Adopted by
General Assembly

Brussels, Belgium
13-14 November 2026

Motion

Strengthening Youth Participation at Local and Regional Level

Signed by: Portuguese National Youth Council (CNJ)

Co-signed by: Council of the German-speaking Youth of Belgium (RdJ), Croatian Youth Network (MMH), European Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations (YMCA Europe), Forum des Jeunes (FJ), Hellenic National Youth Council (ESYN), National Youth Council of Catalonia (CNJC), National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS), Romanian National Youth Council (CTR), Rural Youth Europe (RYE), Spanish Youth Council (CJE)

Rationale

Democracy is first experienced where people live: in the parish, the town hall and the region. On the 12th December 1976, Portugal held its first democratic local elections, two years after the end of dictatorship. Fifty years later, local power is widely recognised as one of the most enduring achievements of Portuguese democracy, and its anniversary is being marked by an official national commemoration running from December 2026.

That anniversary carries a lesson for Europe. Local democracy endures when people see it, use it and own it. For young people, this is far from guaranteed: participation structures exist on paper in many municipalities but are inactive, under-resourced or reach only young people who are already engaged. Rural and peripheral territories, young people with fewer opportunities and those outside organised structures are the most often left out.

In March 2026, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2026)3 on the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life. It replaces the 2004 recommendation and updates a Charter first adopted in 1992. It defines participation as having the right, the means, the space, the structures and the opportunities to influence decisions, and it calls on Member States and local and regional authorities to act on youth councils, local youth strategies, participatory budgeting, youth work and evaluation.

Complementing this framework, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe has implemented its Youth Delegates Programme since 2014, as part of the Rejuvenating Politics initiative. The programme enables young people from across the Council of Europe's member States to participate directly in Congress sessions alongside elected local and regional representatives, contribute a youth perspective to political debates, and develop grassroots projects in their own communities. It illustrates the value of connecting youth participation at European level with practical action at local and regional level, while highlighting the importance of creating lasting opportunities for young people to influence decision-making beyond formal consultation.

The regional level is a particular gap in several countries. Mainland Portugal has no elected regional tier of government: the administrative regions foreseen in the 1976 Constitution were rejected in the 1998 referendum, and only the Azores and Madeira have autonomous regional governments. Regional youth policy therefore lacks a democratic counterpart. To fill this gap, the Portuguese National Youth Council holds a mandate to establish regional youth councils, and is committed to making them a bridge between local youth participation and national and European decision-making.

A new standard is only as strong as its implementation. National Youth Councils and youth organisations already hold much of the know-how needed: diagnosing local youth needs, co-designing strategies, setting up and reviving municipal youth councils, running youth participatory budgets, supporting school student associations and training facilitators. This motion asks the European Youth Forum to turn the new Charter into a shared advocacy and capacity-building agenda for its members.

Preamble

The General Assembly of the European Youth Forum,

1. **Recalling** that local and regional authorities are the level of government closest to young people, and that decisions on housing, mobility, education, employment, culture, climate and public space are largely shaped there;

2. **Recalling** the 50th anniversary of the first democratic local elections in Portugal, held on 12 December 1976, as a reminder that local democracy is a cornerstone of democratic consolidation across Europe;

3. **Welcoming** the adoption of Recommendation CM/Rec(2026)3 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, and its definition of participation as having the right, the means, the space, the structures and the opportunities to influence decision-making;

4. **Noting** that the Charter calls for permanent youth councils with clear frameworks, fair representation and adequate budgets; for evidence-based local youth policies developed together with and by young people; for deliberative tools such as participatory budgeting; and for democratic structures in schools;

5. **Noting further** that the Charter calls for the principle of co-management, the removal of financial barriers to participation, adequate recognition of youth work, the training of local staff, and regular, participatory and transparent evaluation of its implementation;

6. **Welcoming** the Youth Delegates Programme of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, which enables young people to participate in Congress sessions alongside elected local and regional representatives and to develop initiatives in their communities, strengthening youth representation and the connection between European-level decision-making and local and regional realities;

7. **Concerned** that in many municipalities youth councils, youth strategies and school student associations exist only formally, lack resources or follow-up, and fail to reach young people in rural, peripheral and disadvantaged contexts;

8. **Concerned** that the absence of common quality criteria makes it difficult to assess whether local youth policy is meaningful, and allows tokenistic consultation to be presented as participation;

9. **Recognising** that National Youth Councils and youth organisations have developed proven methods to support municipalities, including youth needs diagnoses, co-designed local youth strategies, the creation and revitalisation of municipal youth councils, youth participatory budgeting, support to school student associations, and pools of trained peer facilitators;

10. **Believing** that these practices can be scaled and adapted across Europe through peer learning between Member Organisations, and that the Youth Forum is uniquely placed to connect them with European institutions and networks of local and regional authorities;

11. **Welcoming** initiatives by National Youth Councils to establish regional youth councils where no elected regional authority exists, such as the mandate held by the Portuguese National Youth Council.

Call to action

Commits the European Youth Forum to:

1. Develop, together with Member Organisations, a set of quality criteria for youth participation at local and regional level, building on the Charter, as a first step towards developing a voluntary quality assurance process for local youth policy;

2. Make the implementation of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life a standing advocacy priority, including in its work with the Council of Europe, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the European Committee of the Regions;

3. Create a peer-learning space where Member Organisations can share and adapt tools to support municipalities, such as youth needs diagnoses, local youth strategies, youth councils, youth participatory budgeting and school democracy;

4. Support Member Organisations in mobilising funding and partnerships for local participation programmes, notably through Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps and the AGORA programme;

5. Monitor the implementation of the Charter and feed young people's assessment into the review foreseen five years after its adoption;

6. Support Member Organisations seeking to establish regional youth councils, particularly in countries without elected regional authorities, and promote these councils as recognised interlocutors at regional level.

Calls on Member Organisations to:

1. Promote the Charter nationally, including by translating it into national languages and accessible youth-friendly formats;

2. Promote the Youth Delegates Programme of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and encourage young people from their respective countries to apply and support their national project, while enabling initiatives that strengthen the link between youth delegates, local and regional authorities, and youth organisations;

3. Offer municipalities and regions structured support to plan, implement and evaluate youth participation, with particular attention to rural, peripheral and disadvantaged areas;

4. Train and maintain pools of peer facilitators able to support local youth councils, consultations and participatory processes.

Calls on national governments to:

1. Fully implement Recommendation CM/Rec(2026)3, and review national legal frameworks on youth councils and local youth policy accordingly;

2. Provide stable funding for local and regional youth participation and for the youth organisations that support it;

3. Consider lowering the voting age to 16 for local and regional elections, as encouraged by the Charter;

4. Where no elected regional authorities exist, recognise and fund regional youth councils, and ensure that deconcentrated state bodies and intermunicipal entities consult them on policies affecting young people.

Calls on local and regional authorities to:

1. Adopt local youth strategies based on evidence and co-designed with young people, with clear goals, indicators and budgets;

2. Establish or revitalise youth councils with real competences, resources, fair representation and a duty of feedback from decision-makers;

3. Set up youth participatory budgets and support democratic student structures in schools;

4. Apply the principle of co-management and remove financial barriers to participation;

5. Recognise youth organisations and National Youth Councils as partners in designing and evaluating local youth policy.

Calls on the European institutions to:

1. Encourage the European Committee of the Regions and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities to promote the Charter among their members;

2. Encourage the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe to revise the selection process of the Youth Delegates Programme to ensure that National Youth Councils are meaningfully involved in selecting Youth Delegates, thereby strengthening national ownership, transparency and the legitimacy of youth representation;

3. Integrate local and regional youth participation into the EU Youth Strategy and EU Youth Dialogue, and into the youth check of EU policies with territorial impact.

References

- Recommendation CM/Rec(2026)3 on the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, 12 March 2026

- Torres Pereira preside à comissão para comemorar os 50 anos das primeiras eleições autárquicas, Government of Portugal, 2026







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.