

The European Youth participation charter



Introduction:

In an era where democratic engagement is increasingly under pressure, the Council of Europe has taken a bold step by revising one of its most important youth policy documents: **the *European Youth Participation Charter***. Originally adopted in 1992 and revised in 2003, the Charter has served as a guiding framework for ensuring **young people's involvement in local and regional life**. Now, over two decades later, the Council of Europe is updating this critical document to reflect the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly changing world. The revised Charter, approved on **30 June 2025** by the Council's Committee on **Social Inclusion and Human Dignity**, is expected to be formally adopted in **October 2025**. This marks a significant milestone in the evolution of youth rights and democratic participation across Europe.

Background:

Initial charter (1992, revised 2003):

The original charter was drawn up in 1992 but was substantially revised in 2003 to take into account the rapidly changing political environment¹the charter has been adopted by many European municipalities who have chosen to set up the youth council. The revised charter was taken up by the committee of ministers of the Council of Europe as a recommendation. Lending it added political weight. Several European NGO's, such as the **European youth**

¹ what is youth participation, youth voice? 2009 retrieved 2010-07-28

forum² actively support the charter through their activities. It has been translated into 11 languages, plus a plain English version and manual entitled "have **your say**".

The charter is divided into three sections:

- **Part one:** gives local and regional authorities guidelines on how to conduct policies affecting young people.
- **Part two:** provides some tools for furthering the participation of young people.
- **Part three:** advise on how to provide institutional conditions for the participation of young people.

Revision process (2024-2025):

The ongoing revision of the **European Charter** on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, led by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, seeks to update the Charter to better reflect the current realities and challenges faced by young people. As part of this process, a survey has been launched among key stakeholders to gather insights and recommendations.

The responses to this survey will form the foundation for the Charter's revision and will inform discussions during a consultative meeting scheduled for **5 July 2024** in **Strasbourg**. This meeting brought together committee members, Congress youth delegates, representatives of the Council of Europe's youth statutory bodies, and selected partner organisations. This participatory approach ensured that the revised charter would reflect the diverse realities and aspirations of young Europeans. The draft, shaped by these consultations, **was officially approved** by the council committee in **June 2025** and is set for final adoption during the congress session in **October**.

A charter for today's challenges:

The primary goal of the new charter is to align youth participation principles with the realities of modern society. Today's young people face a complex range of issues from digital transformation and economic uncertainty to climate anxiety and democratic disappointment. The updated charter recognizes that youth participation must be more than a policy buzzword, **it must be a fundamental democratic right, fully embedded in the legal, political, and social structure of local and regional governance**. This transformation is guided by the principle that youth participation is inseparable from human rights and should be treated as such by government, institutions, and civil society.

The Charter targets a broad audience, including local and regional authorities, civil society organisations, youth workers, and young people themselves. While it is not legally binding, it stands as a strong moral and political commitment to elevating youth voices in governance.

² is a platform that represents over 100 youth councils across Europe, aiming to empower young people and advocate for their rights.

Its recommendations provide a blueprint for municipalities and regions striving to build inclusive, resilient, and future-oriented democracies.

Key principles and Commitments:



The **Charter on Youth and Democracy** is a policy document created with the active involvement of young people and youth organizations to strengthen youth participation in democratic processes across Europe. It contains **49 concrete recommendations** aimed at European, national, and local governments. These

include actions like improving citizenship education, lowering the voting age, encouraging young people to run for office, involving youth in policy consultations, and testing new laws for their impact on young people.

The Charter was **co-created in a bottom-up process** by youth organizations and young elected officials from across the EU, with the support of the **European Committee of the Regions (CoR)**³ and the **European Youth Forum**⁴. It was officially signed on **1 December** during a **CoR** plenary session focused on youth and the future of Europe, marking the conclusion of the **European Year of Youth 2022**.

The goal of the Charter is to create a **youth-friendly democratic environment** where young people's voices are not just heard occasionally, but **formally and permanently included** in decision-making at all levels. The signing event featured EU officials, youth political representatives, and success stories from cities recognized as **European Youth Capitals**, including Lublin (2023), Ghent (2024), and Lviv (2025).

“By implementing the charter, local and regional authorities will ensure a stronger youth perspective in their work, harnessing the creativity and energy of young people in decision-making processes. This in turn should lead to more inclusive, vibrant and resilient communities. Youth participation⁵ is not a tool, it's a core principle of democracy”

stated **Aida Karimli**.

In essence, by putting the Charter into practice, local and regional authorities can better include young people's ideas and energy in their decision-making, leading to more inclusive and resilient communities. This approach recognizes that youth participation isn't just a helpful tool it's a fundamental part of a healthy democracy.

³ is the European assembly of local and regional representatives that provides sub-national authorities.

⁴ is an international non-profit association that serves as an umbrella organisation and advocacy group of the national youth councils and international non governmental youth organisations in Europe.

⁵ it provides a widely accepted definition of what youth participation means, encompassing more than just voting or standing for election.

The Committee also approved a report on innovations in social housing, presented by rapporteurs **Doris Kampus (Austria, SOC/G/PD)** and **Jimmy Moloney (Ireland, ILDG)**. Addressing both long-standing and emerging housing challenges, the report is scheduled for further debate during the **October session**. Additionally, the Committee held discussions on **three ongoing reports: the issue of rural exodus in Europe, enhancing local and regional capacities for the use of artificial intelligence, and safeguarding freedom of expression and assembly for LGBTI persons**. An exchange of views was also held on the protection of human rights at the local and regional levels, with a particular focus on the right to health, led by **Mélanie Lepoutier (France, ILDG)**, Congress Deputy Standing Rapporteur on Human Rights. The meeting featured contributions from a diverse group of European experts from academia and civil society.

What's next?

With the formal adoption of the revised charter expected in **October 2025**, the next step will be implementation. Local and regional governments are encouraged to assess their current youth policies and practices, align them with the **charter's updated principles**. This includes establishing youth councils, providing training programs, financing youth-led initiatives, and embedding youth participation in all stages of policymaking. The **council of Europe** and the congress will likely offer **toolkits, case studies, and other resources to support this transition**.

Conclusion:

The new **European Youth Charter** is a timely and ambitious effort to ensure that youth voices are not only heard but **integrated into the very fabric of European democracy**. It reaffirms that participation is a right, not a privilege, and that young people must be empowered to co-create the societies they live in. As Europe grapples with **political fragmentation, social inequality, and generational divides**, this charter offers a hopeful vision: one where youth participation is not the exception, but the norm and where democracy is stronger because of it.

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