



**European Committee  
of the Regions**



# Charter on Youth and Democracy

# Introduction

The Charter on Youth and Democracy puts forward concrete recommendations relating to the democratic participation of young people to social, political and civic life at three levels of governance: the local and regional level; the national level; and the European level. It strives to build and consolidate a youth friendly democratic space to ensure the voices of young people are formally, continuously and permanently represented in the European Union. The Charter follows a participatory approach, which involves youth via numerous youth organisations, including youth branches of both national and European political parties, as well as the community of the European Committee of the Regions' Young Elected Politicians -program.

The proposed recommendations put forward by the above-mentioned youth representatives serve as guidelines for discussion as well as examples to follow. The topics of the Charter are divided into the four following areas:

1. Education, cooperation, information
2. Youth empowerment, leadership and democratic participation
3. Role of new technologies and digitalisation
4. Youth mainstreaming of policies and political representation

## I. Recommendations on education, cooperation, information

### Local and regional level:

1. Step up citizenship education as well as education about the European Union at all levels of education, as a fundamental enabler of active and informed citizenship and for democratic participation; while recognizing and supporting youth organisations as competence centres where civic education also takes place.
2. Ensure that schools themselves are democratic institutions, involving students in democratic structures, and including participatory initiatives in citizenship education, while also promoting the development of citizenship skills beyond school premises, for instance through projects within local communities addressing topical issues.
3. Strengthen youth work in order to build young people's competence for democratic culture, and provide a forum for them to actively engage in society from a young age.

### Member State level:

4. Fund citizenship education within formal and non-formal education, and co-create the curricula in partnership with the youth organisations.
5. Improve the availability of inclusive youth spaces, put up information hubs run together with youth, and create and coordinate online platforms with the aim to inform on youth-related matters and to widen participation.

6. Recognise the value of and validate the competences and skills gained through youth work, volunteering, non-formal education, informal learning also in youth organisations.
7. Recognize the role of national institutions - cultural, educational, governmental -, in ensuring that information about youth programmes and policies relating to youth is easily available for young people including for underrepresented and minority groups.

### EU level:

8. Reinforce and promote EU youth programmes and address existing barriers, such as financial barriers, in order to widen participation and to allow more young people, including those from disadvantaged groups, to get experience abroad within the EU; and recognize such experience also by study credits.
9. Improve the accessibility of information on EU youth programmes, in particular via social media used by youth.
10. Tackle disinformation, polarisation and hate crime.

## II. Recommendations on youth empowerment, leadership and democratic participation

### Local and regional level:

11. Support the building and safeguarding of intersectional democratic spaces for youth and by youth to ensure the voices of young people are formally, continuously, and permanently represented in the policy-making cycle, making sure that such spaces exist in both urban and rural areas.
12. Include the outcomes of local and regional deliberative dialogues and initiatives into the local/regional decision making, and implement continuous participation mechanisms rather than isolated initiatives.
13. Ensure sufficient and sustainable financial and professional support to youth centres and youth organisations, in particular those working with disadvantaged groups.
14. Promote and strengthen the impact of existing local youth councils and establish new ones as needed, while ensuring that they are youth-led by intersectional democratic principles and given concrete tools to contribute to the formulation of relevant policies.
15. Use the mechanism of participatory budgeting to enhance youth ownership.

### Member State level:

16. Expand a safe and more youth-friendly civic space and protect the civil and political rights of young people.
17. Increase sustainable and structural financial support to youth organisations, so they can further promote the participation of young people in democratic life and enhance citizenship skills, in a spirit of solidarity and inclusion.
18. Cooperate with the local and regional chapters of youth organisations to develop a Youth Test<sup>1</sup>, while also involving the youth in the policy making processes, and ensuring mitigation measures in case young people would be negatively impacted by the new policy.

19. Cooperate with representative student organisations and unions, also facilitating their creation where they do not exist.
20. Consider lowering the voting age to encourage and foster youth democratic participation, accompanied by adequate political education to further support participation in elections.

### EU level:

21. Support the Member States and the local and regional authorities in building youth friendly democratic spaces in cooperation with youth, in order to foster youth leadership and ensure inclusion of issues of importance to youth.
22. Provide multilingual support to sharing of best practices with youth organisations, especially those who work with the most vulnerable youth.
23. Build on the lessons learned in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe to further expand on participatory and consultation mechanisms with youth and fully utilise already existing mechanisms, such as the EU Youth Dialogue and ensure the outcomes are followed up and considered during the decision-making processes.
24. Enforce employment principles with dignified payments that will ensure European youth can acquire high quality work experience within European and political institutions under safe and fair conditions; promote intersectional youth participation in European policy-making.

<sup>1</sup> A Youth Test is an impact assessment tool which ensures that young people are considered when new policies and laws are decided. It would allow to create better policies that are long-lasting and impactful, while reducing inequalities and considering the needs of both current and future generations.

### III. Recommendations on access to new technologies and digitalisation

#### Local and regional level:

25. Strengthen the digital readiness of schools and provide training for teachers and students to improve digital skills, media literacy and critical thinking, including on the use of personal data.
26. Develop free lending services for digital devices, in public spaces such as libraries or municipal buildings and at schools, in order to ease the access to new technologies and support learning-by-doing approach.

#### Member State level:

27. Ensure affordable high-speed Internet connectivity for all, including in the less developed, remote, or rural areas, and particularly for formal and informal education institutions, including for youth centres, if necessary by agreements with local Internet service providers.
28. Ensure that young people can participate democracy through digital tools that are safe, easily accessible, unrestricted and user-friendly.
29. Examine alternative methods of voting, such as e-voting, to allow broader participation by learning from best practices.
30. Devise and adopt policies, strategies and legal frameworks that support digital well-being for young people, including on data protection, Internet safety and protection against online discrimination and hate speech.
31. Address the digital gap between regions/cities while ensuring the possibility of expressing opinions in other ways than just through digital channels.

#### EU level:

32. Devise policies and legislative frameworks to foster privacy and safety on the internet and social media.
33. Protect civil society and youth organisations from being labelled political on social media, especially when they are critical of the government in power.
34. Ensure and raise awareness of that new technologies based on algorithms and programs are not strongly biased and not reproducing discriminatory behaviour.

## IV. Recommendations on youth mainstreaming of policies and political representation

### Local and regional level:

35. Ensure ways for meaningful, non-partisan and intersectional participation of young people in the local community, paying a special attention to rural areas, and in the local politics.
36. Enhance dialogue between youth and local politicians, ensure follow-up actions and promote initiatives aimed at restoring trust between elected officials, political parties and young citizens.
37. Consider the inclusion of zip lists for young candidates in the elections at the local level and provide training and mentoring for young people to encourage them to stand for election.

### Member State level:

38. Ensure ways for meaningful participation of young people in national politics, for example via recognition of and cooperation with National Youth Councils and their networks.
39. Promote cooperation with the youth branches of political parties and youth non-governmental organizations to further enhance participation in elections and political engagement more broadly, and ensure youth interests are included in the political programmes, including via consulting with relevant and representative youth organisations.
40. Implement evidence-based youth policies at all levels and increase funding for research on youth matters and ensure the transparent collection of gender-and-age-disaggregated data.
41. Increase investment in accordance with the priorities of young people at national level, especially for the disadvantaged groups.

42. Enhance dialogue and coordination between ministries responsible for youth matters so as to improve effective policy making and evaluation.
43. Consider youth zip lists of political mandates to make room for young people in formal politics, and include youth-specific asks in the political programme of political parties.
44. Reinforce the development and funding for youth umbrella and political organisations, as well as civil society organisations at national level.
45. Ensure the accessibility of information also via online platforms on voting procedures and consider targeted campaigns directed at youth, especially before elections, with specific information packages for first time voters.

### EU level:

46. Promote the exchange of views and data collection on the impact of lowering the voting age to 16, as well as lowering the age for candidacies.
47. Reinforce cooperation between EU umbrella youth organisations and the youth sections of the EU political parties.
48. Establish a youth-test mechanism to ensure that all new EU legislation and policy is subject to a youth focused impact assessment, including a consultation with youth organisations and youth experts at the EU level and the development of mitigation measures in case a negative impact is identified.
49. Invest concrete efforts, such as long-term, targeted campaigns, to increase the participation of youth in elections to the European Parliament, and consider the inclusion of zip lists for young candidates to such European elections.

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Created in 1994, the European Committee of the Regions is the EU's political assembly of 329 regional and local representatives such as regional presidents or city-mayors from all 27 Member States, representing over 446 million Europeans.

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The European Youth Forum is the largest platform of youth organisations in Europe, bringing together tens of millions of young people from all over the continent. We represent over 100 diverse youth organisations and platforms, and we are led by young people, who are democratically elected for the roles of President and the Board.

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