Adopted by
General Assembly

Brussels, Belgium
13-14 November 2026

Motion

Civic Education for All: Empowering Young People through Active Participation

Signed by: Lithuanian Youth Council (LiJOT)
Co-signed by: Rural Youth Europe (RYE)

Civic education is one of the most essential elements in building an engaged and informed society. It enables young people to understand their rights and responsibilities, appreciate the democracies they live in, and actively participate in the democratic process. Civic education strengthens a sense of ownership in shaping the future of our communities and countries, and it must be safeguarded and expanded to ensure a well-functioning democracy for all.

Today, civic engagement among youth faces numerous challenges. In the last several EU elections, young people, while turning out in sizable amounts, have been lagging behind compared to voters of older generations. According to data, the participation rate of young voters has decreased by 6 percentage points since 2019, partially offsetting the 14 percentage point increase that took place between 2014 and 2019.[1] Additionally, while there has been a positive trend in youth turnout in European elections until 2024, young people are still the least actively engaged demographic group. This is a worrying sign that needs to be addressed through comprehensive measures directed at strengthening the ability of young people to participate in their communities by developing active citizenship through theoretical and practical means in schools. By engaging and integrating youth non-governmental organisations alongside traditional and formal educational practices young people would get to experience and learn through methods based on the principles of non-formal education. That requires a comprehensive approach which would enable youth non-governmental organisations to actively participate in the civic education of young people in schools and elsewhere.

With the increasing need for youth participation in decision-making processes, we note that civic education is lacking in many European educational systems. This often results in low political awareness, limited understanding of democratic structures, and a lack of motivation to engage in civic duties such as voting. Young people deserve comprehensive civic education that prepares them for meaningful involvement in society. All NGOs and civil society organisations should have the opportunity to present their work in schools, offering diverse perspectives and engaging students with real-world examples of how civic participation works in practice. Civic education cannot be confined to textbooks - it must be brought to life through the engagement of organisations working directly on the ground, thus strengthening active citizenship. Youth non-governmental organisations have vast experience and knowledge in how to engage young people and provide meaningful experiences that would better illustrate the importance of actively engaging in their communities via practical activities. As an example, non-formal education, as promoted by many youth organisations across Europe, provides innovative and inclusive methods to inspire young people. It empowers them to translate theoretical knowledge into practical action, fostering critical thinking, collaboration and meaningful participation in their communities. Volunteering and youth work play an important role in this process, offering young people opportunities to engage directly with civic issues, develop leadership skills and build a stronger connection to their societies. Thus, the need to actively involve youth non-governmental organisations in the process of civic education in formal education institutions is crucial in strengthening and bolstering the engagement of young people in democratic processes.

We must ensure that every young person in Europe is equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to engage in political processes, such as voting, understanding the functions of government, and navigating political systems. Civic education should provide a comprehensive understanding of electoral processes, the importance of participating in elections, and the impact of voting on shaping policies that influence our everyday lives. Without this, young people are left disconnected from key societal decisions that directly impact their future.

When young people are empowered through knowledge and active participation, they grow into citizens who can hold their governments accountable, contribute to public debates, and ensure that

1 European Parliament Eurobarometer EU Post-Electoral Survey 2024, page 9. [Access via “Report” section in https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3292]

the democratic principles of transparency, equality, and justice are upheld.

It is to be noted that all across Europe and in particular in countries seeking to join the EU, civic education also plays a vital role. It strengthens young people's understanding of the EU, its institutions, and values, providing them with the tools to actively participate in societal change. Enhanced civic education in these nations can also promote social cohesion and democratic engagement on a broader European scale.

We draw attention to the fact that the Council of the European Union, at the meeting of the Council (Education Youth, Culture and Sport), on 13-14 May 2024, adopted the Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on inclusive societies for young people. In the implementing measures, among others, implementing measure 3.1 Integrate non-formal education led by NGOs into formal civic education is to be noted: "Stimulate schools to involve youth-led NGOs, in collaboration with youth workers, in implementing the civic education curriculum using non-formal methods. The initiative should be supported by the EU institutions. The course should use the national curriculum and be prepared together with youth workers and teachers. The youth-led NGO' lessons will enable young people to learn about civic society, give more opportunities to engage and increase social inclusion by providing a peer-to-peer practical learning experience. This should lead to providing opportunities to engage and learn practical skills through civic education." In order for this measure to be implemented, all of the relevant stakeholders from the EU level, the governments and relevant institutions of the Member States, NGOs and civic society have to collaborate and prioritise the strengthening of civic education.

We recognize the significant contributions of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe in advancing civic education through non-formal methods. Their education and training programmes, along with established quality standards, provide valuable frameworks that can be integrated into formal education systems. By leveraging these resources, we can create more engaging and effective civic education curricula that empower young people to actively participate in democratic processes.

To strengthen youth civic engagement across Europe, we must address the barriers young people face in accessing quality civic education. NGOs, educators, and policymakers have a shared responsibility to ensure that schools become spaces where democracy and civic responsibility are discussed openly, critically, and inclusively.

Therefore, we call for:

- The European Commission and the Member States of the EU to initiate discussions on how civic education can be further expanded, ensuring it aligns with the democratic values and practices of the EU;

- National governments and educational institutions to collaborate, and include the National Youth Councils, NGOs and other actors engaged in working with young people as stakeholders, in creating accessible resources that equip young people with the skills and knowledge they need to navigate their political systems, make informed choices, and participate actively in democratic processes;

- For national stakeholders to actively collaborate with the European Youth Forum and its Member Organisations, including National Youth Councils, in strengthening civic education in different countries in Europe, finding and co-creating measures to strengthen the ability of NGOs and teachers to collaborate and make civic education more appealing and interesting for young people and making schools more accessible to youth non-governmental organisations;

- National stakeholders to actively engage in the process of lowering the voting age to 16, considering that it would create avenues for young people to engage more actively and provide the opportunity for the knowledge acquired during civic education practically from a younger age, as it has been shown that voting and engaging in democratic pro-

cesses is a habit that would be important to be formed from a younger age;

- The recognition of youth work, non-formal education, volunteering and learning mobility in providing civic education & conveying democratic values providing adequate and increased funding and creating easier access to those opportunities for all young people in countries across Europe.







Co-funded by the European Union

The European Youth Forum is funded by the European Union and the Council of Europe. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union, the Council of Europe or the European Youth Foundation. Neither the European Union nor any other granting authority can be held responsible for them.