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Strengthening democracies with young people: from participation to shared responsibility

Report¹

Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media

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1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 15756](#), Reference 4746 of 19 June 2023.



A. Draft resolution²

1. The effective participation of young people in democratic life is vital for the renewal, resilience and legitimacy of democratic institutions. The future of Europe depends on societies in which young people are recognised as equal partners in shaping political, social, economic and cultural life.
2. Building on its [Resolution 2619 \(2025\)](#) and [Recommendation 2299 \(2025\)](#) “Youth movements for democracy” and its [Resolution 2553 \(2024\)](#) “Strengthening the youth perspective in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly”, the Assembly emphasises that youth participation must evolve from consultation to shared responsibility, ensuring that young people have both the right and the means to influence decisions that affect them.
3. The Assembly notes that while progress has been made, youth participation remains uneven and fragmented across Europe. Many young people continue to feel excluded from decision making, perceive institutions as unrepresentative, and have limited opportunities to shape public policy. Persistent barriers such as social inequality, precarious employment, limited access to housing and education, and shrinking civic and cultural spaces have deepened generational divides.
4. The Assembly welcomes the Declaration adopted at the 10th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth, held on 8-9 October 2025 in Malta and the resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective, adopted on the same occasion. It also welcomes the adoption of the new European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional life by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe on 29 October 2025 , as well as the 2025 report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe entitled “Towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe”, which together provide a coherent roadmap for integrating youth perspective across all sectors of policy and decision making.
5. The Assembly recognises the importance of the Council of Europe unique co-management system of the youth sector as a standard and inspiration to be followed, including the instruments of the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest and the European Youth Foundation, as an exemplary model of youth participation. It also welcomes the proposal to conduct a feasibility study on the establishment of a third venue of the European Youth Centre in the Black Sea region as a sign of renewed commitment to democratic inclusion in Europe’s eastern regions.
6. The Assembly stresses that youth participation must move beyond consultation towards genuine influence in decision making. This requires transparent and accessible institutional mechanisms, accountability of authorities towards young people, and a culture of trust between generations.
7. In light of the above and in consideration of the centrality of youth engagement to the New Democratic Pact for Europe, the Assembly calls on member States to develop and implement comprehensive frameworks for youth participation, taking inspiration from the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective, at all levels and in particular to:
 - 7.1. adopt or update national youth policies and strategies and ensure their effective implementation through measurable indicators;
 - 7.2. establish or reinforce youth-led councils, youth parliaments, and structured dialogue platforms with decision-making powers or advisory mandates, including by integrating participatory youth budgeting;
 - 7.3. implement the new European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional life adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;
 - 7.4. include young people in public administration advisory bodies, boards of cultural institutions, and environmental councils;
 - 7.5. adopt targeted measures to prevent and address hate speech directed at young people engaged in political life, including through stronger legal protections, reporting and rapid-response mechanisms, and educational programmes that promote democratic participation and safeguard young voices in the public sphere.

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 2 December 2025.

8. The Assembly emphasises that equal access to rights is the foundation of participation. As a priority, it urges member States to:
 - 8.1. guarantee universal access to quality education, vocational training, and employment opportunities, housing and healthcare for young people;
 - 8.2. prioritise mental health policies and accessible services tailored to young people's realities, particularly in post-crisis contexts;
 - 8.3. combat discrimination and ensure the inclusion of marginalised youth, including those from minority, migrant, rural or low-income backgrounds, or with disabilities;
 - 8.4. ensure gender equality in all youth-related initiatives and leadership positions.
9. The Assembly notes that civic and citizenship education are key to nurturing democratic competences and critical thinking. It therefore calls on member States to:
 - 9.1. integrate civic education into formal curricula from an early age and across disciplines;
 - 9.2. support non-formal education and youth work as complementary spaces for experiential learning and active citizenship;
 - 9.3. enhance teacher training and youth worker professionalisation;
 - 9.4. recognise youth civil society, volunteering and community engagement as integral parts of civic learning;
 - 9.5. welcome the Council of Europe's Quality Label for Youth Centres as a symbol of commitment to shared values, collaborative learning and continuous improvement of youth work across Europe.
10. The Assembly highlights that cultural participation strengthens belonging and community cohesion, based on the principles set out in the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (CETS No. 199, "Faro Convention", 2005). It invites member States and local authorities to:
 - 10.1. support projects linking art, civic engagement and urban regeneration;
 - 10.2. provide accessible public spaces for youth creativity and expression;
 - 10.3. promote partnerships between youth organisations, artists and municipalities to co-create inclusive cultural initiatives, including by strengthening links with the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe.
11. Recognising the digital transformation of political and civic life, the Assembly calls on member States to:
 - 11.1. promote digital literacy and critical media education for young people;
 - 11.2. establish transparent frameworks for online participation, including e-consultations and digital assemblies;
 - 11.3. ensure that digital platforms respect human rights, protect young users from disinformation and online abuse, and promote respect, remedy and democratic dialogue.
12. The Assembly also strongly supports lowering the voting age to 16 as a concrete step towards intergenerational equality and more inclusive democracy. It recalls the positive experience of several member States where such reform has led to higher levels of political engagement and civic trust among young voters. It therefore urges all member States to:
 - 12.1. examine the legal and institutional feasibility of lowering the voting age to 16 in all elections;
 - 12.2. accompany this reform with civic education and awareness-raising initiatives to ensure informed participation;
 - 12.3. support peer-learning and capacity building among electoral authorities, youth organisations, and youth workers to facilitate implementation.
13. The Assembly further encourages governments to foster intergenerational dialogue and participation by:
 - 13.1. developing mentorship programmes linking young leaders with experienced policy makers;
 - 13.2. establishing youth advisory boards in national parliaments and government ministries, in consultation with national youth councils;

- 13.3. supporting political parties in promoting youth wings and candidate training programmes, including young women, vulnerable and underrepresented groups, and minorities.
14. Civil society and youth-led organisations are indispensable partners for democratic innovation. The Assembly calls on them to strengthen advocacy for youth rights, promote diversity and inclusion, develop civic education initiatives, and engage in structured co-operation with parliaments and public authorities.
15. Furthermore, the Assembly invites international and regional organisations, including the European Union, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and United Nations agencies, to co-ordinate efforts to promote youth participation, support research and data collection, and share best practices on intergenerational solidarity.
16. Finally, the Assembly resolves to:
 - 16.1. continue integrating the youth perspective in all its thematic, political and monitoring activities, and encourage the visibility of young parliamentarians in national delegations;
 - 16.2. ensure regular involvement of youth representatives, including grass-root organisations, in its debates, hearings as well as election observation missions and electoral activities;
 - 16.3. promote interparliamentary co-operation on youth engagement through regional exchanges and capacity-building for youth representatives.
17. Building democracies with youth requires meaningful engagement, which demands institutional reform, accountability, and shared responsibility. By embedding the youth perspective across all levels of decision making, Council of Europe member States can ensure that democracy remains inclusive, dynamic and sustainable for generations to come.

B. Draft recommendation³

1. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to its Resolution ... (2026) "Strengthening democracies with young people: from participation to shared responsibility", which reaffirms that the renewal and resilience of democracy depend on the full and effective participation of young people in all spheres of public life.
2. The Assembly commends the achievements of the Council of Europe's youth sector, notably its co-management model, which remains unique in international governance, and recognises the pivotal contribution of the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest, and the European Youth Foundation.
3. The Assembly welcomes the Declaration adopted at the 10th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth and the resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective adopted on the same occasion, and invites the Committee of Ministers to ensure its effective implementation across all sectors and monitoring bodies of the Organisation.
4. The Assembly invites the Committee of Ministers to:
 - 4.1. reaffirm youth participation as a cross-cutting priority of the Council of Europe, ensuring systematic inclusion of the youth perspective in all intergovernmental, monitoring and co-operation activities;
 - 4.2. strengthen the co-management system by enhancing synergies among the Joint Council on Youth, the Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, including through regular exchanges and joint initiatives;
 - 4.3. provide predictable, multi-annual funding for the Council of Europe Youth For Democracy programme, the European Youth Foundation and the European Youth Centres to secure long-term planning, accessibility and inclusiveness;
 - 4.4. continue its support to the Quality Label for Youth Centres on the basis of the "Marienthal Statement" adopted during the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers;
 - 4.5. support the integration of Council of Europe standards on youth participation into national legislation and practice through technical assistance, peer learning and training of civil servants;
 - 4.6. enhance partnerships with other international and regional organisations, including the European Union, the United Nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), to promote a coherent international agenda for youth rights and democratic engagement;
 - 4.7. encourage the collection of comparative data and research on youth participation, disillusionment and trust in democracy, to support evidence-based policy making;
 - 4.8. make every effort in its work to reach out to young people living in European societies who may not have access to the usual institutional channels for participation;
 - 4.9. promote the establishment of a third venue of the European Youth Centre in the Black Sea region, within available resources, as a concrete expression of solidarity and outreach to young people in the wider region.
5. The Assembly supports the creation of a pan-European campaign on lowering the voting age to 16 to provide expertise, training and advocacy materials to member States willing to explore or implement this reform, in line with best practices identified within the Council of Europe.
6. By reinforcing the institutional capacity of the Council of Europe and its commitment to youth participation, the Committee of Ministers can ensure that young people are meaningfully involved in shaping the future agenda of the Organisation and its reforms as active builders of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

3. Draft recommendation adopted unanimously by the committee on 2 December 2025.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Sona Ghazaryan, rapporteur⁴

1. Introduction

1. The engagement of young people in democratic governance remains one of the most pressing priorities for the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly. This report builds on the Assembly's earlier work, while placing greater emphasis on the institutional, policy and governance mechanisms that can make youth participation systemic and sustainable.
2. [Resolution 2619 \(2025\)](#) and [Recommendation 2299 \(2025\)](#) "Youth movements for democracy", adopted on 1 October 2025, focus on civic mobilisation and youth activism outside formal institutions. This report therefore explores how parliaments, governments and public authorities can translate democratic aspirations into concrete frameworks for youth inclusion.
3. The report also draws on recent Council of Europe developments, notably the Council of Europe youth campaign "Democracy Here. Democracy Now.", and its call for action 2022,⁵ the [Declaration](#) following the [10th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth](#) held on 8-9 October 2025, in Malta; the [Resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective](#), adopted on the same occasion, as well as the 2025 report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe entitled "[Towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe](#)", and the "Marienthal Statement" on the Council of Europe's Quality Label for Youth Centres (May 2025).⁶
4. It also integrates new findings from international organisations and academic studies, which underline the urgency of addressing the declining trust of young citizens in democratic institutions. It proposes practical recommendations to strengthen the policy ecosystem supporting young people's full participation in democratic life across member States.
5. Young people across Europe are already driving change in multiple domains, from climate activism and digital civic initiatives to social justice movements, highlighting their potential as agents of democratic renewal. However, access to decision-making structures, inclusive policies, and meaningful opportunities for participation remain uneven and require urgent attention.
6. At the Council of Europe level, youth involvement in policy making is supported through multiple mechanisms, including the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest and the European Youth Foundation. The co-management system, which gives an equal voice to young Europeans represented by the Advisory Council on Youth and to public authorities responsible for youth issues, remains a leading example of institutionalised youth participation that member States can emulate.
7. Following the stance of the Heads of State and Government at the 4th Summit in Reykjavik, which underlined that a youth perspective should inform all intergovernmental and other deliberations, the Assembly adopted [Resolution 2553 \(2024\)](#) "Strengthening the youth perspective in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly" on 26 June 2024 and established a participatory mechanism bringing together members of the Assembly and young Europeans to debate youth policies. This mechanism also enhances the visibility of young parliamentarians within national delegations and encourages political groups to strengthen engagement with their youth branches.
8. The Malta and Luxembourg Presidencies of the Committee of Ministers have prioritised democratic participation of young people at all levels, with the explicit aim of strengthening the rule of law and democracy. In line with this, the Council of Europe adopted a [Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective](#) (see paragraph 3 above) to systematically incorporate a youth perspective in all intergovernmental committees and deliberations.
9. This report analyses barriers to youth participation, drawing on Council of Europe initiatives, expert discussions, and recent data. It provides recommendations to foster electoral and civic engagement, strengthen youth-led organisations, and promote full access to social, economic, and cultural rights, including in the context of digital transformation.

4. The explanatory memorandum is drawn up under the responsibility of the rapporteur.

5. [Democracy Now! Call for Action](#).

6. [Marienthal Statement](#).

10. Socio-economic challenges such as high living costs and housing shortages, as well as inequalities in education and access to culture, are also considered, recognising their centrality to meaningful youth engagement. The report seeks to identify practical strategies to bridge the gap between young people and democratic institutions while aligning with the Council of Europe's youth sector priorities.

11. Finally, the report reflects on hearings held on 1 October 2024, 12 March and 6 and 25 June 2025.⁷ These hearings contributed to assessing current youth participation practices and informing recommendations for stronger democratic engagement. The Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media has also invited the Belgian youth organisation [Urban Foxes – Academy for Urban Action \(DURF\)](#) to the 1 December 2025 meeting, in Paris, to present a concrete illustration of how culture and civic engagement can be combined at the local level to strengthen a sense of belonging, enhances democratic competences, and fosters inclusion in decision making.

12. The rapporteur proposes the revised title “Strengthening democracies with youth: from participation to shared responsibility” to better reflect the report's central argument that young people are not merely participants in democratic life but essential partners in shaping and sustaining it. It conveys the evolution from consultation to genuine power-sharing and accountability within democratic governance, moving beyond symbolic engagement towards systemic, institutionalised forms of youth inclusion.

2. From lip service to meaningful policies for today's youth

13. The political, social and economic context for youth participation remains challenging. Growing polarisation, social inequality, the climate crisis, armed conflicts, and rampant disinformation pose significant obstacles to meaningful engagement.

14. Without concrete measures, youth engagement risks remaining symbolic, undermining democratic legitimacy and resilience.

15. Young people are often perceived primarily as a solution to current governance problems, for instance as cheap labour or as future bearers of the consequences of today's policy decisions. This perception undermines recognition of their immediate rights and contributions to policy making. The 2025 report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe stresses that ignoring youth perspectives in decision making perpetuates inequality, limits innovation, and reduces trust in institutions.

16. Despite public statements by national and international organisations acknowledging youth concerns, many young people continue to experience disillusion (that democratic politics does not deliver for them, that politicians do not represent their interests, or that their vote will not make any difference), anxiety around their future (jobs, financial security, social change), and a lack of trust in democratic institutions (a gap between formal support for democracy and confidence that democracy works for them in practice).⁸

7. 1 October 2024 (Strasbourg): hearing with the participation of Ms Nina Grmuša, Chairperson of the Council of Europe Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), and Mr Jorge Jraissati, President of the Economic Inclusion Group, Madrid.

12 March 2025 (Paris): hearing with the participation of Mr Tobias Flessenkemper, Head of the Youth Department, Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity, Council of Europe; Mr Xesc Mainzer, member of the CCJ and Vice-President of the Young European Federalists (JEF Europe); Ms Miriam Allam, Head of Unit, Global Partnerships, Inclusion and Justice Division, Public Governance Directorate; and Ms Veerle Miranda, Principal Economist, Youth and Diversity Policies, Social Policy Division, Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Paris.

4 June 2025 (Trondheim): hearing with the participation of Ms Ida Haugen Skulstad, Kulturtanken's Youth Council; and Ms Ingrid Aspelund, Acting Executive Director, the European Wergeland Centre.

25 June 2025 (Strasbourg): hearing with the participation of Ms Miriam Teuma, Chairperson of the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ); Ms Nina Grmuša, Chairperson of the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) and of the CCJ; Mr Francesco Gellel, Youth Community Officer, National Youth Council of Malta (KNZ); the youth rapporteurs representing the Assembly committees: Ms Naomi Cachia (Malta, SOC), Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee); Ms Saara-Sofia Sirén (Finland, EPP/CD), Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights; Ms Aurora Floridia (Italy, SOC), Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development; Ms Aysu Bankoğlu (Türkiye, SOC), Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination; and Mr Tobias Flessenkemper.

8. “Young Europeans losing faith in democracy, poll finds” | Young people | [The Guardian](#). “Young people's trust in institutions, civic knowledge and their dispositions toward civic engagement” | [Large-scale Assessments in Education](#).

17. Genuine youth policies require the promotion of human, political, social, economic, and cultural rights today rather than postponing them. Meaningful youth policies encompass three key dimensions: political participation, socio-economic inclusion, and cultural engagement. These dimensions are interdependent and must be addressed through co-ordinated, evidence-based strategies at national and European levels.

18. The Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective provides concrete guidance on integrating youth considerations into all policy areas, emphasising co-management, equal voice, and accountability mechanisms.

19. Policies must move beyond symbolic consultation and ensure that young people have access to decision-making spaces where their input can directly shape legislative and programme outcomes.

20. Structural barriers such as socio-economic disadvantage, digital divides, and limited educational opportunities must be addressed to make youth participation equitable.

21. Evidence from Eurostat and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data clearly point to the link between socio-economic conditions and political engagement. Young people facing unemployment, housing shortages and insecurity or educational inequalities are less likely to engage in democratic processes, highlighting the importance of comprehensive policies that combine political, social, economic and cultural measures.⁹

22. To move from lip service to meaningful policies, it is essential that member States, the Council of Europe, and political bodies systematically integrate youth perspectives, support youth-led initiatives, and create the conditions for equitable participation in all spheres of society.

3. Promoting participation in electoral and decision-making processes

23. Young people's participation in political life remains uneven across Europe, influenced by structural, social, and generational factors. Studies repeatedly show that younger generations feel excluded from conventional political processes, perceive politicians as unrepresentative, consider the political environment as toxic, ineffective or corrupt, and are more likely to support radical or protest movements than traditional democratic institutions.¹⁰

24. The Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective recommends ensuring that youth voices are present at every stage of policy making. It highlights that lowering the voting age, providing e-participation tools, and promoting civic education are essential measures to increase engagement.

25. Evidence shows that participatory approaches that involve young people from the design stage of policies result in more effective and sustainable outcomes. For instance, co-creation workshops and youth advisory panels have led to measurable improvements in local policies in countries such as Finland and the Netherlands, including greater satisfaction with municipal services and higher rates of volunteer engagement.

26. Digital technologies present new opportunities for participation, including e-voting, online consultations, and social media engagement. Evidence from Estonia shows that e-voting has significantly increased turnout among young voters, while other member States are beginning to explore digital participation with mixed results due to infrastructure and trust challenges.

27. However, digital participation is not without limitations. While online tools increase accessibility for some, they can exacerbate inequalities for youth without reliable internet access or digital literacy skills. Member States need to combine digital innovation with offline engagement strategies, ensuring that no group of young people is left behind. Data privacy, cybersecurity, and misinformation concerns must also be addressed to maintain trust in digital democratic tools.

28. Recent hearings of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media highlighted the potential of digitalisation, civic simulations, and multi-age candidate lists to foster inclusive participation. Members stressed the importance of ensuring "the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and the support" for youth involvement.

9. "Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training" - Statistics Explained - Eurostat.

10. "Youth and democracy" - FEPS 2024. "Young Europeans losing faith in democracy, poll finds" | Young people | *The Guardian*.

29. Evidence from the Eurobarometer 2024 survey shows that social media is the primary source of political information for 42% of young Europeans aged 16-30. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are particularly influential, although concerns regarding disinformation remain high. Policy makers and social media platforms share responsibility in promoting digital literacy and combating misinformation.

30. Also, media literacy programmes and partnerships between youth organisations and tech companies can enhance critical thinking and reduce the impact of false information. For example, the “[Check Before You Share](#)” initiative in Ireland and [digital literacy campaigns in France](#) have successfully increased young people’s awareness of online misinformation, resulting in more informed participation.

31. Lowering the voting age remains a key instrument for youth inclusion. Austria, Malta, Scotland, and Germany provide examples of successful implementation, leading to higher participation rates among younger voters. [Resolution 1826](#) (2011) “Expansion of democracy by lowering the voting age to 16” and subsequent Council of Europe [studies](#) emphasise that votes at 16 strengthen intergenerational equity in decision making.

32. Inclusive political structures, such as quotas for youth under 30 and support for independent candidates, are necessary to ensure that young people have meaningful influence within political parties and representative bodies. Training programmes for emerging young leaders, such as the Council of Europe Schools of Political Studies, provide practical skills and networks to foster active engagement.

33. Many young people start their democratic journey at elections, as voters and as observers. The Council of Europe promotes first-time voting of young voters and youth participation, and NGOs like [AEGEE](#) train and deploy young observer teams while addressing hurdles facing young voters and candidates. Yet, recent Assembly missions report growing pressure, smear campaigns and even arrests of young candidates and observers, which deter youth. Recognising and supporting the youth dimension of election participation and observation is vital to safeguard election transparency and credibility and to encourage lasting democratic engagement.

34. Additional mechanisms, such as mentorship schemes, leadership incubators and cross-party youth networks, have proven effective in equipping young people with negotiation, public speaking, and policy analysis skills. Such initiatives also enhance the diversity of voices within political institutions, ensuring that decision making better reflects the perspectives and priorities of the next generation.

35. To further enhance participation, member States are encouraged to implement deliberative processes, including youth juries, mock trials, and consultative councils. These mechanisms bridge the gap between institutional politics and youth perspectives, promoting informed, confident, and sustained civic involvement.

36. In conclusion, promoting youth participation in electoral and decision-making processes requires a multi-faceted approach combining legal reforms, digital innovation, civic education, inclusive structures and dedicated support mechanisms. The Council of Europe’s ongoing work in the youth sector, including the Assembly’s youth participation mechanism, provides a model for embedding youth perspectives across political levels.

37. To consolidate progress, member States should be encouraged to adopt comprehensive youth participation strategies, integrate youth consultation into all policy areas, and monitor participation indicators regularly. Political parties, local authorities, and civil society organisations must also be proactive in creating accessible, safe, and inclusive spaces for youth engagement, ensuring that young people are recognised as active contributors to democracy.

4. Tackling social and economic inequalities

38. Economic and social inequalities remain major barriers to meaningful youth participation across Europe. Young people are disproportionately affected by high living costs, insecure employment, rising housing prices, and limited access to financial services, all of which reduce their capacity to engage in political and civic life. Concerns are higher among young women and youth in rural areas, highlighting the need for targeted interventions.

39. Recent data underscores the severity of these challenges. According to the OECD, approximately 12% of young people aged 18 to 25 live in relative poverty, compared to 11% for the total population. This disparity highlights the heightened vulnerability of youth to economic hardship and underscores the need for targeted interventions to address their specific needs.¹¹

11. [Youth employment and social policies | OECD](#).

40. The 2025 report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe stresses that social and economic inclusion of youth is essential for democratic resilience. Policies addressing education, employment, housing, and financial inclusion must be implemented with a youth perspective to prevent further disengagement.

41. Youth inclusion has often been promoted through employment measures. However, a broader approach is necessary, examining how welfare systems, access to benefits, and services affect the rights of young people.

42. Governments must implement urgent measures to enhance youth economic empowerment, including access to quality education, vocational training, affordable housing and sustainable employment opportunities. They should be encouraged to engage youth directly in shaping these policies.

43. The hearing held by the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media on 12 March 2025 pointed to the [OECD's Youth Policy Toolkit](#) advocating for addressing age-based inequalities and promoting intergenerational justice as strategic priorities for ensuring inclusive prosperity. It emphasises the need for tailored solutions that consider the unique challenges faced by young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

44. Innovative approaches, such as cross-sectoral collaboration models seen in Norway, combine efforts of local and central authorities with that of civil society and NGOs to improve youth participation and social mobility. These models demonstrate the importance of multi-level governance in addressing socio-economic barriers.

45. Non-formal education and youth-led initiatives also play a critical role in mitigating inequalities. The Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development has supported projects involving disadvantaged youth in parliamentary activities, increasing both skills and engagement.

46. Policies should prioritise economic stability and job creation for youth, leveraging emerging technologies to boost productivity and inclusion. Expanding access to affordable housing and financial services, alongside social protection measures, strengthens democratic participation and fosters a sense of agency among young people.

5. Promoting full access to cultural rights

47. Access to culture and education is a fundamental prerequisite for young people to participate fully in society and in democratic life. The legal and normative basis for cultural rights of young people is well established in international law. The [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization \(UNESCO\)](#) stresses that the right of young people to access, enjoy and actively participate in cultural life is essential for fostering peace, diversity, and social cohesion.¹² Cultural engagement strengthens civic awareness, nurtures a sense of belonging, and supports the development of critical thinking and creativity.

48. Those principles underline that cultural policy should not be treated merely as an adjunct to education or leisure policy, but as a cornerstone of democratic participation and youth empowerment. Governments should ensure young people's access to cultural activities, creative platforms and heritage sites, recognising culture as a catalyst for social cohesion and active citizenship.

49. Dedicated youth spaces, both physical and digital, are essential to provide safe environments for civic engagement and learning. European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest serve as examples of spaces free from commercial pressure promoting citizenship, cultural exchange, and non-formal education. In addition, over 15 other Council of Europe quality-labelled youth spaces across member States provide access to cultural activities, workshops, and international exchanges.

50. The rapporteur welcomes the Ministers' proposal in Malta to launch a feasibility study on establishing a third European Youth Centre in the Black Sea region, as it reflects a strong commitment to advancing the Council of Europe's youth policy principles and fostering co-operation, capacity building, and democratic engagement among young people in the Eastern regions.

51. Inequalities in access to cultural and educational resources remain significant, particularly for youth from rural areas, low-income households, and marginalised communities. Research shows that in several European countries, fewer than 10% of young people with lower secondary education participate in cultural

12. ["Cutting Edge | Youth and Cultural Policies: Coming of Age" | UNESCO.](#)

activities, compared with more than twice that share among those with tertiary education. Young people in rural or Low-income areas often face financial, geographical, and digital barriers that require targeted policy interventions.¹³

52. Targeted policies to reduce these disparities include subsidised participation, digital inclusion strategies, and enhanced mobility programmes for cultural exchange.¹⁴

53. Digital literacy and media competence are essential for young people to navigate the vast landscape of information and cultural content. Programmes promoting critical thinking and media literacy help counter disinformation, strengthen participation in democratic processes, and support informed cultural engagement.

54. In this context, non-formal education and youth work play a crucial role. The Council of Europe underlines that non-formal learning empowers disadvantaged youth by providing creative platforms to express themselves, develop leadership skills, and engage in intercultural dialogue. Integrating these approaches into cultural policy can significantly enhance participation among underrepresented groups.¹⁵

55. The “Urban Foxes – Academy for Urban Action (DURF)” project in Belgium, supported through the Europe Goes Local initiative, brings together young people, artists, urban planners, and local authorities to re-imagine public space through participatory design, creative expression, and community-based urban projects. By engaging young people in collaborative urban action, the project demonstrates how youth work, culture, and urban development can intersect to empower young citizens as active co-creators of their cities, turning cultural participation into a driver of democracy and social cohesion.

56. Digital transformation also opens new avenues for cultural inclusion. UNESCO encourages governments to involve young people in heritage preservation, creative industries, and digital culture initiatives such as online museums and virtual youth heritage forums. Ensuring that these digital platforms are safe, inclusive, and accessible is vital to guarantee that young people can act as both creators and consumers of culture.¹⁶

57. To achieve this, member States should be encouraged to:

- recognise youth cultural participation as a human right and integrate it into national youth and education strategies;
- support the creation of inclusive youth cultural spaces that are accessible, affordable, and free from commercial pressures;
- invest in non-formal education and youth work in the cultural sector, especially in rural or disadvantaged areas;
- develop digital inclusion programmes and media literacy training to equip young people with skills to critically engage with online content;
- monitor participation through disaggregated data (by gender, income, geography) to ensure evidence-based policies;
- foster partnerships between youth organisations, local authorities, and cultural institutions to co-create programmes reflecting youth diversity and creativity.

6. A shared responsibility: parliaments as drivers of the Council of Europe’s youth agenda

58. The Assembly should welcome the Resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective adopted by the Ministers responsible for Youth as timely instruments.

59. This resolution acknowledges that young people are not just beneficiaries of policy but active rights holders and agents of change. It articulates a four-element approach: Think with young people, Learn from and with young people, Participate with young people, Act with and for young people.

60. The Reference Framework explicitly links youth participation to the broader democratic agenda namely strengthening trust in institutions, enhancing pluralism, inclusion, and human rights. It adopts a rights-based and cross-sectoral approach, emphasising that youth issues cut across education, employment, civic space,

13. Creatives unite | “People with lower income and education participate less in cultural activities”.

14. Creatives unite | “The Overlooked Role of Art and Culture in Well-being OECD’s Report”.

15. “Supporting non-formal education and Youth Work - Enter! Access to Social Rights for Young People”.

16. UNESCO World Heritage Centre - Young Professionals Forum 2021.

digital rights, among others. The inclusion of a structured three-phase practical guidance (preparation, design and implementation, monitoring and evaluation) gives clear orientation for member States. There is recognition of the need for financial and human resources and for youth organisations to be genuine partners, not token consultees.

61. While the resolution and Reference Framework are robust in many respects, the Assembly should make the following recommendations:

- Stronger binding commitments: The language is still largely aspirational (“we encourage”, “we undertake to consider”). For parliamentarians, there is value in urging member States to adopt concrete legislative or regulatory measures to embed the youth perspective;
- Clearer accountability and benchmarks: while the monitoring phase is defined, the Reference Framework could benefit from specifying standardised indicators (for example, youth representation on decision-making bodies, youth voter turnout) and requiring member States to report regularly to the Council of Europe on progress;
- Enhanced national parliamentary involvement: Much of the focus is on executive or administrative actors. The Assembly can recommend that national parliaments adopt oversight mechanisms: for example, parliamentary youth committees, regular hearings with youth organisations, budget scrutiny for youth participation;
- Addressing structural inequalities: The Reference Framework rightly highlights barriers faced by young people from disadvantaged backgrounds but could be stronger in prescribing actions to dismantle systemic obstacles (poverty, digital exclusion, regional disparities). National parliaments should also examine the disaggregated data by socio-economic status, gender and region;
- Sustainability of youth engagement: The risk of tokenism is explicitly mentioned, yet to counteract this, youth participation can be institutionalised at all levels (local, regional, national) with mandated youth quotas on advisory boards or commissions.

62. National parliaments have a pivotal role to play and key instruments to deploy, such as:

- Legislation and budgeting: parliaments should review and, where necessary, revise legal frameworks to articulate the youth perspective, ensure youth rights and participation mechanisms, and allocate sufficient resources;
- Oversight and evaluation: parliamentary committees (for youth, education, employment, social affairs) should monitor government implementation of the Reference Framework, request progress reports, call youth organisations for testimony, and scrutinise impact;
- Engagement and co-creation: parliaments should engage young people directly in the legislative process (e-consultations, youth panels) and ensure youth representation in parliamentary advisory bodies;
- Interparliamentary exchange: through the Assembly, national parliaments can share best practices, peer review each other’s progress in implementing the youth perspective, and adopt common benchmarks.

63. As for the Assembly’s own role, it can:

- call on national parliaments to integrate and monitor the youth perspective, setting out suggested benchmarks and indicators;
- facilitate peer-review visits or exchanges between parliaments and youth organisations, also via its youth rapporteurs, to encourage learning and foster innovation across member States;
- continue promoting youth voices within the Assembly itself, ensuring that young people’s perspectives inform the Assembly’s debates and that youth organisations are consulted as part of the Assembly’s work.

64. In sum, the Reference Framework is an important step forward in embedding a youth perspective into policy making across the Organisation. For maximum impact, the Assembly should urge national parliaments to translate the Framework’s commitments into legislative and oversight practices, institutionalise youth participation, allocate adequate resources, and track progress via measurable indicators.

65. By actively engaging young people and holding governments to account, the Assembly and all 46 national parliaments can help turn the Reference Framework’s vision into meaningful change.

7. Conclusions and recommendations: consolidating the youth dimension of democracy

66. The Assembly has consistently recognised that democracies cannot thrive without the meaningful involvement of their younger generations. Building on the Assembly's earlier work, including [Resolution 2619 \(2025\)](#) and [Recommendation 2299 \(2025\)](#) "Youth movements for democracy" and [Resolution 2553 \(2024\)](#) "Strengthening the youth perspective in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly", this report reaffirms that youth participation must evolve from mere consultation to shared responsibility in decision making.

67. Despite notable progress, youth participation across Europe remains uneven and fragmented. Many young people continue to feel excluded from political and civic life, perceiving institutions as distant or unrepresentative.

68. Socio-economic barriers, precarious employment, limited access to housing and education, as well as shrinking civic and cultural spaces, have deepened generational divides. Restoring young people's trust in democratic institutions requires addressing these inequalities while ensuring that young people have a real influence over the policies that affect their lives.

69. The adoption of the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective and the Secretary General's report entitled "Towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe" provide a timely opportunity to integrate the youth perspective across all sectors of governance. The Council of Europe's co-management system, embodied by the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest and the European Youth Foundation, remains a unique and exemplary model of institutionalised participation. The proposed feasibility study on the creation of a third European Youth Centre in the Black Sea region would further extend the Organisation's outreach and strengthen democratic inclusion across Europe's eastern regions.

70. Moving forward, youth participation must become a structural feature of democratic governance. Member States should adopt comprehensive frameworks that guarantee the rights, opportunities and resources for young people to engage meaningfully at national, regional and local levels. This includes the creation or reinforcement of youth councils, youth parliaments, and structured dialogue platforms with advisory mandates or decision-making powers, as well as participatory budgeting and consultation mechanisms that allow young people to shape local priorities.

71. Equal access to rights remains the foundation of participation. Governments should ensure universal access to quality education, employment, housing and healthcare, with special attention to mental health services and the inclusion of marginalised youth, including those from minority, migrant, rural or low-income backgrounds, and those with disabilities. Gender equality must be fully mainstreamed across all youth-related initiatives and leadership structures.

72. Education and culture are critical enablers of active citizenship. Civic education should be integrated into school curricula from an early age, while non-formal education and youth work should be supported as complementary learning spaces. Cultural participation, creativity and artistic expression strengthen social cohesion and should be promoted through inclusive public spaces and partnerships between youth organisations, artists and local authorities.

73. The digital transformation of civic and political life presents both opportunities and challenges. Digital literacy, critical media education and transparent online participation frameworks are vital to enable young people to engage responsibly and effectively. Member States must ensure that online platforms respect human rights, protect young users from disinformation and abuse, and promote open democratic dialogue.

74. Sustainable youth engagement also depends on intergenerational dialogue and institutional openness. Governments should establish youth advisory boards in parliaments and ministries, promote mentorship programmes linking young leaders with policy makers, and encourage political parties to integrate and support young candidates. Civil society and youth-led organisations must continue to act as drivers of democratic innovation, fostering participation, diversity and civic learning.

75. The Council of Europe has a key role to play in advancing this agenda, considering the centrality of youth engagement to the New Democratic Pact for Europe. The Assembly should invite the Committee of Ministers to reaffirm youth participation as a cross-cutting priority, strengthen the co-management system, and provide stable funding for the European Youth Foundation and the European Youth Centres. Enhanced co-operation with the European Union, the United Nations, UNESCO and the OECD will also be essential to promote a coherent international framework for youth participation and democratic renewal.

76. The Council of Europe and its Assembly should also make every effort to reach out to young people living in European societies who may not have access to the usual institutional channels for participation.

77. Building democracies with youth demands institutional reform, accountability and trust between generations. By embedding the youth perspective across all areas of public life, Council of Europe member States can ensure that democracy remains inclusive, dynamic and future-oriented, sustained by the energy, creativity and commitment of young people across the continent.