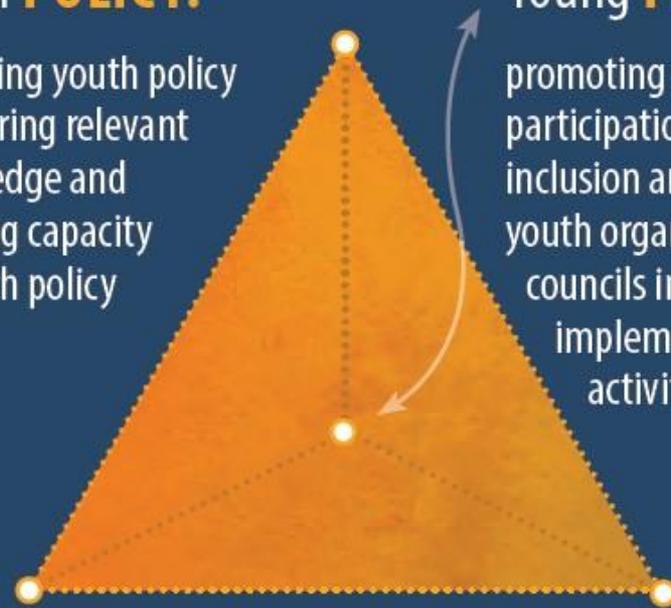
promoting young people's participation and social inclusion and involving youth organisations/ councils in planning and implementing our activities.

#### Youth **RESEARCH:**

developing knowledge on youth to better understand current and upcoming challenges and trends in the lives of young people, and their implications for youth policy and youth work.

#### Youth **WORK:**

promoting and strengthening youth work and recognition of its contribution to, *inter alia*, youth participation and the social inclusion of young people.



# Main research on youth political participation

[Shrinking democratic civic space for youth \(2020\), Dezelan, T. and Laden Yurttaguler](#)

[Covid-19 – The impact on youth participation and youth spaces \(2022\), Dezelan, T.](#)

[Study on youth political participation \(2021, upcoming\), by Barta, O. Boldt, G. and Lavizaari, A.](#)

[Insights on youth political participation \(2021, upcoming\), by Barta, O. and Lavizzari, A.](#)

[Disobedient youth: Lessons from the youth climate strike movement, by Jamie Gorman](#)

[Young women's participation \(2021\) - video](#)

[Young people's access to right to assembly \(2020\), Maria Carmen Pantea](#)

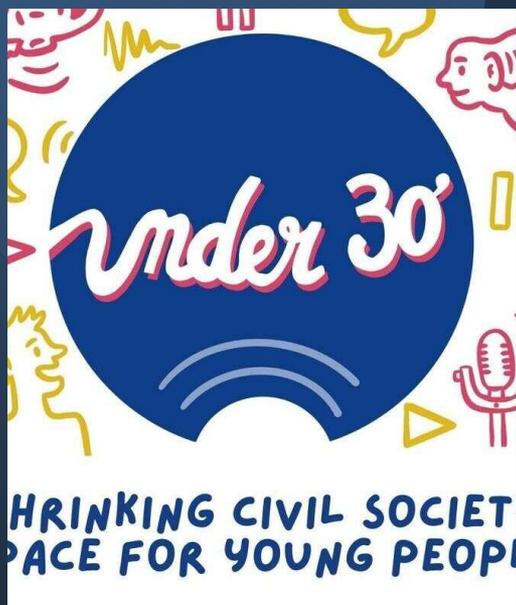
[Knowledge Hub on the impact of Covid-19 on youth sector](#)

Animated videos:

[What is political participation](#)

[How to engage marginalised young people in politics?](#)

[How can we meaningfully engage young people?](#)



# MEANINGFUL YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION



Would European democracies exist without young people?

HOW DO WE DEFINE IT?

WHAT IS IT?

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE CAN DO, ACTUALLY?



#EUROPEAN YEAR OF YOUTH #EYY

ALMA YOUTH PANELS ESC E+

MENTAL HEALTH

YOUTH GUARANTEE

DEMOCRACY

VIEWS CONCERNS PERSPECTIVE KNOWLEDGE CREATIVITY



Without young people, there is no democracy.

CO-MANAGEMENT

SPACES WITHIN COE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

TWO YOUNG CENTRE

- BUDAPEST

- STRASBOURG

Each of us must shape our own views on democracy, while being in contact with its general definition

DEMOCRACY IS NOT A SPONTANEOUS ORDER OF THINGS, AND TRUSTING IT ISN'T A ONE-WAY STREET...

## TRUST & DEMOCRACY

PROPER INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP (INCLUSIVE & OPEN)

There are diverse forms of youth participation and we should think of them CUMULATIVE rather than alternative!

"PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY THAT SHAPES, OR INVOLVES THE LOCAL SPHERE"

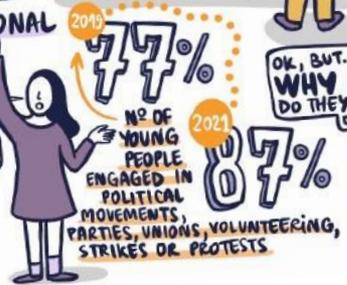


FRESH, DIVERSE & LONG-TERM VIEWS

UNCONVENTIONAL

RIGHTS

Any motivation to participate depends on equal treatment & the opportunity to be heard and make an impact.



OK, BUT... WHY DO THEY?

- AIMS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION
- DEVELOPMENT
  - RIGHTS-BASED
  - EMPOWERMENT
  - EFFICIENCY

- WHAT IS NEEDED:
- MATERIAL & NON-MATERIAL SUPPORT
  - POWER SHARING
  - AUTHORITY & VOICE
  - TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY
  - OPEN COMMUNICATION CHANNELS BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS.

Campaign:

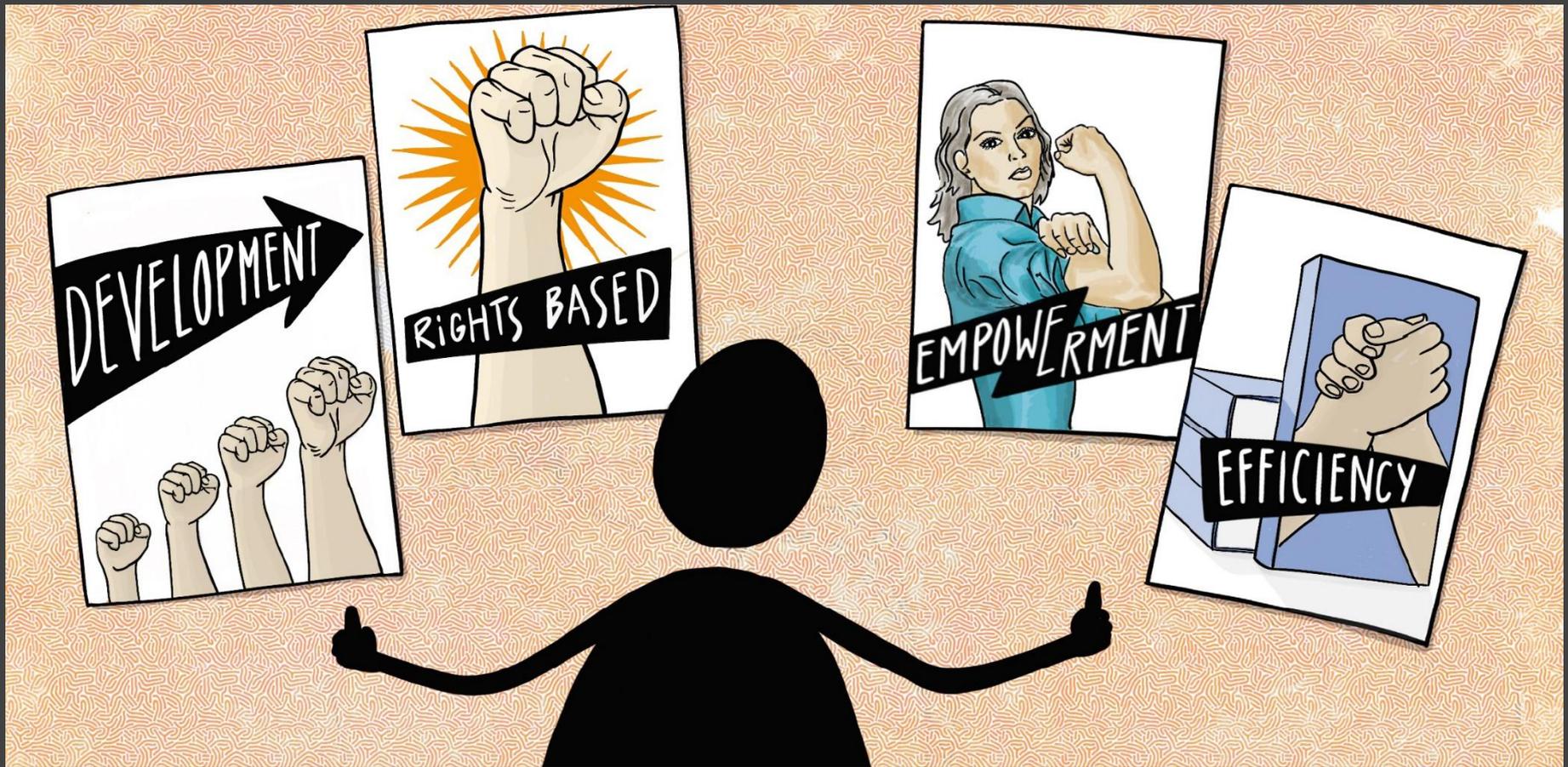
DEMOCRACY HERE DEMOCRACY NOW

THE INDIVISIBILITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS IS OUR STEPPING STONE

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Why participation?

Aims and justifications for youth political participation

# Conventional youth participation in representative democracy

- Voting and elections (and voting age)
- Referendum
- Party membership
- Running for office
- Signing petitions
- Institutional participatory mechanisms
  - Youth councils
  - Student unions
  - Youth parliaments
  - Participatory budgeting

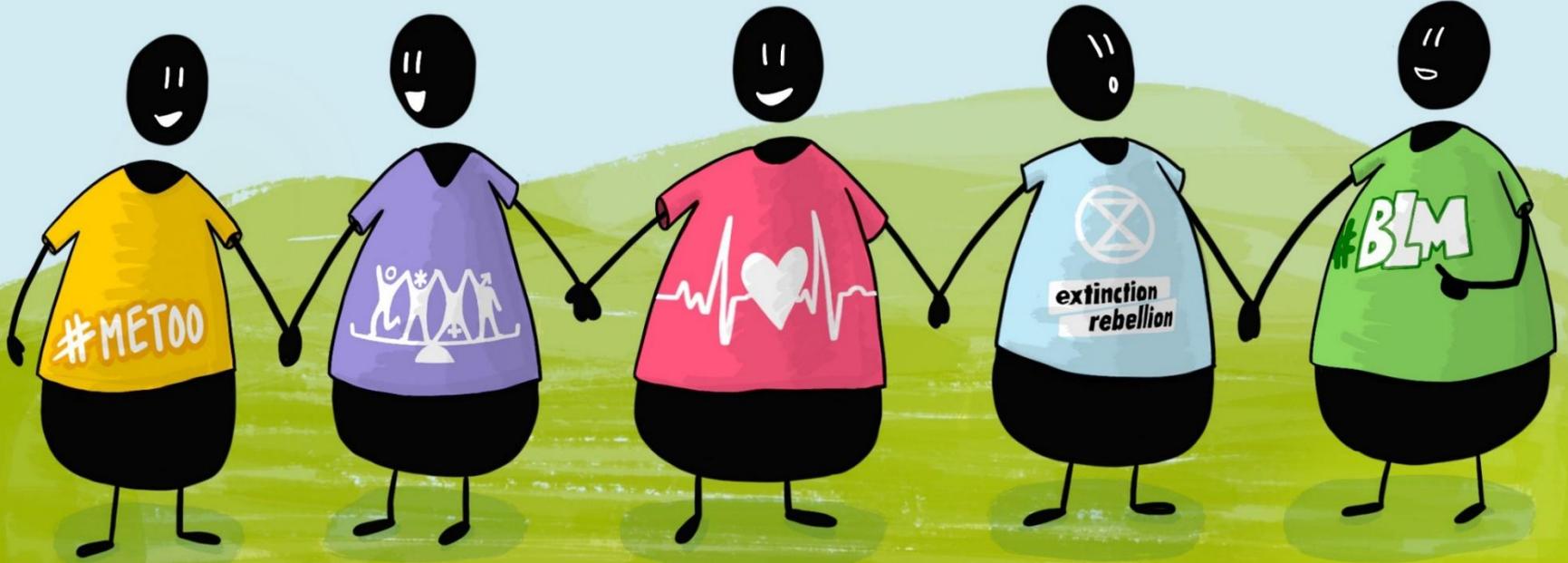
*Young people may refrain from voting, as they feel invisible within the system and perceive that youth issues have low priority on the agenda*



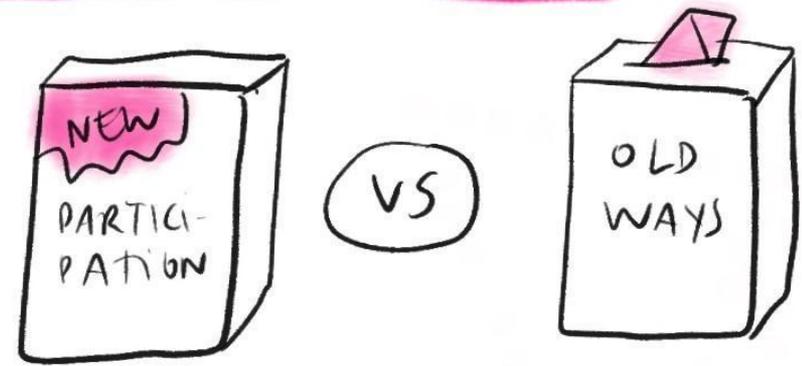
# YOUTH COUNCIL



**Establishment of youth councils at local, regional and national levels sends an important message from public authorities regarding the commitment towards including young people in decision-making**



# Youth participation in decision-making processes



- Meaningful young people's participation in political, social and economic life is crucial for healthy democracy
- *Young people may refrain from participating if they feel their perspective is not taken into account*
- Young people's interest in politics and participation is not decreasing, but changing:
  - 2019 survey shows 77% of young people engage in political movements, parties, unions, volunteering, strikes or protests; 2021 survey - 87%;
  - Engagement is issue-led, short-term and less organised – it is rapidly evolving



## Types of engagement:

- Voting (41%)
- Taking part in protests and demonstrations (33%)
- Creating or signing a petition (30%)
- 85% of young people discuss politics when they get together with friends or relatives
- Two-thirds (66%) of respondents who were eligible to vote in the last (2019) European election say they did so
- Around three in five (62%) respondents are generally in favour of the EU

# What influences youth political participation?

- Motivation to participate depends on equal treatment and opportunity to be heard and make an impact
- Socio-economic factors
- Gender
- Context and type of democratic environment....



# Shrinking space – a global trend

- increase in anti-democratic tendencies throughout the democratic world, accompanied by human rights violations and a dramatic decline in social, civic and associational life
- It goes beyond “democracies at risk” – new era of limited freedoms and increased state control
- control of public space
- The ways in which civic space is shrinking are manifold and have primarily to do with the actions of those in political power who threaten freedom of assembly, association and speech, usually under the guise of security

# Context, realities and challenges of youth participation

## Limitations on young people's participation

- Financial obstacles and economic restrictions (funding only organisations supportive of government)
- Legal limitations on youth organisations and criminalisation of youth activism
- The imposition of restrictions, barriers and/or limitations on participation in civil society (CSOs and/or movements) as members and/or volunteers;
- Youth spaces (physical and virtual)
- Young people's right to assembly
- Selective priorities - ignoring the demands and (civil and political) rights of ethnic, religious or other minorities and not considering them in public discourse
- Withdrawing legal protection for ethnic, religious and/or other minorities
- Exerting pressure through different methods used by both state and non-state actors, ranging from stigmatisation, surveillance, harassment, abuse, physical violence to prosecution through criminal prosecution

# Covid-19 impact on youth participation and spaces

- Covid-19 significantly affected basic human rights and had a disproportionately negative impact on the exercise of young people's exercise of their basic civil rights and their well-being in general, as well as on the functioning of youth CSOs
- Covid-19 response and recovery plans rarely included youth
- Survey examining the three dimensions: a) citizen participation; b) freedoms of information and expression; and c) rights of assembly and association. (Transparency international framework)

# Covid-19 impact on youth participation and spaces

- **Access to young people:** 17% of organisations had no difficulties, while 31% indicate that their access to young people was very limited and another 52% of the organisations indicate that their access was somewhat limited.
- **Citizen participation:** Less than 20% were able to participate fully (38% pre-Covid, 2020 survey), and almost 30% had significant difficulties (11% pre-Covid, 2020 survey)
- **Access to information:** 26% of organisations reporting that they have full access to information from government sources, including financial information. In contrast, more than 15% of organisations experienced significant difficulties or were unable to access information from government sources, and a further 22% of organisations experienced some difficulties
- **Ability to act autonomously:** More than one third of the organisations report government interference, while 4% of the organisations report significant interference

# Covid-19 impact on youth participation and spaces

## Civic space:

- Engaging freely and without fear of retribution, more than 10% of organisations felt completely unable to engage in advocacy, while another 15% experienced significant difficulties. **Less than 30%** of organisations were able to engage fully without fear of retribution.
- Restrictive measures included police control, physical violence, especially against members of sexual and ethnic minorities, and others. Compared to **before the pandemic**, the difference in results is again alarming. Before the pandemic, **61% of organisations** said they were fully able to engage in advocacy, while less than 2% of organisations said they were not able to engage at all.

## Reflections on Covid measures:

- Some of these seemed justified, at least for a period of time, but many citizens felt that governments were exploiting the situation to downplay criticism of their actions in managing the Covid\_19 crisis. In some cases, it was also an opportunity to silence civil society organisations and individuals, or at least limit their ability to voice their concerns about some non-transparent practices that emerged as a result of Covid-19. The organisations believe that **governments have used the opportunity to suppress the ability to participate in public meetings and demonstrations**. More than a third of the organisations surveyed believe that the government has done this, with 15% of organisations believing that this has been done to a significant extent.
- Youth organisations have often responded to the shrinking phenomena by creating new spaces: offline (35%) and online (42%)

# Meaningful youth participation in decision-making...

- Transparency and accountability; authority and voice; open communication channels; power-sharing; material and non-material support;
- Need for safe spaces for young people (physical and virtual)
- Particular attention to young people and especially young women in the conventional representative democracy (political parties, parliaments)
- Inclusion of youth movements into discussions
- De-stigmatisation and de-criminalisation of youth activists
- (Youth) policy monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment/ youth test

# Meaningful Youth Political Participation



Understanding the roles, responsibilities, processes and participation mechanisms

Trust

Transparency and accountability

Up-to-date information

Youth-focused conferences

Youth-friendly communication

Open information and communication channels between young people and adults

Young people's voices need to be heard and respected by other stakeholders in the political participation processes

Young people need to be able to make decisions, either on their own or jointly with other stakeholders, under transparent conditions known to all involved actors

Authority and voice

Power sharing

Material support and

Young people should be supported to safely engage in youth political participation activities with no regard to their background, status, or identity

non-material support

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