

**DEMOCRACY
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Let's get political!

Youth, politics and elections

Seminar, 2nd edition

23 – 28 June 2024
European Youth Centre, Strasbourg

Call for participants

Deadline for applications: **23 May 2024,**
14:00 CET

Rationale

The Reykjavik summit of Heads of State and Governments of the member states of the Council of Europe, held in May 2023, re-affirmed the commitment of the member states to the mission and the standards of the institution. The important role played by young people and youth civil society is also recognised in the [Reykjavik Declaration – United around our values](#):

...youth participation in decision-making processes improves the effectiveness of public policies and strengthens democratic institutions through open dialogue.

The Reykjavik Declaration follows on a process of recognising the importance of youth participation in decision making processes in the last decade and aims to respond to the significant concerns about democratic backsliding and youth disengagement and disaffection with democracy, democratic institutions and processes in Europe.

Elections mark 2024, both at global and European level. In the Council of Europe member states, the year showcases at least four presidential elections and eight parliamentary elections. The European Parliament elections (affecting EU member states) take place in June. In some countries, 16 years old will have the opportunity to vote for the first time. Within the Council of Europe, 2024 is also marked by elections of the new Secretary General (June 2024) and of the Human Rights Commissioner (March 2024). Exercising the right to vote and to stand in elections is paramount this year.

Young people are showing lower turnouts at vote than other age cohorts generally speaking in elections at local, national and European levels. The explanation resides in what researchers consider a 'participation paradox': young people are active in today's democracy, but they seem reluctant to take part in conventional democratic institutions and processes. They are more prone to resort to unconventional forms of participation, such as protest, volunteering, boycotting, social media activism, staging public performances.

However, in a democratic system largely based on representation and elections, the resort to non-institutional forms of participation to further alienate young people from power distribution and exercise. The limited engagement with conventional forms of participation needs further examination in respect to both reasons and possible solutions.

Some of the causes include the limited representation of young people in national parliaments (only 4.9 % members of parliaments under 30 in Europe), reflected as well in the membership of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (10.9% under 35 years old in 2022).¹ The gap between the minimum age to vote and the minimum age to stand in elections also comes in play, varying between 3.5 years for lower chambers to 10.4 years for upper chambers.² Further attention needs to be given to how young people are becoming socialised in political parties and movements, and the extent to which their interests and needs are reflected in the political programmes.

Risks and costs associated with political participation are significantly higher if one considers criteria for discrimination such as sex, gender, migration background, social class, etc. A certain stigma around political parties can also prevent young people from engaging.

Precarious economic situation is likely to constitute a barrier in the political participation of young people as highlighted by the participants in the Council of Europe Youth Action Week

¹ AS/Pol (2022) 37 PACE Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, [Establishment of a "youth partner" status with the Parliamentary Assembly](#), Introductory memorandum, rapporteur: Anastasios Chatzivasileiou, Greece.

² Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Youth participation in national parliaments](#), 2021.

(2022). When looking closer to the elections cycle, one should also inquire into the hidden costs (in terms of finance and time) of voting.

Youth organisations have long term advocated various solutions to increase the engagement of young people in political life at all levels, including the removal of barriers to political participation such as lowering the voting age or the age to stand in elections. Incentives to promotion of youth political participation target youth quotas on electoral lists, incentives given to political parties that have young people on lists and the strengthening of political youth organisations.

The first edition of the seminar Let's get political (November 2023, Budapest) concluded that there is a need to provide a for a for meeting, networking and discussing the specific challenges faced by young people in their engagement in political life.

About the seminar

The second edition of the seminar aims to contribute to empowering and supporting young people to take part in the democratic political life at local, national and European level. The seminar takes place in parallel with the Parliamentary Assembly session in Strasbourg. It is organised in partnership with the European Youth Forum and the German Federal Youth Council.

The objectives are:

- To map and discuss the barriers and challenges faced by young people in the electoral cycle at local and national level
- To share and learn from different practices of engaging young people in political life from structural measures (lowering voting age) to democratic citizenship and human rights education.
- To explore the role played by political youth organisations in advocating for structural changes that support young people's engagement in politics.
- To associate the participants with the Council of Europe and its work, notably the Youth Department and the Parliamentary Assembly.
- To make recommendations on how to further address the challenges of political engagement of young people at local, national and international level.

Programme and methodology

The seminar will take place in parallel with the session of the Parliamentary Assembly in the Council of Europe. It is expected that the participants will visit the session of the Parliamentary Assembly featuring the election of the Secretary General and will take part in a side event co-organised by the Youth Department.

The programme of the activity will be based on the principles and approaches of non-formal learning, building from the experiences and practices of the participants.

It will feature lectures from experts, sessions to explore deeper and share good practices, as well as to co-create recommendations and initiatives.

Profile of participants

The seminar is designed to bring together some 40 participants that are either:

- Representatives of, representing youth organisations and movements, including international youth organisations/networks, political party youth organisations, national youth councils and local youth councils, minority youth organisation, and any other youth civil society motivated to advocate for youth political participation, democracy and human rights
or
- Elected representatives (e.g., parliamentarians, elected members of local councils, etc.) interested in advancing youth political participation in a framework of democracy and human rights.
or
- Representatives of national and local authorities responsible for youth.
or
- Representatives of organisations/institutions involved with political education, including political foundations.
or
- Researchers focused on youth political participation in Europe.

And in addition, fulfil the following criteria:

- Are holding a position in their organisations/institutions that allows them to follow-up on the seminar.
- Are committed to the values of the Council of Europe, democracy, human rights and to youth participation and are interested in taking further action.
- Are motivated and able to take in the entire training course and be involved in the project follow-up.
- Are able to work autonomously in either English language.
- Are resident in one of the state parties to the European Cultural Convention; exceptions can be made if justified.
- Priority will be given to participants aged 18-30.

The Council of Europe welcomes applications from all candidates who fulfil the specific profile of the activities, irrespective of gender, disability, marital or parental status, racial, ethnic or social origin, colour, religion, belief or sexual orientation.

Application, procedure and selection of participants

All candidates must apply on-line at <https://youthapplications.coe.int>.

The Council of Europe will select up to 40 participants on the basis of the profile outlined above. It will try as far as possible to respect the organisations' priorities, but also to ensure a balance between genders, geographical regions, different types of experiences, cultural backgrounds and organisations, institutions and projects. A waiting list may be established.

The full application form including the support letter from sending organisation must be submitted on-line **before 14:00 (CET), 23 May 2023**.

Practical conditions

Board and lodging

Accommodation and meals will be provided by the Council of Europe in the European Youth Centre Strasbourg.

Travel

Travel expenses and visa fees for the seminar in France will be reimbursed by bank transfer after the activity according to the rules of the Council of Europe. Only the participants who attend the entire seminar can be reimbursed.

Participants are expected to arrive to the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg on 23 June and depart on 28 June 2024.

Working languages

The seminar will be held in English.

Questions

If you have any questions about this activity, please do not hesitate to contact us at youthdemocracy@coe.int.