

10 November 2020, 10.00 – 11.30 CET, Online

Civil society in dialogue. Diversity and the Conference of INGOs

The Conference of INGOs' "2020-2021 Youth Delegates Program" invites you to take part in an online dialogue on diversity in the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe.

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The quality of democracy is judged by people on its ability to deliver for all. The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed and magnified inequalities in our democracies, while the decision-making has become more centralised, leaving many voices unheard. On the one hand, many have felt disproportionately hit by the health, economic and democratic crises that have unfolded as they saw their access to fundamental rights drastically reduced. These crises expanded societal vulnerabilities to new groups. On the other hand, the vulnerable are often under-represented in institutions and in policy-making. Sometimes, they feel marginalised even in progressive civic organisations and movements.

In June, we have witnessed to masses of people mobilising under the slogan 'Black Lives Matter' to stand in solidarity with people of colour in the United States but also to bring attention to an issue – racism and systemic discrimination against people of colour – which is often forgotten, but is present in Europe, too. The demonstrations did not happen in a vacuum. The crisis has made visible many struggles that have been organising and imagining alternatives for years. They have also been at the forefront of the demand to ask for change and want to be present where the decisions are made. They do not want to be represented; they want to speak for themselves.

It would be very naive to believe that better representativity automatically equals better outcomes. Representation is part of the thinking and the tools to progress. At the same time, there is a very serious need for discussing representation and diversity. As young people taking part in the Council of Europe Conference of INGOs work, we expect it to reflect the diversity of realities and voices in Europe in order to feed meaningfully and influence all of the work of the Council of Europe. However, we observe that it often reproduces and amplifies societal and power imbalances. The fact that some voices are not heard inside the Conference might mean that these decisions will miss out on certain experiences and ideas. What voices feel under-represented? What challenges and structural obstacles impede these voices from participating? What can the concerned stakeholders do to overcome them?

The aim of the webinar is to start a reflection on how to facilitate the inclusion of all voices in the Conference of INGOs' work. The participants will be sharing perspectives, ideas and experiences in small groups:

1. Diversity and democracy

- What is the link between participation and the ability of democracy to deliver for all?
- What voices feel under-represented?
- What do representation and participation mean to them?

2. Meaningful participation vs tokenism

- What practices allow for diverse voices to participate?
- What are the prerequisites for meaningful participation?
- How to ensure that participation is not reduced to a check-boxing exercise?

3. Safe spaces

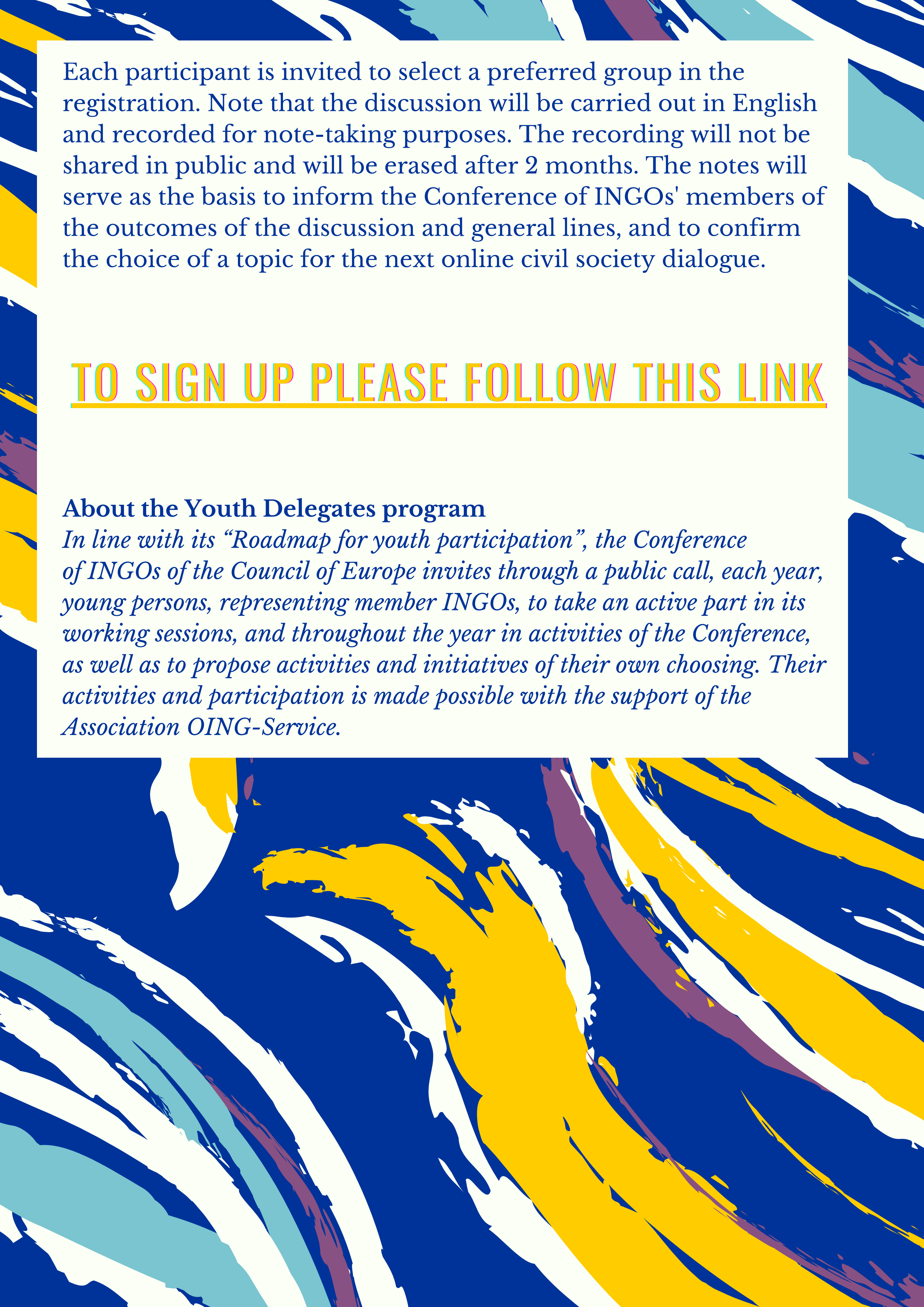
- What is the importance of creating safe spaces?
- What do safe spaces inside civil society like in Council of Europe member states?
- What kind of practices allow to create safe spaces and can be reproduced?

4. Challenges and obstacles to participation

- What challenges and structural obstacles impede these voices from participating inside civil society spaces like the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe?
- What can the Council of Europe do to overcome them?
- Are there groups that are already organising to tackle these challenges and obstacles inside the Council of Europe?

5. The Council of Europe, youth and sustainability

- What is the role of youth in assuring a sustainable future?
- How can the Council of Europe support the younger generation to create a green future on our planet?



Each participant is invited to select a preferred group in the registration. Note that the discussion will be carried out in English and recorded for note-taking purposes. The recording will not be shared in public and will be erased after 2 months. The notes will serve as the basis to inform the Conference of INGOs' members of the outcomes of the discussion and general lines, and to confirm the choice of a topic for the next online civil society dialogue.

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About the Youth Delegates program

In line with its “Roadmap for youth participation”, the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe invites through a public call, each year, young persons, representing member INGOs, to take an active part in its working sessions, and throughout the year in activities of the Conference, as well as to propose activities and initiatives of their own choosing. Their activities and participation is made possible with the support of the Association OING-Service.