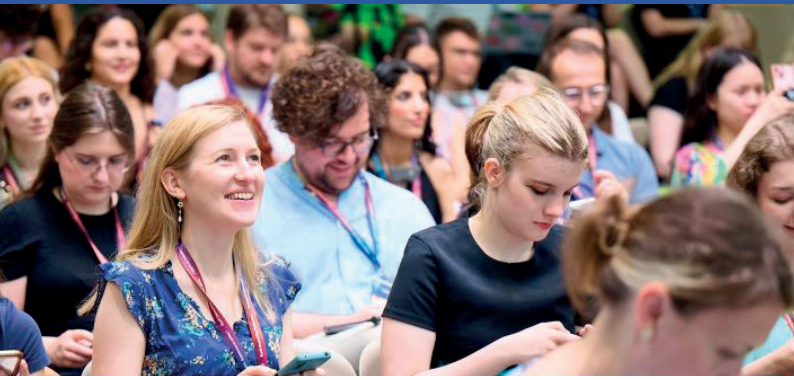
European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life



Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
of the Council of Europe

Youth – Jeunesse

THE CONGRESS
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European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life

French edition:
Charte européenne sur la participation des jeunes à la vie locale et régionale

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Contents

European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life	9
Resolution 516 (2025) of the Congress	23
Recommendation 537 (2025) of the Congress	27
Recommendation CM/Rec(2026)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life	31
Appendix – Explanatory memorandum	39
References/Resources	70

“Make the charter a reality!”

For us [the participants of the Youth Innovating Democracy event of the Council of Europe in June 2026] democracy is a culture to live and a path to build. A culture where people are free to speak and disagree. A culture where participation begins early and lasts a lifetime. Where education prepares people for democratic participation and not only for work. Where generations meet as partners in dialogue. Where diversity in all its forms is celebrated. Where all of us are equal in rights. […] Because democracy belongs not only to those who hold power. It belongs to us, the people.– Manifesto “Youth Visions for a European Democracy in 2049” - June 2026

Youth participation in democratic processes is essential for building inclusive, resilient, and forward-looking societies as well as for preserving democratic stability and social justice in 21st century Europe.

The European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life as adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in October 2025 and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in March 2026 is the key standard at European level acknowledging youth participation as an essential element of European democracy and providing guidance to those who should implement it.

This emphasis on youth participation is also important to the New Democratic Pact for Europe.

Launched in 2025 by the Council of Europe, the New Democratic Pact for Europe has been conceived as a strategic and political process to identify integrated responses to democratic backsliding and to renew democratic governance across Europe. It brings together governments, parliamentarians, local and regional authorities, international partners, civil society, academia, the private sector and citizens, including young people, to renew their commitment to and engagement with democracy.

The European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life is a concrete contribution to this process, reinforced by a "Manifesto: Youth Visions for a European Democracy in 2049" adopted in June 2026, and reflecting young people's shared vision for the future of European democracy.

The European Youth Participation Charter is not new. The first version was adopted in 1992 by what was then the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities. It was revised in 2003, with the input of young people. However, the newly revised version presented in this booklet defines more clearly than previous versions what are the rights of youth (as the "right-holders") and the duties of local and regional authorities (as the "duty-bearers").

Participation in democratic life concerns more than the essentials of voting and standing for election. It means active citizenship, with people able to influence political decisions. Not only must this be a right, but it must be enabled by means,

space and structures, opportunities and tools and full support to participate in and influence political decisions.

Local and regional authorities, as the authorities closest to young people, have a key role in promoting and advancing youth participation. They can ensure that young people not only hear and learn about democracy and citizenship in their towns, cities and regions, but have the opportunity to practice it, for example in local youth councils and in interacting directly with municipal councils and councillors and their decision-making structures. The new charter is very clear on this point.

True youth participation also means socio-economic participation without discrimination, ensuring that young people have the resources to take part in civic life. It also means shaping political discourse in way that is accessible to young people. Authorities at all levels should take care to ensure this.

The new European Youth Participation Charter is in itself an outstanding example of youth participation at the European level. It was prepared in close co-operation between the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Council of Europe statutory bodies on youth, the Steering Committee on Youth (CDEJ) and the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) and numerous representatives of their partner youth organisations and individual young people, including the Congress youth delegates. This approach has ensured that the charter is informed by a deep understanding about the expectations of today's youth and the need to ensure participation that is effective and not tokenistic.

Now is the time to transform this gold standard into real results.

We therefore call on all local and regional authorities, on all national authorities, on youth civil society organisations and young people themselves to take action to give life to this charter. We urge them to use these provisions, to advocate for inclusion and change and to create the structures that will allow young people's suggestions to flourish and take root.

Gunn Marit Helgesen	Liliya Elenkova	Emma Wedner
President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities	*Chair of the Steering Committee on Youth*	*Chair of the Advisory Council on Youth*







The following text of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life has been adopted as an Appendix to Resolution 516 (2025) and Recommendation 537 (2025) of the Congress and to Recommendation CM/Rec(2026)3 of the Comitee of Minister to member States.

European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life

Scope and purpose

1. The European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life (hereinafter the charter") aims to promote and strengthen the participation of young people in decision-making processes at the local and regional levels, and to ensure an enabling environment for the participation of young people. Participation is at the core of democracy, strengthening the participation of young people contributes to the sustainability and resilience of democratic societies.

2. Young people and their participation in decision-making at the local and regional levels are at the centre of the charter. Young people are equal actors in society and their participation in democratic processes is essential to the sustainability and development of democratic systems. As the generation that will be most affected by today's decisions, young people have the right to participate in the decisions and processes that shape their lives.

3. Local and regional authorities are one of the main foundations of any democratic system. The right to participate in the conduct of public affairs is one of the democratic principles shared among all member States and this right can be most directly exercised at the local level, as outlined by the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207).

4. The European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life was adopted in 1992 and is one of the key European standards with respect to youth participation. The current revision was initiated in 2024 by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in partnership with the Joint Council on Youth. This revision included a consultative process with young people, youth organisations and with local and regional authorities to respond to current changes in the realities of young people and incorporate the lessons from the implementation.

5. The definition of the age range covered by the terms "young people" or "youth" should reflect the legal and constitutional framework of each member State.

Chapter I – Youth participation and its principles

6. Youth participation means that young people have the right, the means, the space, the structures, the opportunities, the tools, and the necessary support to participate in and influence decision-making at local and regional levels.

7. Youth participation is a process based on democratic values. In a rapidly evolving world, the ways young people

choose to participate are as diverse as they are. Local and regional authorities should create an enabling environment for young people to participate and be motivated to participate. They should support and recognise stable, democratic and transparent structures for youth participation in decision making, such as youth councils and youth organisations, and other forms of participation that empower young people to shape their communities, including informal youth groups, youth-led community-based movements or similar initiatives.

8. Local and regional authorities should strive to create the conditions, structures, processes and procedures that allow for the highest levels of participation of young people in the decisions and processes that affect their lives. They should promote the principle of co-management, as practiced by the Council of Europe, involving young people, through their chosen representatives, in taking decisions as equal partners together with local and regional authorities. It includes the involvement of young people in setting the agenda, decision-making, implementation and evaluation.

9. The principle of equality and the prohibition on discrimination, as enshrined in the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ETS No. 5), apply fully to youth participation. All young people should have equal access to participation structures and processes without discrimination on any ground such as "race",[1] colour, descent, national or

1. In line with General Policy Recommendation No. 15 of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) on combatting hate speech, the term "race" is used in this charter with the sole purpose of ensuring that those persons who are generally and erroneously perceived as belonging to another race are not excluded from the protection provided for by the charter.

ethnic origin, age, disability, language, religion or belief, political affiliation, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and other personal characteristics or status.

10. Local and regional authorities, together with young people, should constantly identify and take measures to remove the barriers to the active participation of young people. This may entail adopting tailored measures to support the participation of specific groups of young people in local and regional affairs. These measures should consider all forms of discrimination, including structural, multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination.

11. Local and regional authorities should pay particular attention to gender equality when providing young women and men with access to participation spaces in social, political and cultural life in general, and to leadership positions in particular. This includes taking measures to eradicate gender-based violence.

12. Local and regional authorities should take inclusive and proactive measures to facilitate youth participation, giving particular attention to the realities of young people seeking refuge and asylum, or facing the challenges of forced displacement or statelessness.

13. Youth participation requires the investment of time and resources by young people. Local and regional authorities should ensure that sufficient time is foreseen for young people to take part in decisions and processes that affect their lives. Local and regional authorities should recognise the time invested by young people through adequate means, ensuring that financial barriers to participation are removed, including through means of compensation.

14. The relevant authorities in member States should create an enabling environment for youth civil society, in full respect for the freedom to associate and recognising their essential role in securing a thriving democratic future. This includes an appropriate legal framework, structural support and access to funding and to decision making processes.

15. Democracy, human rights and participation are learnt. The relevant authorities in member States should ensure that all those involved in youth participation, notably young people, youth organisations and local and regional authorities, including staff and elected representatives, have continuous access to information, education and training to develop their competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes).

16. Local and regional authorities should ensure that youth participation happens in environments that are physically and psychologically safe and where all participants are treated with respect. It is essential for trust in democracy that young people can express their opinions and engage without fear of discrimination, intimidation, or backlash. Young people should be informed of existing mechanisms for reporting and remedy, and, where such mechanisms do not exist, they should be created.

17. The formats of youth participation should be firmly anchored in decision-making procedures, yet flexible and adaptable to constantly changing political or socio-economic realities. They should allow for innovation and creativity, offering a variety of ways for young people to engage that suit their schedules, interests, and levels of commitment.

18. The structures, processes and platforms for youth participation should be designed in ways that are accessible to all young people. They should be adapted to the changing needs and interests of young people, while paying particular attention to the needs of those with fewer opportunities.

19. Youth participation should be voluntary, productive, engaging and enjoyable, creating the conditions for a meaningful and empowering experience for young people, while encouraging commitment to democratic values. Feedback should be provided to young people on the results of their participation.

20. Youth participation requires dedicated and adequate financial and qualified human resources. Local and regional authorities should ensure that provisions for youth participation are incorporated into regular planning and budgeting processes. Sustainability means that youth participation is ongoing and is not limited to one-off events, and that it is supported by permanent structures and qualified and sufficient human resources, which are accessible to all, to ensure that youth engagement continues to thrive.

Chapter II – Young people's rights and means to participate

21. Youth participation is rooted in the international human rights framework which emphasises the importance of involving all individuals, including young people, in the decisions and processes that affect their lives and those of future generations.

22. By engaging in decision-making at the local and regional levels, young people exercise their human rights, including the right to participate in public affairs and cultural life, either directly or through representatives of their choice.

23. Local and regional authorities play an essential role in the respect for, and the protection, fulfilment and promotion of the human rights of young people by creating the necessary conditions for their participation in the life of the community.

24. Respect for the freedom of expression of young people is fundamental to the exercise of the right to participate and ensures that young people can voice their opinions without fear of intimidation, repression or backlash. At the same time, young people need access to unbiased and reliable information to make informed decisions, including the use of appropriate and diverse channels to inform young people about opportunities to take part in decisions and processes that affect their lives.

25. The right to privacy requires additional protection with respect to participation processes, in both online and offline environments. Local and regional authorities should take all necessary measures to protect young people's right to privacy and respect their right to data protection, clearly informing them and where applicable their legal guardians, about all aspects involved.

26. Freedom of assembly and association, including the protection of youth civil society is a requirement for meaningful youth participation at any level. Young people exercise these rights in various ways, including through engagement in youth organisations, local and regional youth councils and movements, and by taking part in demonstrations and advocacy groups. Young people should be protected while acting or appearing as human rights defenders, including those in exile or in vulnerable circumstances.

27. Member States have an obligation to respect, protect, fulfil and promote human rights. All relevant authorities should take the necessary measures to ensure that young people have access to education for democratic citizenship and human rights education in both formal and non-formal settings. This involves recognising and supporting the important role played by youth organisations in information, education and training programmes.

28. Young people's social rights should be guaranteed, including housing, education and training, health, employment and work, leisure and culture without discrimination on any grounds. Local and regional authorities and other authorities in member States should pay particular attention to the fulfilment of social rights as well as to disadvantaged groups of young people, especially those who are subject to multiple and/or intersectional discrimination.

29. Youth participation is an individual right with a collective dimension, which ensures that young people can make an impact not only as individuals but as part of a broader group.

Chapter III – Spaces and structures for youth participation

30. Member States should take the necessary measures in all areas and at the most appropriate levels to create an enabling and stimulating environment for youth participation, with particular attention paid to democratic structures and processes for youth participation, such as local youth councils; youth civil society and youth-led spaces, including youth centres.

31. Local and regional authorities should support, resource and promote the creation of independent and youth-led

structures for participation in decision making at the local level, and to formally recognise their role. Whether they are called local and regional youth councils, youth advisory bodies, youth parliaments or youth forums (hereafter "youth councils"), they serve as permanent structures that enable young people to actively and meaningfully engage in decision-making processes on a regular basis.

32. Youth councils require the existence of a clear framework for their functioning, including a clear and public set of objectives, roles and responsibilities with regard to young people and local and regional authorities, and to the rules and procedures, discussed and approved by the members. These procedures should be co-created by youth councils and local and regional authorities.

33. Youth councils should ensure their composition is fair and representative of the diversity of local youth. Youth council members should be elected or designated by young people and/or youth civil society through a fair and transparent procedure. Youth councils should adopt and implement non-discriminatory policies and practices that ensure all young people, regardless of their background, can participate, thus safeguarding representativity.

34. Local and regional authorities should ensure that youth councils can follow and contribute to their decision-making processes, allowing young people the possibility of maximum impact.

35. Youth councils can facilitate consultations with young people on relevant issues, serve as forums for the development, monitoring, and evaluation of youth projects, and encourage youth participation in other local consultative bodies.

36. Local and regional authorities should ensure that youth councils have an adequate budgetary allocation that is included in the regular budget of the local or regional authority, as well as adequate infrastructure (for example meeting space, equipment, technology, materials) and human resources that support their activity and safeguard their independent functioning. To preserve independence, youth councils and youth organisations should be supported through unrestricted and recurring funding that does not compromise their critical voice. This should not impede youth councils from seeking any additional funding and resources necessary for them to conduct their activity, nor influence in any manner their functioning.

37. The activity of youth councils should be transparent, well communicated and made visible to young people and youth civil society in the community they represent.

38. Local and regional authorities should also devise democratic processes for the consultation and engagement of young people, notably specific consultations, youth assemblies and other practices of deliberative democracy or participatory budgeting. Such processes should adhere to the principles of youth participation outlined in Chapter I and should be seen as complementary.

39. Local and regional authorities should ensure that young people have access to youth-led youth spaces, including youth centres, where democracy can be learnt and practised. Such spaces require investment and financial support.

40. Local and regional authorities should consider leveraging inclusive, accessible and safe digital platforms to engage with young people and ensure their participation in democratic

processes, including online consultations, virtual town halls and interactive decision-making platforms. Local authorities should consider the role that such digital platforms can play in situations of emergency (for example conflict or natural disaster) paying particular attention to their accessibility and inclusivity.

41. Local and regional authorities should secure means for reaching out to young people in rural and remote areas, or who are unable to access youth centres, through means such as mobile youth centres, outreach and digital youth work, and information services.

42. Within the remit of their authority, local and regional authorities should support the creation and maintenance of democratic governance structures in schools and universities and furthermore recognise the contribution of such structures for youth participation.

43. Young people should be encouraged to participate in the political life of the community, with special emphasis placed on the right to vote in and stand for elections.

44. Member States should consider, within their legal and constitutional frameworks, measures to encourage the political participation of young people, including lowering the voting age and the introduction of youth quotas on electoral lists.

Chapter IV – Youth policy at the local and regional levels and youth perspectives in policy-making

45. Local and regional authorities should adopt evidence-based youth policies and/or strategies developed together with and by young people and their representatives. Such

policies and/or strategies should be implemented, monitored, evaluated and reviewed in an equal partnership with young people.

46. Member States should encourage co-operation between national authorities and local and regional authorities in the field of youth with a view to better coordinating and supporting youth participation.

47. Member States should encourage international co-operation in the field of youth, especially co-operation between local and regional authorities, youth councils and youth civil society active at local and regional levels.

48. Youth perspectives should be taken into account in policy areas implemented at the local and regional levels that affect the lives of young people. This should include but not be limited to economic policies, employment, education and training, living and working conditions, urban planning and design, transport and mobility, rural and remote communities, equality, diversity and inclusivity, digital technologies and digitalisation, social media and artificial intelligence, environment and climate change, leisure, sport and public health.

49. Particular attention should be given to the creation of conditions aimed at safeguarding youth participation during crises, conflict, displacement, or natural disasters, including alternative, cross-border or digital means of participation.

Chapter V – Opportunities, tools and full support for youth participation

50. Local and regional authorities should ensure that young people have the opportunities and the full support, including

adequate tools, to take an active part in local and regional affairs. Local and regional authorities should co-design and co-evaluate such opportunities, tools and support together with young people, with particular attention to the needs of marginalised groups, including young people with minority background, those with disabilities, those from rural areas and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, young refugees and asylum-seekers, as well as human rights defenders.

51. Local and regional authorities should ensure that adequate provisions are made for access to education for democratic citizenship and human rights education both in formal and non-formal education and training. This implies recognising the role of youth organisations as providers of human rights and citizenship education and providing them with the support necessary, including financial and institutional backing.

52. Local and regional authorities should ensure that adequate conditions and recognition are provided to youth work as an essential contribution to young people's empowerment and development. Recognition and support should be given to both paid and volunteer youth work.

53. Local and regional authorities should strive to develop tools that support youth participation, harnessing the power of virtual spaces, while ensuring the principles of youth participation are fully respected. Those tools include raising awareness in the digital space (on social media platforms, forums, websites, etc.), providing education for digital literacy, critical thinking, and both formal and non-formal training, as well as exchanging best practices and offering e-learning opportunities.

54. Local and regional authorities should invest in capacity building measures ensuring that staff, as well as elected representatives, are trained in and motivated to support youth participation. This should include principles and standards for youth policy, youth work and dedicated youth programmes.

55. Local and regional authorities, and where relevant, national authorities, should take measures to assist the private sector in living up to its social responsibility.

Chapter VI – Dissemination, evaluation and review of the charter

56. Competent authorities in each member State should ensure that the charter is translated into national, regional and local languages.

57. Local, regional and national authorities should ensure the wide dissemination of the charter among the relevant authorities and stakeholders. Young people and youth organisations are key partners in the design, implementation, and evaluation of dissemination strategies of the charter to ensure that these efforts are relevant, effective, and resonate with the young people.

58. Local and regional authorities and young people, including youth organisations and youth councils, should evaluate the implementation of the charter in their community by means of tools developed for this purpose, using indicators based on the principles of youth participation outlined in Chapter I. The evaluation process should be regular, participatory and transparent and should be followed-up with appropriate measures to strengthen the implementation of the charter.

Resolution 516 (2025)[2]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. Its Recommendation 128 (2003) on the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life and Recommendation Rec(2004)13 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the participation of young people in local and regional life, and the recent evolutions in youth participation and youth policies which justify that the texts be replaced by the present ones;

b. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207);

c. the most recent and relevant recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member States, in particular:

   – Recommendation CM/Rec (2025)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the social, economic, and political participation of rural youth;

   – Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on young people and climate action;

2. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 29 October 2025 (see document CG (2025)49-14, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs Aida Karimli, Sweden (R, ILDG) and Roberto Pella, Italy (L, EPP/CCE).

- Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on Roma youth participation;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on deliberative democracy;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on protecting youth civil society and young people, and supporting their participation in democratic processes;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the participation of citizens in local public life;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on young people's access to rights;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights;

d. the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy (Appendix III of the Reykjavík Declaration) which underline the importance of supporting young people's participation in democratic life and decision-making processes as an investment in a democratic future;

e. the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and notably Goal 16 "Peace, Justice and Institutions" and its sub-goals 16.6 to "develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels" and 16.7 to "ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels".

2. The Congress considers that:

a. the participation of young people is a determining factor for a sustainable democratic future of Europe;

b. youth policies at all levels should be evidence-based, tailor-made and intersectional with a view to addressing the diversity of young people and support needed by young people in vulnerable situations;

c. permanent and reliable structures for youth participation are of utmost importance next to youth civil society in learning, practicing, defending and innovating democracy;

d. support systems should facilitate the participation of young people, including via youth centres, youth work and youth civil society;

e. the consultative process and its outcomes supported by the Congress and the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) are a good practice example of a participatory process involving young people and youth civil society, as well as local and regional authorities;

f. the conclusions of the European Youth Conference "Young people in local and regional life: democracy in action!" held in Braga, Portugal, on 5-7 February 2025, are an example of fruitful co-operation between the Council of Europe Youth

Department, the Congress and youth civil society, as well as national and local authorities of a member State.

3. The Congress resolves to endorse the new European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life as appended to the present resolution below as part of its contribution to the highest standards of youth participation and the protection of sustainable democracies in Council of Europe member States.

4. The Congress calls on local and regional authorities in member States to:

a. promote and apply, through policies and action, the principles and measures set out in the charter, which aim to strengthen the participation of young people in decision-making processes at local and regional levels, and to ensure an enabling environment for their active and meaningful democratic engagement;

b. in implementing the charter, give due consideration to the specific needs and situations of all young people in all their diversity;

c. translate and widely disseminate the charter appended hereto, including in accessible and youth-friendly formats, among local and regional key stakeholders addressing any political issues that may be of relevance for youth;

d. support, within the Congress, the regular review of the implementation of this resolution.

5. The Congress makes the commitment to take into account and respect the present resolution in the framework of relevant activities led by its statutory bodies, and in particular its committees.

Recommendation 537 (2025)[3]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe refers to:

a. Its Recommendation 128 (2003) on the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life and Recommendation Rec(2004)13 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the participation of young people in local and regional life, and the recent evolutions in youth participation and youth policies which justify that the texts be replaced by the present ones;

b. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207);

c. the most recent and relevant recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member States, in particular:

   – Recommendation CM/Rec (2025)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the social, economic, and political participation of rural youth;

   – Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on young people and climate action;

   – Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on Roma youth participation;

3. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 29 October 2025 (see document CG (2025)49-14, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs Aida Karimli, Sweden (R, ILDG) and Roberto Pella, Italy (L, EPP/CCE).

- Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on deliberative democracy;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on protecting youth civil society and young people, and supporting their participation in democratic processes;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the participation of citizens in local public life;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on young people's access to rights;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights;

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notably Goal 16 "Peace, Justice and Institutions" and its sub-goals 16.6 to "develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels" and 16.7 to "ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels".

2. The Congress considers that:

a. the participation of young people is a determining factor for a sustainable democratic future of Europe;

b. youth participation and youth policies at all levels should be evidence-based, tailor-made and intersectional with a view to addressing the diversity of young people and support needed by young people in vulnerable situations;

c. permanent and reliable structures for youth participation are of utmost importance next to youth civil society in learning, practicing, defending and innovating democracy;

d. support systems should facilitate the participation of young people, including via youth centres, youth work and youth civil society;

e. the consultative process and its outcomes supported by the Congress and the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) are a good practice example of a participatory process involving young people and youth civil society, as well as local and regional authorities;

f. the conclusions of the European Youth Conference "Young people in local and regional life: democracy in action!" held in Braga, Portugal, on 5-7 February 2025, are an example of fruitful co-operation between the Council of Europe Youth Department, the Congress and youth civil society, as well as national and local authorities of a member State.

3. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers to invite the respective national authorities of the member States to the Council of Europe to:

a. create a national legal and political framework that promotes and strengthens youth participation and youth policies across all relevant political areas, including by creating favourable conditions for local and regional action;

b. invite national associations of local and regional authorities as well as other relevant organisations at local and regional levels, to take into account the principles set out in the charter appended hereto in their own activities, to promote the charter's implementation among local and regional authorities so as to strengthen the participation of young people in decision-making processes at local and regional levels;

c. support the translation and wide dissemination of the charter, including in accessible and youth-friendly formats, among local and regional key stakeholders addressing any political issues that may be of relevance for youth;

d. support the regular review, by the Congress and the Committee of Ministers, of the implementation of this resolution at local and regional levels.

4. The Congress also calls on the Committee of Ministers to continue supporting the exemplary partnership developed between the Congress and the Council of Europe Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) in the framework of the latest charter revision, with a view to ensuring that youth participation and youth policies are being continuously addressed in a multilevel perspective, as a substantive contribution to the New Democratic Pact for Europe by the Council of Europe.

Recommendation CM/Rec(2026)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life

(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 12 March 2026 at the 1554th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)

Preamble

The Committee of Ministers, under Article 15.*b* of the Statute of the Council of Europe (ETS No. 1),

Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and facilitating their economic and social progress;

Considering that member States of the Council of Europe have committed themselves to ensuring the rights and freedoms enshrined in the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ETS No. 5, "the Convention") to everyone within their jurisdiction, and underlining their obligation to refrain from human rights violations;

Having regard to the European Social Charter (ETS No. 35), adopted in 1961 and subsequently amended and supplemented by its additional protocols: ETS Nos. 128 (1988), 142 (1991) and 158 (1995), and revised in 1996, ETS No. 163),

as applied and interpreted by the European Committee of Social Rights;

Having regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted in 1989 by the General Assembly in its Resolution 44/25);

Having regard to the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122);

Building on the provisions of the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207);

Considering that participation is a core element of democracy and is one of the democratic principles that are shared by all member States of the Council of Europe;

Considering that it is at the local level that this right can be exercised most directly;

Underlining the applicability of existing principles set out in relevant recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to member States, in particular:

- Recommendation CM/Rec(2025)3 on the social, economic and political participation of rural youth;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)6 on young people and climate action;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)6 on deliberative democracy;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)4 on Roma youth participation;

- Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)6 on protecting youth civil society and young people, and supporting their participation in democratic processes;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)4 on the participation of citizens in local public life;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 on youth work;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)7 on young people's access to rights;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)3 on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2 on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)2 on the evaluation, auditing and monitoring of participation and participation policies at local and regional level;
- Recommendation Rec(2006)14 on citizenship and participation of young people in public life;

Recalling Resolution CM/Res(2020)2 on the Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030, in particular the priority of "revitalising pluralistic democracy" with special emphasis on "broadening youth participation, so that young people participate meaningfully in decision making, on the basis of

a broad social and political consensus in support of inclusion, participatory governance and accountability";

Recalling the Reykjavík Declaration "United around our values" adopted at the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (16-17 May 2023), which underscores the willingness to include " a youth perspective in the Organisation's intergovernmental and other deliberations as youth participation in decision-making processes improves the effectiveness of public policies and strengthens democratic institutions through open dialogue";

Recalling also the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy (Appendix III of the declaration), which underline the importance of supporting young people's participation in democratic life and decision-making processes as an investment in a democratic future;

Having regard to the Resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective, adopted by the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth held in Malta on 8 and 9 October 2025;

Considering that the participation of young people is a determining factor for a sustainable democratic future of Europe;

Considering young people in all their diversity and consequently considering that youth participation and youth policies at all levels should be evidence based, tailor-made and intersectional, with a view to addressing young people's diverse needs;

Considering the importance of permanent structures that foster youth participation and the role of youth civil society

in learning, practising, defending, promoting and innovating democracy;

Highlighting the importance of equal access to fundamental rights, equal opportunities for all young people and, where needed, support systems for the participation of young people, including youth centres, youth work and youth civil society;

Recognising that youth participation is essential not only in times of democratic stability, but also in situations of armed conflict, forced displacement and post-emergency recovery, as it contributes to safeguarding democratic values and fostering civic trust;

Recognising that young people in exile, young human rights defenders and young people with refugee or asylum-seeking backgrounds often face additional barriers and risks to participation and require additional measures to ensure their safety, inclusion and access to democratic processes;

Bearing in mind the consultative process set up by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the Joint Council on Youth, and its conclusions, on the proposed text of the charter in the appendix to this recommendation, and acknowledging it as an example of good practice of the participatory process for young people and youth civil society, as well as local and regional authorities;

Considering the conclusions of the European Youth Conference "Young people in local and regional life: democracy in action!" (Braga, 5-7 February 2025), as a good example of co-operation between the Youth Department and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the Portuguese national authorities, the Municipality of Braga and youth civil society;

Taking note of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe Resolution 516 (2025) and Recommendation 537 (2025) on the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life;

Having regard to Recommendation Rec(2004)13 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the participation of young people in local and regional life, and considering that the changes which have taken place since its adoption justify that it be replaced by this recommendation,

Recommends that the governments of the member States:

a. promote and support, taking into account their legal and constitutional framework, the implementation of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, which aims to promote and strengthen the participation of young people in decision-making processes and in political life at the local and regional levels, and to ensure an enabling environment for their active and meaningful engagement;

b. encourage the development of adaptable youth participation mechanisms in times of crisis, conflict and recovery, ensuring that young people continue to engage in democratic processes, decision making and community rebuilding through safe, inclusive and accessible formats;

c. invite local and regional authorities to implement the measures in this recommendation and its appendix that fall within their sphere of competence;

d. give due consideration, when implementing these measures, to the specific needs and situations of all young people in all their diversity;

e. translate and disseminate widely this recommendation and its appendix (including in accessible and youth-friendly formats), especially among national, regional and local authorities and key stakeholders that address or are concerned by youth issues; and

f. review, within the Committee of Ministers, the implementation of this recommendation by member States five years after its adoption and every five years thereafter.

Appendix to the charter – Explanatory memorandum

1. Introduction

1. The following explanatory memorandum accompanies and backs up the new European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life ("charter") as well as Resolution 516 (2025) and Recommendation 537 (2025) of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities ("Congress") and Recommendation CM/Rec(2026)3 of the Committee of Ministers introducing the charter as a reference for the Council of Europe statutory bodies on youth, the Steering Committee on Youth (CDEJ) and the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), both part of a co-management structure led by the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ).

2. The charter is the key instrument providing guidance to local, regional and national authorities in Council of Europe member States as the main duty bearers for planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating youth participation in policy and political decisions, notably at local and regional levels as the levels of decision-making closest to young people. While local and regional authorities are responsible for the sustainable implementation of relevant participation structures and activities, national authorities need to create favourable conditions and support local and regional action, for example through appropriate legal frameworks, mainstreaming efforts, training and education programmes and the provision of sufficient and reliable funding.

3. Accordingly, the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in local and regional life is proposed for adoption by both the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Committee of Ministers. The texts in common for adoption are the charter and the explanatory memorandum, with the Committee of Ministers adopting a Recommendation text separately and the Congress a Resolution and a Recommendation, in conformity with their respective rules and procedures.

4. The new text of the charter takes a human rights-based approach, grounded in the assumption that young people's participation in political, social, environmental and economic life is an absolute necessity to progress on the path of an inclusive, sustainable and democratic development. This reflects the fact that human rights belong to young people, in the same way that they belong to every individual. Their diverse backgrounds and situations should not impede their access to and enjoyment of human rights, and any measures put in place to implement the charter should address the obstacles to youth participation.

5. The civic and political participation of young people is widely recognised as an essential factor in strengthening contemporary democracies. As a significant portion of the population, young people must be seen in the dual role of beneficiaries of participation opportunities and agents of change in communities. Mobilising younger generations requires new approaches and a diverse range of forms of intervention, from voting, social activism and membership of youth organisations to collaboration in public consultation processes and political decisions. Young people often have a

heightened interest in preserving the planet and its resources: as agents of change, they have a paramount role in ensuring that this happens, as well as safeguarding peaceful and equitable societies and investing their efforts in the well-being of future generations.

6. With a strong human rights and anti-discrimination focus, the new text of the charter – accompanied by this explanatory memorandum – sets a modern, adaptable standard for youth participation across Council of Europe member States. Its full implementation will contribute to stronger democratic processes, broader youth engagement, and strengthened participatory structures at all levels.

2. History of the charter

7. The charter has a long history as a reference document in matters of youth participation at local and regional levels in Europe and has always been an instrument elaborated by following a participatory approach. The first charter was adopted in 1992 by the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities, predecessor institution of the current Congress. Even at that time, the Standing Conference called for a commitment from local and regional authorities to develop a culture where young people are able to contribute "in valuable and meaningful ways". The text had been adopted against the background of youth policies which were focusing on the development of initiatives, models and policies of youth participation, the participation of marginalised groups and youth with migrant background, equal opportunities for boys and girls and youth mobility.

8. The charter was revised for the first time in 2003, to become a key standard on youth participation for all Council of Europe member States, elaborated through a partnership between the Congress and the Council of Europe intergovernmental bodies and services. The 2003 text aimed to be more specific and evidence-based than the original charter and to outline in more detail the policy areas in which young people would expect to be able to take part in political decisions; it explained why and how youth participation should happen in certain policy areas, including some where it had been absent.

9. To create a strong evidence base, the 2003 charter was backed up by the outcomes of the Conference "Young People – Actors in their Towns and Regions" held on the occasion of the charter's 10th Anniversary on 7-8 March 2002 in Krakow (Poland), organised by the Culture and Education Committee of the Congress, in co-operation with the Council of Europe's Directorate of Youth and Sport and the City of Krakow, to take stock of progress and discuss ways of further promoting youth participation.

10. Once adopted, the 2003 charter was completed with practical tools, namely a plain language version and a manual entitled "Have Your Say" (both last updated in 2015), as well as training courses dedicated to local authorities and youth civil society. These tools have been much used and appreciated by young people, youth workers and local and regional representatives partnering with youth across Europe over the past decades, and their importance and value was once again underlined during the consultation process leading up to the new, 2025 charter.

3. Political and policy context leading to the new revision of the charter

11. The new revision of the charter was initiated by the Congress in 2024, with a view to adapting the text to policy developments in the youth field, as well as to the new context and challenges for local and regional policies, and to make the charter fit as a standard for the 21st century. This renewed attention to the charter was also spurred by the conclusions of the 2023 Council of Europe Reykjavik Summit of Heads of State and Government, and the resulting Reykjavik Declaration and Principles for Democracy.[4]

12. Since 2003, major socio-economic changes – including global economic shifts, increased mobility of people, digital transformation, and growing inequalities – have reshaped young people's lives across Europe. These trends, further intensified by recent economic, health, political, and environmental crises, highlight the need for new policy responses and an updated framework for the participation of younger generations, enabling them to shape their own future.

13. Democracy is increasingly challenged by the rise of populism, extremist movements, fake news, hate speech and online grooming of young people for the purpose of radicalisation. The shrinking space and resources for civil society also represent a profound challenge. All of this contributes to democratic backsliding and a climate where young people fear retribution when exercising their right to freedom of expression,

4. Reykjavik Declaration – United around our values, 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, 16-17 May 2023, Council of Europe, 2023.

even though access to information and media has never been as easy as today. Young people show a high degree of political interest but a low degree of engagement with formal democratic processes. At a global level, only 2.8% of parliamentarians are under 30,[5] and young people's membership in political parties is clearly decreasing; equally voter turnout among young people is on the decline at various levels of governance.

14. Concerns regarding the state of democracies in Europe have been raised repeatedly over recent years, especially in the face of the rise of authoritarian regimes in many countries and the successive and multiple crises that have troubled the socio-economic perspectives of youth, starting with the late 2008 economic crisis, continuing with the Covid-19 pandemic and up to the ongoing war against Ukraine and its socio-economic, political and cultural consequences.

15. Young people are losing trust in political institutions at a faster pace than older generations. With cuts to youth services and shrinking space and resources for youth civil society, essential to support the engagement of young people, they have become increasingly disengaged from the political system over the past 20 years. According to the most recent polls, only about 50% of young people still believe that democracy is the best form of government, while around a quarter of young people surveyed would favour authoritarian regimes under certain circumstances.[6] Involving young people in shaping the democratic future of Europe is therefore urgent.

5. Youth participation in national parliaments: 2023, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023.
6. Young Europe 2025, Youth study, TUI Foundation, 2025.

16. Like for the general population, political participation of young people is also determined by factors such as economic well-being, race, ethnicity, religion, migration status, areas of residence and level of urbanisation, and the most marginalised individuals regularly face most difficulties in accessing participatory and democratic processes.

17. Recent studies reveal that young people's attitudes are not necessarily the main cause of the problem, as many of them are interested in politics and the fate of their communities, and want to participate. This is also revealed through the increasing popularity of "non-traditional" forms of participation such as the expression of online opinions, involvement in environmental justice movements, or commitment to the new ethical approach of "radical kindness". It remains for institutions at local, regional and national levels to engage youth in dialogue, and to co-create structures of participation with young people in order to shift their attention from informal participation to formal democratic processes.[7]

18. The ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine is a call to action to protect democracy and express solidarity at European level and beyond. In the face of the significant impact of war on youth in Ukraine – through serious losses of close persons or homes, broken relationships with family or friends and growing concerns about health and mental health issues – young people are considered a driving force for change and the country's recovery; which makes it necessary to develop effective youth policies and stronger youth engagement,

7. Deležan T, Bacalso C and Lodeserto A. (eds.), Youth Political Participation, Council of Europe and European Commission, 2023.

leading to more resilient local communities than would otherwise be the case in future.[8]

19. The current revision of the charter also had to respond to the developments of European standards over the last two decades:

- The Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority, to the European Charter on Local Self-Governance,(CETS No.207) was adopted in 2009. Currently signed by 22 member States, it recognises the fact that local participation is crucial for sustaining the legitimacy of political decisions, making public authorities more accountable and helping them to learn from constituents and design better policies and services. It also fosters a sense of belonging and common mission among citizens, making local communities desirable places to live and work for all generations.[9] The implementation of the Additional Protocol is regularly reviewed by the Congress through its monitoring mechanism for the European Charter of Local Self-Government and results can be found in country-based monitoring reports.[10]
- The Council of Europe acquis regarding youth has been extended with a series of Committee of Ministers recommendations that advance the continent's standards and respond to contemporary challenges.

8. UNDP: How war affects young people in Ukraine: presentation of research findings, 5 December 2024.
9. Webpage dedicated to the Additional Protocol
10. Webpage dedicated to monitoring the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government

Recommendations CM/Rec(2025)3, CM/Rec(2023)4 and CM/Rec (2023)9 address respectively the participation of young people from rural areas, national minorities and Roma youth; setting high standards for the measures needed to create participatory structures and practices and to combat discrimination. Moreover, Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)6 to member States on protecting youth civil society and young people and supporting their participation in democratic processes addresses the challenges posed to youth civil society by the phenomenon of shrinking spaces for democratic participation.[11]

– At European Union level, the European Committee of the Regions adopted a charter on Youth and Democracy in 2022. This contains 49 recommendations drawn up in co-operation with the European Youth Forum. The charter aims to enhance democratic youth participation at the local, regional, national and European levels, including through measures such as lowering the voting age below 18, establishing permanent consultation mechanisms with young people, and implementing a youth test.[12]

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11. Recommendation CM/Rec (2025) 3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the social, economic and political participation of rural youth; Recommendation CM/Rec (2023)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on Roma youth participation, and Recommendation CM/Rec (2023)9 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the active participation of national minority youth.
12. Charter on youth and democracy, Europan Committee of Regions, 2022.

20. The Reykjavik Declaration adopted in 2023 also calls for the following: "[The new path for the Council of Europe] should include a youth perspective in the Organisation's intergovernmental and other deliberations as youth participation in decision-making processes improves the effectiveness of public policies and strengthens democratic institutions through open dialogue."[13] This declaration has since guided Council of Europe activities relating to youth policies and youth engagement, both in the intergovernmental sector and in political bodies, and underpins this latest revision of the charter. The 10th Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth (Malta, 8-9 October 2025) endorsed the adoption of a Council of Europe Framework on the integration of a youth perspective both at European and national levels.[14]

4. The participatory process for the charter revision

21. The 2025 revision of the charter, culminating in the final draft charter and the present explanatory memorandum, was initiated in April 2024 by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, in partnership with the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ), representing the co-management structure of youth work at the Council of Europe, including the Steering Committee on Youth (CDEJ) and the Advisory Council on Youth

13. Reykjavik Declaration – United around our values, 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, 16-17 May 2023, Council of Europe, 2023, p. 8.
14. 10th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for youth, Resolution on the Council of Europe reference framework on a youth perspective, Valletta, 9 October 2025.

(CCJ) as its main work structures. For the Congress, the launch of this revision process was done at a moment when its own Youth Delegate programme Rejuvenating Politics was in its 10th anniversary year,[15] and the Council of Europe in the year of its 75th anniversary.

22. This second revision of the charter has been a consultative process with young people and youth organisations from across Europe, as well as with local and regional authorities represented at the Congress, to ensure that the new standard is based on solid evidence, to respond to the current challenges identified by young people themselves and to incorporate the lessons learned via the implementation of youth participation structures and activities over the past 20 years.

23. The revision process began with the approval of the Terms of Reference on 26 and 28 March 2024 respectively by the Congress Committee on Social Inclusion and Human Dignity ("Social Inclusion Committee") and the Congress Bureau, officially mandating the Committee to elaborate the new charter. On 9 April, the Secretary General of the Congress formally announced the kick-off of the revision process at the meeting of the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) in Budapest, inviting the CMJ and its co-management bodies (European Steering Committee for

15. The 'Rejuvenating Politics' initiative was launched by Congress in 2014. It reflects the Congress' commitment to promoting the participation of young people in public life and allows one Youth Delegate from each Council of Europe member state to take part in the Congress work for a year, notably via the two Congress sessions in March and October and Congress committee meetings, and to carry out a grassroots project chosen in advance, not least to input received through the peer group of youth delegates.

Youth (CDEJ) and Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ),[16] to join the process as main partners of the Congress.

24. The revision was then launched on 15 April, with the appointment of Congress co-rapporteurs, Aida Karimli from Sweden and Roberto Pella from Italy, as well as the agreement of a roadmap between the secretariats of the Congress and the Council of Europe Youth Department (DGII). The CMJ appointed Eva Kotnik (Slovenia) and Matias Rubio (Spain) for CCJ, Laurence Hermand (Belgium) and Ricardo Venturini (San Marino) for CDEJ, as well as Lauren Mason from the European Youth Forum as members of the drafting group.

25. In May and June 2024, substantive input on the text of the future charter and the issues that it should cover was gathered through an online survey of Congress members, Congress Youth Delegates, CMJ members and youth organisations. Based on the analysis of results, a discussion paper was produced for a consultative meeting on 5 July 2024, involving the same stakeholders, as well as selected European youth organisations, including the European Youth Forum, the Youth Regional Network (YRN) of the Assembly of European Regions (AER), Europe goes local (JINT) and the Youth Express Network (YEN).

26. The meeting was moderated by Congress Rapporteur Aida Karimli, and participants engaged in formal and non-formal working methods, which gave them the opportunity to experience a dynamic, participatory, inclusive and fun way of exchanging ideas and driving conclusions. Some of the

16. Any reference to CMJ from this point onwards is considered to cover both the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) and the European Steering Committee for Youth (CMJ).

substantive results of the survey, the consultation meeting and subsequent steps of the participatory process, in terms of youth challenges and priorities identified, are presented below (chapter 5).

27. Between July and September 2024, based on first consultation outcomes, the mandated expert prepared an initial draft of the revised charter, which was presented to the Congress Social Inclusion Committee on 15 October 2024.[17] Shortly afterwards, the draft was submitted to the CMJ at its meeting on 21-23 October 2024. The draft was further examined by the Congress rapporteurs and the CMJ drafting group at a meeting held on 24 October 2024.

28. In parallel, also in October 2024, the draft charter was discussed with youth organisations, notably with young participants in study sessions and dedicated consultations organised by the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest, focus group meetings organised by youth centres awarded the Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres, and consultations undertaken by the Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance of the Congress (in Ukraine).

29. A survey on the completed text of the draft charter was undertaken between December 2024 and January 2025, once again among Congress members and Youth Delegates, CMJ members and partnering youth organisations, and based on a questionnaire formulating concrete questions on the text.

17. Substantive input into the preparation of the charter and the present explanatory memorandum was provided by Dr Zsuzsanna Rutai, independent child and youth participation expert.

Some of the respondents organised consultations of their own in preparation of collective responses (e.g. in Timisoara, where 55 youth organisations that are members of the county youth council were consulted, or in Ukraine where the association of local youth councils consulted its members).

30. Major youth input into the draft charter was then produced at a European event - the European Youth Conference "Young people in local and regional life: Democracy in action!" held on 5-7 February 2025 in Braga, Portugal. It brought together around 150 youth leaders and representatives of local and regional authorities from 42 countries across Europe and was organised by the Council of Europe Youth Department in partnership with the Congress, the Braga Youth Centre, the Municipality of Braga, the Portuguese Institute for Sports and Youth and the European Youth Forum. The event was the culmination of the semi-public consultation for the revision of the charter, allowing all stakeholders to express their views once again. The conference also proposed more general and contextual measures for implementing and advancing the participation of young people in decision-making at local and regional levels in the coming years and was designed to stimulate innovation through inspirational speeches and work sessions. Detailed results of the conference can be found in the dedicated report.[18]

31. Finally, the draft text of the charter that was produced on the basis of the semi-open consultations and the Braga European Youth Conference was revised for a final time by the drafting group and submitted to the Congress Social Inclusion

18. Webpage dedicated to the European Youth Conference.

Committee and the CMJ for final consideration before formal approval. On 30 June 2025, the draft charter was approved by the Congress Social Inclusion Committee according to the usual procedures, and in the presence of CMJ Chair and members, before being sent to the Congress plenary for adoption in October 2025 (and onwards to the intergovernmental bodies of the Council of Europe for endorsement by the CMJ and adoption by the Committee of Ministers).

32. Overall, the participatory process leading to the charter involved more than 400 representatives of youth councils, youth civil society, local and regional authorities and their associations, and national authorities and produced a comprehensive revision of the text, responding to the needs identified by various stakeholders, in particular young people. Throughout the consultations, the draft charter was found to be well-structured, comprehensive and engaging**,** effectively addressing key principles of youth participation and grounded in a well-articulated human rights-based approach emphasising youth participation as a fundamental right for all rather than a privilege for some.

33. The charter was also found to be drafted in a clear and comprehensible manner, and open enough to allow for adaptation to local and regional realities and contextual developments. It was regularly highlighted during the process that the charter should be completed and accompanied by a practical toolbox and examples to support both local authorities as duty-bearers and young people as agents of change in implementing its principles.

5. Key youth and policy issues to be reflected in the new charter

34. As outlined in previous chapters, the 2025 revision of the charter was undertaken by Council of Europe institutions and bodies acting as key partners, notably the Congress and its Social Inclusion Committee and the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ), then involving, as a second "layer" of partners in the process, European youth and youth organisations directly, and involved a wide range of working methods.

35. Without specifically attaching the issues raised and substantive findings to each stage of consultation, the following paragraphs reflect on the main results of the participatory process in 2024 and 2025, which were then taken into account for the core text of the charter and point to potential action to be taken to facilitate the promotion and implementation of the charter in upcoming years. While the charter addresses many of the concerns raised in the consultations, several proposals relate to specific local realities and will be better addressed in the implementation of youth participation structures and processes at local and regional levels.

5.1. Definition, approach and principles

36. The consultations highlighted that the 2003 text was particularly known for the "RMSOS" model applied to youth participation, which was also the basis for its fundamental definition: " [youth participation] is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunities and, where necessary, the support to participate in and influence decisions and

engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society."[19]

37. The 2025 definition of youth participation (art. 6) builds on some of the fundamental ideas of the previous charter and adapts them to a rights-based, structured, and institutional context. It reflects an evolution in how youth participation is understood - not just as a general civic value, but as a process requiring formal mechanisms, concrete tools and systematic support, particularly within and by local and regional authorities. This support should allow sufficient time and resources, not only from institutions but for recognising the time and effort invested by young people. Regional authorities are therefore expected to ensure the removal of financial and structural barriers, provide appropriate compensation, and create environments that are safe, inclusive and respectful and where young people do not fear reprisals when making use of their right to freedom of expression.

38. Council of Europe human rights standards and approaches were also integrated in the new version to highlight the role of local, regional and national authorities as duty-bearers, and of young people as rights-holders, equally emphasising the importance of a thriving eco-system for participation (through youth civil society organisations, youth spaces and centres, democratic citizenship and human rights education opportunities, etc.).

39. Throughout the consultation process, there was overall agreement that the new charter should take the format of

19. Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in local and regional life, 2003.

a shorter and "to-the-point" legal standard, rather than an extensive description of areas in which youth participation needed to be stepped up. Accordingly, the 2025 text emphasises and expands the sections dedicated to youth participation principles, structures for youth participation and support measures for youth participation (parts II and III of the former text).

40. The second chapter of the charter articulates the connection between the right to participate and the access and enjoyment of all human rights by young people. It emphasises certain rights that are essential conditions to be able to exercise the right to participate, such as the right to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, the right to education and the full enjoyment of social rights. This human rights-based approach serves as a conceptual framework for designing and shaping policies, standards and practices that are based on international human rights law and in line with the Council of Europe's foundational values: human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

41. The consultation process for the charter also examined current obstacles to youth participation and found them to be both structural and individual, including a lack of trust in public institutions, insufficient resources for taking part in political processes, lack of awareness of opportunities, and limited spaces for participation. Participants agreed that the charter should address such obstacles in a positive, solution-oriented manner, focusing on actions such as awareness-raising and the creation of youth-friendly spaces. Effective youth participation requires systemic and systematic attention to the structural

barriers faced by young people to ensure that youth voices are heard and lead to real action.

42. The text of the charter recognises the diversity of youth and young people's experiences at local, regional and national levels and refrains from defining a general age range for the target group of provisions. This approach acknowledges the fact that member States define the age groups covered by their youth policies in ways which are coherent with other legal provisions concerning young people and reflect the realities of transition to full autonomy from multiple points of view (legal, social, economic, etc). For the purposes of youth policies promoted both the Council of Europe and the European Commission, and through their partnership, the notions of "young people" or "youth" refer to those aged between 13 and 30. National legislative frameworks might define the age range for youth differently.[20]

43. Surveys, consultations and further studies have revealed that the implementation of the 2003 charter followed took different forms, from fully fledged youth participation frameworks, structures and support measures to a complete lack of any such framework, policies or structures in others.[21] While a wealth of good practice exists, it became evident that local, regional authorities and national authorities need

20. About the Youth Partnership - Youth Partnership
21. Surveys and consultations led towards the draft charter (2024, 2025); M. Taseva et all, Models and mechanisms of youth engagement, DYPALL Network, 2023; Anastasiia Starikova, Local Youth Councils. Analysis of policy and mechanisms, DYPALL Network, 2024; Pamuković A.et al, Good Practices and Case Studies, DYPALL Network, 2025.

further guidance that will enable them to start developing comprehensive participation mechanisms that respond to diverse realities of young people, as well as respective legal and administrative frameworks. Thus, the new text concentrates on principles and approaches to be respected rather than being prescriptive on forms and formats.

44. The proposal to have the European Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life adopted both by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Committee of Ministers is rooted in the diversity of constitutional, legal and administrative arrangements in member States of the Council of Europe and the experiences with the implementation of the 2003 text, which indicate the value of multilevel co-ordination and partnerships at all levels.

45. The principle of equality and non-discrimination needs to be respected and guaranteed in youth participation structures and processes. Related to this, the 2025 Global Youth Participation Index highlights that young people must overcome remarkably high hurdles to engage in the political, civic and economic life of their countries and that the most effective way to increase participation is to remove these barriers.[22]

46. The results of consultations leading to the new charter pointed strongly to the need to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to participate in local and regional life and should benefit from support wherever it is needed. The new charter therefore addresses possible grounds for discrimination and their interconnection that may be faced by young people across Europe and proposes responses

22. Global Youth Participation Index, 2025, p.20.

in line with the Council of Europe's latest recommendation and standards. It pays particular attention to the situation of young women, who continue to experience widespread gender-based violence and barriers to participation despite significant legal progress made in this area[23], young people with disabilities, youth in the situation of displacement, exile, asylum and migration, LGBTQI+ youth, as well as youth from national, ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities.

5.2. Spaces and structures for youth participation

47. The charter section on structures and spaces for youth participation was highly welcomed during the consultations, particularly for its clear differentiation between permanent structures for youth participation, provisions for youth civil society and youth-led spaces, including youth centres. This responds to demands made by young people in their Call for Action (2023) to revitalise democracy: "*Independent and youth-led youth councils should be created and supported in every municipality in every Council of Europe member State. Participation in decision-making is a cornerstone of both democracy and human rights*."[24]

48. The principle of co-management, as practiced by the Council of Europe youth bodies, remains one of the most far-reaching forms of youth participation. With a view to the implementation, the charter requires the involvement of young

23. Lavizzari A.et Yurttagüler L., Contemporary forms of young women's participation: priorities, challenges and ways forward?, European Commission and Council of Europe, 2023.
24. Democracy Now! Call for Action, Youth Action Week (Strasbourg, 28 June – 1 July 2022), Council of Europe Youth Department, 2022.

people, through their democratically chosen representatives, as equal partners in decision-making, alongside local and regional authorities and their elected representatives. Such involvement foresees that young people have a say in all phases of a political process from agenda-setting to decision-making, as well as in subsequent implementation and evaluation activities.[25]

49. As regards permanent structures of youth participation at local and regional level, in particular in the format of local or regional youth councils, the reality in member States varies greatly, from States with national legislation and/or frameworks that require the existence of such structures in all municipalities to a complete lack of provisions and structures. Between these two extremes, a variety of frameworks and practices emerge. To support a process in which youth-led youth councils are established and maintained over time, with a view to regular and meaningful engagement in decision-making processes, the charter proposes a set of principles, that are based on research and practices highlighted by participants in the consultations. Following the adoption of the charter, further attention and support measures will be elaborated across Europe.

50. The consultations further highlighted the need for clear mandates, accountability frameworks, autonomy and sustainable financial and staff support for youth bodies. There was a strong emphasis on the need for regular evaluation, reporting and transparent communication about how youth proposals have been used, or explanations as to why they

25. About co-management in the Council of Europe.

have not been used. Suggestions included expanding the mandate of youth councils beyond youth-specific issues, ensuring diverse and minority representation and providing robust inclusion and recognition of both formal and informal youth groups.

51. The charter also recognises the need to complement more permanent youth participation mechanisms with dedicated consultation processes that engage young people on specific themes, paying particular respect to practices such as youth assemblies and deliberative democracy, or participatory budgeting. It also recognises the importance of developing and supporting democratic governance structures in formal education institutions (e.g. students' co-administration bodies) in agreement with the provisions of Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 containing the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education.

52. In conformity with the provisions of Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)6 on protecting youth with civil society and young people, and supporting their participation in democratic processes, and other standards of the Council of Europe with respect to civil society, the charter recognises the unique role, and the importance, of youth civil society for youth participation, as it provides for the spaces and communities where democracy and human rights are learned and practiced among peers.

53. Young people equally need spaces where they can connect, collaborate and develop a sense of belonging. Youth centres are essential environments not only for learning youth participation, democracy, human rights, but also for forming values and experiencing non-formal learning. Establishing

physical spaces reserved for and led by young people that are accessible and welcoming to youth from all walks of life is creating hubs for democracy and active participation. In this context, the Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres provides a relevant framework of principles, criteria and practices that can be further adapted and supported within local communities.[26]

54. The importance of promoting political participation through the traditional democratic means of voting and standing in elections is also emphasised by the charter. The measures proposed by the charter stem from the consultations but are also in line with standards developed by various institutions and bodies of the Council of Europe. Lowering the voting age to 16, one of the key enfranchisement measures proposed, is in line with Congress Resolution 387 (2015) on "Voting at 16 – Consequences on youth participation at local and regional level" and the more recent Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2553 (2024) on "Strengthening a youth perspective in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly".[27]

5.3. Youth policy and youth perspectives

55. The Council of Europe has developed a wealth of standards, information and knowledge of good practice with regard to youth policy. Engaging young people in policy formulation,

26. The Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres – Promoting Council of Europe values, youth policy and youth work standards in Europe. A programme of the European Steering Committee for Youth, Council of Europe, 2025.
27. For further research on vote 16, see Jan Eichhorn, Johannes Bergh (eds.), Lowering the Voting Age to 17. Learning from Real Experiences Worldwide, 2020.

implementation and evaluation constitutes a political act and an exercise in political power. Most Council of Europe member States have adopted national policy frameworks and strategies addressing young people in conformity with European youth policy standards. It is essential that local and regional authorities equally implement youth policies in line with these standards.

56. Throughout the charter consultation process, there has been wide agreement on the fact that youth participation in decision-making at local and regional levels must not be limited to youth policy matters. The new charter follows the 2003 text in underlining the need to consider young people's perspectives and experiences across the board in all decisions that concern any aspects of young people's lives in a local and regional context. It will then be for young people and local and regional authorities together to define these areas of interest in a specific territorial and institutional context.

57. The Declaration "United around our values" of the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe highlighted the need to include a youth perspective across the intergovernmental work of Organisation. The subsequently developed Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective defines the following principles which may also inspire youth participation taking place in a national, regional or local context:

- Attitude: *Think with young people:* the mindset recognising young people as active contributors to policymaking,
- Experience: *Learn from and with young people:* the interactive processes enabling intergenerational

learning, fostering mutual understanding and respect between policymakers and young people,

– Skills: *Participate with young people:* the competencies needed for meaningful youth participation, grounded in democratic values like inclusion, pluralism, and non-discrimination,

– Action: *Act with and for young people:* the commitment to actively including youth views and aspirations in all stages of the policy cycle - deliberation, formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.[28]

5.4. Opportunities, tools and full support for participation

58. The consultations leading to the charter have revealed the need for full support to make the promise of youth participation a reality for all young people. In this respect, the need for and importance of education and training of local and regional authorities personnel, both elected representatives and municipal staff is clear.

59. The essential role played by youth civil society organisations in carrying out youth work and education and training programmes, both for local and regional representatives and young people, has been recognised alongside the role played by formal education. In this respect, the text further strengthens the call for support to youth work at local and regional levels, in accordance with the provisions

28. Resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective adopted by the 10th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth, Valletta, 8-9 October 2025.

of Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work, and the Congress Resolution 463 (2021) "Youth work: the role of local and regional authorities".

60. Organised youth and civil society organisations should also be supported and have mechanisms in place to reach out to informal groups and non-organised youth to ensure that their needs are included, and that the plurality of diverse youth opinions is represented. Furthermore, the role of education providers (formal and non-formal) and safe spaces for youth is emphasised by the new charter; in implementing such measures, the existence and activities of informal and unrecognised youth groups should be recognised and supported.

61. Youth participation must be supported through continuous education and training, embedded in local and regional decision-making structures, and designed to be flexible, engaging and sustainable. It should lead to tangible results, be based on clear documentation and include accountability mechanisms, for example in the format of the evaluation of the training's impact.

62. Education and training, both for youth and local and regional representatives, will have an effect on the way in which youth structures are able to engage with decision-making processes and the power they actually have to influence them. When such conditions are met, youth participation becomes a meaningful and empowering experience that strengthens democratic values and systems and promotes long-term civic engagement.

63. Concerning the tools, opportunities and support for participation, many participants in the consultations around

the new charter requested more detailed and practical guidance for local and regional authorities. There was a call for clear implementation mechanisms, more emphasis on marginalised groups, and explicit measures to address the digital divide and promote media literacy. Respondents also wanted to see the role of youth civil society organisations expanded, especially as partners in co-designing, monitoring and evaluating participation opportunities.

5.5. Dissemination, evaluation and review

64. The need to integrate a chapter on dissemination, evaluation and review of implementation of the charter was recognised by all the participants in the consultations, especially since the 2003 charter did not include provisions in this respect and no mechanism to review the implementation of the charter was set up following the 2003 adoption by different Council of Europe institutions.

65. The majority of people taking part in consultations had learned about the charter through the Council of Europe's website or events, with few discovering it through national authorities, local, regional or national youth councils, or civil society organisations; some of the implementation tools related to the charter (e.g. the "Have your say" manual) seemed to have more popularity in the national or local context. This points to the need to step up future promotional activities following a multilevel, multi-stakeholder dissemination strategy and organising awareness-raising campaigns about the revised charter, but also to complement the charter with appealing, accessible and hands-on implementation tools like manuals, checklists or guidance for training programmes. As an important initial step, the translation of the charter into

national, regional and local languages would ensure wider availability for youth in Europe. To transform the charter into an actionable framework, sustained collaboration from all stakeholders – local and regional authorities, youth organisations, civil society organisations and the Council of Europe – was perceived as essential.

66. Among further priorities identified were the need to strengthen youth participation through the creation of more accessible online and offline spaces, aimed at encouraging digital opportunities, sharing best practices, facilitating peer learning and providing access to mentoring and the need to more clearly assign the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders, encompassing all young people (including marginalised groups), public sector bodies at all levels, NGOs, youth workers, the private sector, parents/guardians and educational staff.

67. Many requested the development of clear indicators for the evaluation of youth participation mechanisms, ensuring the publication and transparency of findings, and the set-up of mechanisms to collect, respond to and act on youth feedback. Ensuring continuous collaboration across local, regional, national and European levels was also emphasised. Some considered that follow-up action taken at Council of Europe level should include the development of tools for young people, youth civil society, as well as local, regional and national authorities to conduct regular evaluations of youth participation mechanisms, thus strengthening the implementation of the charter at local and regional levels. Such evaluations should include assessments of progress made under the charter, which would be conducted jointly

by young people - including youth organisations and youth councils - and local and regional authorities in a format yet to be defined.

68. Both the CM Recommendation and the Congress Resolution and Recommendation, as well as the charter itself, include provisions for the regular review by the Committee of Minister and the Congress respectively, of the implementation of the charter, in line with the Statutes of the Council of Europe (Article 15.b) and the Organisations' usual practice for the follow-up of CM Recommendations in particular.

69. Independently of the usual rules and procedures of the Council of Europe, it is evident that the scope and frequency of regular evaluation and review of implementation at local, regional, national and European levels will be key for supporting the effective implementation of the charter, for identifying remaining gaps and support measures needed and to enhance co-operation at the European level.

Conclusion

70. More than 20 years after the last revision of the charter, the new European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life has been prepared in the most thorough, participatory and inclusive manner. The new charter is aimed at reflecting socio-economic and political developments in Europe and the contemporary experience of young people. The continuous partnership between the Congress and the CMJ in setting up the consultation process and preparing the core texts of the charter sets a strong basis for the future implementation of this new European standard, with the involvement of civil society, multilevel governance and youth organisations, and constitutes in itself a substantive contribution to the New Democratic Pact for Europe that is being prepared by the Council of Europe in 2025.

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Young people must be included in democratic structures and processes, have their voices heard and make decisions on issues that impact on them and their lives. Their active participation is essential if we are to build more democratic, caring and prosperous societies.

It is at local and regional levels that a culture of youth participation can most effectively take root and thrive. As far back as 1992, the Congress was the driving force behind the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, revised in 2003 to better reflect changes in society.

The revised Charter contains principles, best practices and guidelines to enhance youth participation at local and regional levels. It also sets out the basic requirements for this participation to be meaningful, i.e. young people must have the necessary rights, means, space, opportunity and support. The Charter is not a legally binding instrument but member states have a moral responsibility to implement it.

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