

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE

# Council of Europe's Student Rights Charter

### INTRODUCTION

Education in Europe is evolving rapidly. Increased student mobility, digital education, and inclusive education policies create new challenges for students, making it essential to develop a modern framework that supports students in these changing environments. At the 26<sup>th</sup> Session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education, held in Strasbourg on 28-29 September 2023, recognising the role of education in fostering democratic participation, Ministers supported the development of an instrument on student rights in collaboration with the European Students' Union.

This initiative aligns with the broader vision of establishing a European Space for Citizenship Education, which aims to ensure that all learners are equipped with the competences necessary to engage in democratic societies. The European Student Rights Charter would aim to consolidate and protect students' rights across Europe,

ensuring that every student, regardless of their background or country of residence, has access to quality education, is empowered to participate democratically in their academic community, and can contribute to societal change.

The European Student Rights Charter would provide an essential framework aimed at safeguarding the rights and responsibilities of students across Europe and would ensure equal access to quality education, promote democratic participation, and uphold human rights for all students. The drafting the European Student Rights Charter would be co-led by the Council of Europe and European Students Union (ESU) and would involve extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. The mandate of the drafting group was approved by the CDEDU in March 2025 and the works are planned to be completed by 2027.



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The European Student Rights Charter aligns with the Council of Europe's broader commitment to democratic participation, ensuring that students have a genuine role in shaping their educational environments and would also emphasise the responsibilities of students as active participants in their educational journey and in democratic society through addressing :



#### **Student Governance**

Students would be encouraged to actively participate in university decision-making, including decisions related to academic policies, campus life, and welfare services.



#### **Promoting Academic Integrity and Citizenship**

Students would be expected to uphold academic integrity, engage in community service, and respect the rights and freedoms of others.



#### **Innovation**

Unlike traditional education policies, the Charter would explicitly place the students at the centre of decision-making, shifting from a passive to an active role in shaping their education and would introduce a rights-based approach that sees students as key stakeholders, rather than just recipients of education.



#### **Enhancing Student Participation and Democratic Culture**

The Charter would support the Council of Europe's goal of democratic citizenship by guaranteeing student representation in university governance and encouraging participation in social and political issues beyond academia.



#### **Digital Learning and Student Data**

With the rise of online education, students now face issues such as data privacy concerns and the accessibility of digital resources. The Charter should address these concerns and ensure that students' rights are upheld in digital learning environments.



#### **International Students**

As European universities become more international, ensuring the protection of the rights of international students—including those under the Erasmus+ program—is essential to ensure that their study abroad experience is equitable, supportive, and free from discrimination.



#### **Addressing Educational Inequality**

Educational disparities persist across Europe due to factors such as socio-economic background, gender, disability, and migration status, combatting discrimination in education and ensuring affordable education and social support for disadvantaged students.



#### **Engagement in Governance**

Students must be active participants in shaping their educational experience.



#### **Respect for Diversity and Inclusion**

Students are encouraged to respect diversity and create an inclusive environment where all individuals feel valued and supported.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

- 01** Student rights and access to educational opportunities vary significantly from one country to another, creating disparities in how students are supported. Some countries offer extensive support services for students (financial aid, mental health services, and free education), while others may not provide the same levels of protection or opportunity.
- 02** While students' rights are often covered in various national laws and agreements, but there is currently no comprehensive European framework that binds all countries together in terms of their commitments to student rights, thus, a need for a comprehensive European framework to harmonise protections in member States.
- 03** The European Student Rights Charter would set minimum standards across all Council of Europe member states, ensuring that every student, regardless of nationality, socio-economic background, or disability, has access to a high-quality and supportive educational environment.
- 04** By establishing a European Student Rights Charter, the Council of Europe could ensure that a core set of rights—including access to affordable education, academic freedom, and student participation in governance—are guaranteed across all member States.

### Strategic Priorities for Implementing the European Student Rights Charter

The European Student Rights Charter would modernise and standardise protections for students, particularly in these emerging areas, and ensure that quality education is accessible to all students, regardless of their nationality or social background. The Council of Europe, with its extensive experience in advancing human rights and democratic values, is uniquely positioned to draft and implement such a framework, ensuring that the European Student Rights Charter aligns with the Council of Europe's broader education and democratic participation strategies.

While many member States have national policies safeguarding student rights, there is no single, unified pan-European framework that comprehensively addresses these needs. By developing and endorsing a European Charter on Student Rights, the Council of Europe would enhance the consistency and protection of student rights across Europe, further promoting the democratic principles and human rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

“ The Charter would recognise students as active stakeholders in shaping the future of education.

The European Student Rights Charter would be a fundamental document that sets out the rights and responsibilities of students across Europe to ensure that students receive an education that is inclusive, high-quality, and aligned with human rights standards. Unlike previous approaches that treated students as passive recipients of education, the Charter would recognise students as active stakeholders in shaping the future of education, in line with the Council of Europe Education Strategy goals and ambitions.

Rooted in the core values of the Council of Europe, particularly as outlined in the Education Strategy 2030, the Charter would serve as a key tool for strengthening democracy, equality, and access to education and will address inclusive education that accommodates students from all backgrounds, including those with disabilities, refugees, and minorities; democratic citizenship through education by ensuring that students develop the skills, values, and attitudes needed to engage in democratic life; strengthening student participation in the governance of educational institutions to ensure that students have a voice in shaping their educational environment and ensuring quality education for all by setting minimum standards and supporting countries in implementing these standards.



### Implementing the European Student Rights Charter at National and Institutional Levels

Once the draft Charter has been formulated, it would need to be reviewed and endorsed by the member States. The implementation of the European Student Rights Charter would require a careful, phased approach to ensure that it is effective, inclusive, and aligns with existing Council of Europe strategies.

Each member state would be responsible for ensuring that students in their country benefit from the rights guaranteed under the Charter. The Council of Europe's established mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing member States' adherence to its recommendations are essential for ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of the European Student Rights Charter. The Council of Europe can ensure that its member states comply with the commitments outlined in the Charter. This would provide an assurance that the rights guaranteed under the Charter are not just theoretical but are backed by practical monitoring and accountability frameworks.

This could involve reform of national policies to ensure the implementation of the Charter's goals are achievable, for example, member states may need to allocate additional funding or resources to support student welfare, improve student governance, and make higher education more accessible (especially for disadvantaged groups) and some countries may need to establish new legal frameworks that recognise the student right to participate in governance or access affordable education.

The support action will be structured around enhancing the Student Representative Structures in Decision-Making, Training and Capacity-Building for Student Leaders and Student Advocacy Campaigns.

## FURTHER READING & RESOURCES



### ↘ [CM/REC\(2012\)13](#)

Recommendation on ensuring quality education



### ↘ [CM/REC\(2010\)7](#)

Recommendation on the Committee of Ministers to member States on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education



### ↘ [CM/REC\(2007\)6](#)

Recommendation on the public responsibility for higher education and research



### ↘ [CM/REC\(2007\)13](#)

Recommendation on the Committee of Ministers to member States on gender mainstreaming in education



### ↘ [CM/REC\(2004\)4](#)

Recommendation on the European Convention on Human Rights in university education and professional training



### ↘ [CM/REC\(2003\)8](#)

Recommendation on the Committee of Ministers on the promotion and recognition of non-formal education/learning of young people



### ↘ [CM/REC\(2002\)12](#)

Recommendation on the Committee of Ministers on education for democratic citizenship

## INSPIRING EXAMPLES FROM ACROSS EUROPE

The Erasmus Student Network (ESN), a pan-European student organisation, regularly participates in consultations and advocacy efforts on student mobility issues and could play an instrumental role in representing the student voice during the drafting process. A similar model could be applied to the European Student Rights Charter, ensuring that the student voice is central to the monitoring and evaluation process.

- 01** In **Norway**, where higher education is free for both domestic and international students, the country's policy could serve as a model for increasing the accessibility of higher education in other European countries.
- 02** In **Denmark**, students have a legal right to participate in university governance through their student councils. These councils have a direct influence on academic policies, university budgets, and student welfare initiatives.
- 03** In **Finland**, the Student Union is a recognized part of university governance, ensuring that students have a say in everything from academic policy to student welfare.
- 04** In **Germany**, student representatives are involved in university governance through the Allgemeiner Studentenausschuss (AStA), which represents students' interests in university decision-making processes, including the allocation of funds for student services.
- 05** The National Union of Students (NUS) in the **UK** regularly runs student consultations to guide its campaigns and advocacy efforts. Their campaigns focus on raising awareness and pushing for policy changes, demonstrating how a focused advocacy campaign can make a significant impact.

## COUNCIL OF EUROPE EDUCATION STRATEGY 2024-2030 "LEARNERS FIRST"

Part of the Council of Europe's Education Strategy 2024-2030 ("Learners First"), this initiative supports Pillar 1, "Renewing the democratic and civic mission of education", reinforcing ESD's role in citizenship education. Aligned with the Reykjavik Declaration, the guidance document promotes democratic competences—such as critical thinking and cooperation—to empower learners in addressing sustainability challenges while ensuring inclusive, quality education. The ESD initiative also contributes to the implementation of the Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment and accompanying Action Plan.



### ↘ [LEARNERS FIRST](#)

Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024-2030

