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8 Youth and Sport

8.1 10th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth (Valletta, Malta, 8-9 October 2025)

Report by the Secretary General

Item to be considered by the GR-C at its meeting on 16 January 2026

Introduction

1. The 10th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth was held in Valletta, Malta, on 8–9 October 2025, under the auspices of the Maltese Presidency of the Committee of Ministers. The agenda, the list of participants, and the adopted documents appear in Appendices 1 to 3 of the present report.

2. The title of the Conference was "Young People for Democracy: Youth Perspectives in Action." It built upon the outcomes of the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Reykjavík, May 2023), in particular, the decision to integrate "a youth perspective in the Organisation's intergovernmental and other deliberations" and was framed in line with the key objectives of the New Democratic Pact for Europe.

3. The Conference was chaired by Hon. Clifton Grima, Minister for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation of Malta. Nina Grmuša, President of the Advisory Council on Youth and of the Joint Council on Youth, served as the Vice-Chair of the Conference.

4. The Conference also marked an important step in advancing the implementation of the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030, providing a platform for Ministers and youth representatives to engage in joint reflection on the renewal of democratic life, the promotion of youth participation, and the strengthening of inclusive societies. A youth event was organised preceding the Conference on 6-8 October 2025 in Malta. The participation of youth delegates in the Conference and the organisation of this youth event constituted a crucial element and tool for ensuring youth perspectives in the Ministerial Conference and bringing youth voices to the exchanges.

5. The integration of perspectives of young people into the national consultation processes leading up to the Conference represented a key dimension.

Participants

6. Ministers of Youth and high-level officials from forty-five States Party to the Cultural Convention attended the Conference. Fourteen Ministers and thirteen Deputy Ministers and Secretaries of State for Youth led delegations alongside four ambassadors and sixteen experts were present. The European Union, UNICEF and other international organisations as well as the European Youth Forum and several international non-governmental youth organisations were also present as observers.

7. A significant innovation in the Conference was the presence, in national delegations, of youth delegates, mainly from national youth councils. Youth delegates were present in thirty-eight delegations, and thirty-four heads of delegation shared their speaking time with youth delegates.

8. The participants in the Youth event, including youth delegates, members of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe and representatives from the European Youth Forum, also joined the Conference.

Opening session

9. In his opening address, the Chair of the Conference, Hon. Clifton Grima, Minister for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation of Malta, emphasised the importance of the meeting as a milestone in the common European commitment to empowering young people and enabling them to shape a more inclusive and forward-looking Europe. Minister Grima noted that, while young people face numerous challenges – including conflict, climate change, and the impact of digital transformation – the Conference offered a valuable opportunity to strengthen co-operation and promote policies that place young people at the centre of decision-making. He underlined the essential role of the Council of Europe in supporting youth participation through the Youth Sector Strategy 2030 and the Recommendation on Youth Work and outlined the themes of the Conference: “Young People and the New Democratic Pact for Europe” and “Integrating a Youth Perspective: An Opportunity to Shape Policies Together”.

10. The Secretary General, Alain Berset, in his address, underlined the significance of bringing together youth delegates and experienced policymakers, noting that thirteen years had passed since the previous Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth. He reflected on the rapid technological, social, and environmental changes that have shaped a new generation, highlighting the need to bridge the growing gap between generations through genuine intergenerational dialogue and inclusion. Emphasising the need to renew democracy rather than give up on it, he presented the Council of Europe’s reflection on a New Democratic Pact for Europe, aimed at restoring trust and making democracy meaningful, including for young people. The Secretary General also referred to ongoing initiatives, such as the proposed Convention on Disinformation and Foreign Influence and commended the active role and contributions of youth representatives to the Conference.

11. Nina Grmuša, President of the Advisory Council on Youth and Vice-Chair of the Conference, emphasised that her presence in this role was not symbolic but political, reflecting the Council of Europe’s long-standing standards and commitment to meaningful youth participation through its co-management system. She recalled her own experience growing up in a post-conflict region and underlined the transformative power of dialogue, reconciliation and youth-led action. Grmuša highlighted the importance of continued investment in youth structures, such as the European Youth Foundation and youth-led civil society, as essential to the renewal of democracy. Referring to initiatives such as the Democracy Here | Democracy Now campaign, she stressed that young people are active agents of democratic innovation who bring empathy, resilience and courage to democratic life. She called on governments to uphold their political commitments and ensure that young people, as rights-holders and partners, are systematically and meaningfully involved in shaping the democratic future of Europe.

12. The President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Theodoros Rousopoulos, emphasised that political declarations acquire meaning only when translated into action. He urged participants to ensure that the conclusions of the Conference become a living commitment rather than another promise on paper. He called for the systematic integration of youth perspectives into all policy areas, the advancement from participation to co-decision, the provision of tools to turn ambitions into results, and the strengthening of democracy through education and inclusion, stressing that democracy begins in everyday dialogue and civic engagement.

13. The President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Marc Cools, highlighted the crucial role of youth participation at all levels of governance and announced the forthcoming adoption of the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life. He presented the Congress's long-standing initiative Rejuvenating Democracy, which has involved nearly 500 young delegates over the past decade, ensuring that youth perspectives are reflected in the Congress's work. He reaffirmed the Congress's commitment to safeguarding freedom of expression for all young representatives and called on local and regional authorities to uphold high standards of youth participation, beginning in schools and communities.

14. The European Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport, Glenn Micallef, underlined that democracy begins with participation and thrives when young people are at its core. He recalled current global challenges, including disinformation, polarisation and threats to freedom, and reaffirmed the European Union's efforts to promote youth engagement through initiatives such as the European Democracy Shield, strengthened Erasmus+ opportunities, and the Youth Advisory Board. Commending the resilience of young people, particularly in Ukraine, he highlighted the importance of the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership in ensuring that participation becomes a lived reality for all young Europeans.

15. The President of the European Youth Forum, Rareș Voicu, expressed appreciation to the Maltese Presidency for convening the Conference after thirteen years and underlined the essential role of youth organisations and national youth councils as partners in building a culture of democracy and participation. He warned against the shrinking civic space in parts of Europe, calling for the protection of freedom of expression, assembly and association. Voicu welcomed the 21 calls to action contained in the draft Declaration and the Resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective, urging governments to match political commitment with sustainable funding for youth structures and organisations. He concluded by calling for the outcomes of the Conference to be translated into lasting progress for future generations.

Plenary session 1: "Young People and the New Democratic Pact for Europe"

16. In her opening address, Federica Mogherini, Rector of the College of Europe and Director of the European Union Diplomatic Academy, reflected on the meaning and vitality of democracy in contemporary Europe. She underlined that democracy is not only an institutional framework but a living process that depends on the active participation and empowerment of citizens, especially young people. A democracy without participation, she noted, becomes an empty shell. While Europe continues to uphold some of the highest democratic standards globally, these achievements must not lead to complacency; democracy requires constant renewal, co-operation, and trust. Drawing on her personal journey – from her involvement in the Council of Europe's All Different – All Equal campaign and youth work at the European Youth Centre, to her later political and diplomatic roles – Mogherini credited the Council of Europe and its youth structures for shaping her commitment to democratic values and inclusivity. She called for sustained investment in youth organisations and youth work, stressing that young people are not only the future but an essential part of Europe's democratic present. Empowerment, she concluded, goes hand in hand with responsibility to act and to strengthen democracy for the next generation.

17. Yevheniia Fedotova, member of the Advisory Council on Youth, underlined that democratic renewal cannot be achieved using the "playbook of the past" and that young people must be recognised as equal partners in shaping Europe's future. Speaking from personal experience of interactions with young veterans from Ukraine, she described how youth-led initiatives foster community resilience and contribute to defending democratic values under pressure. She called for the New Democratic Pact for Europe to be translated into concrete mechanism of participation, including greater investment in youth work, the establishment of a third European Youth Centre, and co-management system across policy levels. Fedotova emphasised the importance of sustained support for youth organisations, youth delegations and adequate budgets to ensure that young people are not placed on the sidelines but are active agents within democratic processes. She concluded by urging governments to demonstrate readiness to work with a generation that has already shown its resilience and commitment to Europe's democratic future.

18. During the exchanges that followed, delegations reaffirmed their strong commitment to the New Democratic Pact for Europe and to placing young people at the heart of democratic renewal. Many emphasised that democracy cannot be sustainable without the active, structured and meaningful participation of young people as equal partners in decision-making at all levels. Delegations highlighted the importance of integrating a youth perspective across policy areas and developing concrete national frameworks or action plans to give effect to this principle.

19. Several interventions underlined the role of youth councils, co-management systems, and youth work as essential mechanism for strengthening democratic culture, social cohesion, and trust in institutions. The need to invest in youth-led organisations and to provide adequate financial resources and policy instruments to translate political commitments into tangible outcomes was emphasised. Many speakers stressed that youth participation must go beyond consultation to include real influence, leadership roles, and representation in public institutions.

20. A number of delegations reflected on the impact of the war in Ukraine and the need to safeguard democracy under pressure, recognising young people's resilience and their role in defending European values. Others addressed the shrinking civic space and the challenges posed by disinformation, digital transformation, and declining trust in democratic institutions, calling for stronger citizenship education and democratic competences from an early age.

21. Delegations also referred to innovative national initiatives such as youth checks in legislative processes, lower voting ages at local level, and youth assemblies designed to strengthen participation. The importance of regional co-operation, intergenerational dialogue, and inclusion of marginalised groups was repeatedly emphasised. Across interventions, there was unanimous agreement that investing in young people means investing in Europe's democratic future, and that the outcomes of the Conference should mark a starting point for collective action to renew democracy and strengthen the rule of law across the continent.

22. In-between the two plenary sessions, Miriam Teuma, President of the European Steering Committee for Youth and CEO of Aġenzija Żgħażagħ (Maltese Youth Agency), presented the outcomes of the 4th European Youth Work Convention. She emphasised that that youth work acts a catalyst for positive societal change and democracy, strengthens inclusion, participation and critical engagement, and should be recognised as a professional discipline and understood as a public service. Teuma conveyed the participants' strong call to reinforce youth work at all levels, stressing the pivotal role of member States in building frameworks, funding structures and creating opportunities that enable youth work to flourish. The need to shift from isolated projects to long-term policies was underlined, along with the message that investment in youth work is essential both as a safeguard and a driver for positive societal and political change.

Plenary session 2: "Integrating a Youth Perspective: An Opportunity to Shape Policies Together"

23. Introducing the session, Jessý Rún Jónsdóttir, member of the Advisory Council on Youth, and Séverine Origny-Fleishman, member of the European Steering Committee for Youth in respect of France, jointly presented the Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective, a key outcome of the Council of Europe's co-management system. They explained that the Framework had been developed through close collaboration between governmental and youth representatives within the Joint Council on Youth, providing practical guidance for systematically incorporating the views, experiences and needs of young people into policymaking processes at all levels.

24. Jónsdóttir highlighted that the youth perspective is not merely about inclusion but about transformation, ensuring that young people are recognised as rights-holders and equal partners in democratic life. She stressed that every policy area affects young people directly or indirectly, calling for a cross-sectoral, multi-level and well-resourced approach. She also underlined the importance of sustainability, long-term investment in youth leadership and civic education, and regular evaluation to keep policies relevant and effective.

25. Origny-Fleishman presented the conceptual and practical dimensions of the Framework, structured around four interrelated principles — thinking with, learning with, participating with, and acting with and for young people — underpinned by human rights, pluralism, inclusion and accountability. She described the Framework's three-step methodology of preparation, design and implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, emphasising that active political commitment and a supportive legal environment are essential to its success.

26. Both speakers recalled that the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy and the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government had confirmed the political will to mainstream youth participation across all sectors of the Council of Europe's work. They concluded by inviting governments to apply the Reference Framework as a practical tool to ensure that youth perspectives become a systematic, meaningful and lasting element of democratic governance across Europe.

27. Delegations broadly welcomed the adoption of the Resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective, considering it a timely and practical instrument to move from policies "about" young people to policies developed "with" them. They underlined that meaningful participation requires clear political prioritisation and adequate human and financial resources, noting that youth plans, co-management arrangements and structured dialogue processes only work if they are properly resourced and if young people see concrete results.

28. Several delegations described ongoing efforts to anchor youth participation in law, national youth strategies or permanent advisory bodies. They stressed that co-creation must take place at every stage of the policy cycle and that youth councils and other representative structures should be treated as partners in public decision-making, not as occasional consultees. The Reference Framework was seen as an authoritative basis for member States to systematise such arrangements and to promote cross-sectoral co-operation.

29. A recurring theme in the debate was inclusion and trust. Delegations underlined that participation must reach young people in different life situations, including those outside large urban centres or not organised in formal structures, and that intergenerational dialogue is essential to link today's decisions with tomorrow's realities. They warned against purely symbolic participation and recalled that supportive environments, mentors and accessible spaces are needed for young people to exercise active citizenship.

30. Finally, delegations connected stronger youth participation with the renewal of democratic culture in Europe. They pointed to civic education, lower barriers to political engagement and the involvement of young people in responding to current crises as ways to reinforce confidence in democratic institutions. In this context, the adoption of the Resolution and implementation of the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective was regarded as sending a clear signal that young people are recognised as partners in safeguarding democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

31. The presentation of the main findings of the revision of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life highlighted that the new Charter, developed through the joint efforts of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Council of Europe youth statutory bodies, and an extensive consultation of young people, sets a clear and up-to-date standard for youth participation. This standard is inclusive and framed as both a right and a responsibility. With rights comes corresponding duties: for decision-makers to listen and act; and for civil society to engage; and for young people not only to speak up, but also to take part actively and contribute. The importance of having, in addition, the means, the support, the opportunities, the space to participate was emphasised. A call was made for member States to implement the Charter once adopted, positioning it as a key element for strengthening democracy and supporting the New Democratic Pact for Europe.

Closing session

32. At the closing session, the Chair recalled that the main outputs of the Conference were the Final Declaration and the Resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective. Both texts had been the subject of extensive prior consultations with delegations and had been endorsed by senior officials the previous day. On that basis, the Conference proceeded to the formal adoption of the Resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective, which the Chair proposed — and the Conference agreed — to adopt by acclamation. The Final Declaration was then likewise adopted by acclamation, confirming the broad political consensus achieved during the day.

33. In his closing remarks, the Chair thanked delegations for their active participation in the Conference and in the preparatory process. He underlined that, although the agenda had been ambitious, the discussions had charted a clear and forward-looking course for European youth policy in the coming years, firmly centred on the democratic values of the Council of Europe — democracy, human rights and the rule of law — and on the need to make these more resilient in the face of current challenges. He stressed that thinking, learning and acting with and for young people is not a slogan but an urgent necessity, and that the New Democratic Pact for Europe together with the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective offer concrete instruments to do so. He encouraged delegations to move swiftly to implementation.

34. The Chair also welcomed the presentations on the revision of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life and on the outcomes of the 4th European Youth Work Convention, noting that they provided not only reflection but also guidance for positive action at local and regional levels, where youth participation and youth work have a direct impact. He recalled that it had been many years since ministers responsible for youth had last met and suggested that such ministerial exchanges should take place on a more regular basis to allow for monitoring, adjustment and continued political support to youth policies.

35. At the conference, Luxembourg announced its intention to host the next Council of Europe Ministerial Conference on Youth in 2028. This announcement provides early clarity on the forthcoming ministerial cycle and will enable timely preparatory work by the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) in co-operation with the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ).

36. In their concluding interventions, the Director for Democracy of the Council of Europe and the Permanent Representative of Malta to the Council of Europe, speaking on behalf of the Presidency, underlined that the conference had been not only rich and productive but also an important political moment for the Organisation’s youth agenda. The Director expressed gratitude to the Chair, the Maltese authorities, the committee structures and the youth representatives, noting that the conference itself had already applied the principles later endorsed in the Resolution and the Final Declaration. He recalled the long interval since the last ministerial meeting on youth and the profound changes that had occurred in the meantime, including growing pressure on democracy, which often affects young people most. In that context, he stressed that the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective is not an abstract construction but a consolidation of practices that have already proved effective in the Council of Europe and in member States, such as co-management and youth action against hate speech, and therefore offers immediately usable tools. He linked the day’s outcome to the emerging New Democratic Pact for Europe and emphasised that the youth perspective can bring both immediate and long-term benefits, provided that member States and the Organisation now invest the necessary attention and resources and deliver on the promises made.

37. The Permanent Representative of Malta to the Council of Europe described the conference as a historic and timely gathering, noting that ministers responsible for youth had not met under the Council of Europe's auspices for thirteen years, while societal challenges had multiplied. She underlined that coming together in Valletta around a shared vision for young people and for democracy was itself an act of commitment. She welcomed the adoption, by acclamation, of the Final Declaration and of the Resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective and presented them as a tangible expression of the collective will to make youth participation a democratic imperative. She pointed to a broader movement within Council of Europe bodies to integrate youth perspectives and to learn from the sector's co-management model. Asserting that "people rise to the space they are given," she called on those already in positions of responsibility to create and share such spaces with younger generations, so that youth participation becomes a permanent, valued presence in decision-making and not a one-off invitation.

Follow-up

38. The Committee of Ministers is invited to take note of the report and of the documents adopted by the Ministers responsible for Youth at the Conference, namely the Final Declaration and the Resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective and to forward them, as appropriate, to the relevant statutory bodies, in line with the objectives of the Program and Budget 2026-2027, as well as the terms of references of these bodies.

39. In particular, acknowledging the importance of integrating young people's perspectives, views and expectations in policy-making processes, as an important element for building stronger and more resilient democracies, and its added value in the framework of the New Democratic Pact for Europe, the Committee of Ministers is invited:

a. To instruct the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) to prioritise, as part of its terms of reference and within the budgetary envelope allocated for the biennium 2026-2027, the implementation of the deliverables set out in the Final Declaration, notably:

i. a study on the need for and the feasibility of a new instrument to consolidate and update the Council of Europe's acquis in the youth field;
ii. a study to examine the experience of countries having lowered the voting age.

b. To initiate the process for the preparation of a feasibility study, on the basis of the fundamental principles of the Council of Europe youth policy, on the creation of a third venue of the European Youth Centre in the Black Sea region, within available resources, to provide a dedicated space for youth co-operation, capacity building, and democratic engagement, and to instruct the CDEJ to proceed with the feasibility study;

c. To instruct the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) with identifying follow-up steps and measures to continue supporting the ongoing integration of a youth perspective in intergovernmental and other deliberations, in line with the Programme and Budget 2026-2027 and the requirements of the Resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective;

d. To instruct the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) with identifying appropriate and flexible steps that can support member States in integrating a youth perspective into national policies and processes, in line with the Programme and Budget 2026-2027 - particularly, building on its intergovernmental programme of assistance for youth policy development in member States - and the requirements of the Resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective.

40. It is also invited to congratulate the Maltese Presidency of the Committee of Ministers for hosting the 10th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth and to take note of the invitation of the authorities of Luxembourg to host the next Conference in 2028.

41. It is likewise invited to welcome the meaningful participation of the youth delegates in the Conference, made possible through the organisation of a dedicated youth event preceding the Conference, the full inclusion of youth delegates in all substantive discussions, and the involvement of the President of the Advisory Council on Youth as Vice-Chair of the Conference, and to confirm that this approach should serve as a model for future events of a similar nature.

42. Finally, the Committee of Ministers is invited to welcome the significant progress in the follow-up and implementation of the Reykjavík Declaration regarding youth participation led by the Council of Europe youth sector. It also welcomed the efforts undertaken by the Secretary General to implement the recommendations of the evaluation on the integration of a youth perspective in Council of Europe work, its institutions and services, and member States across the functions of the Organisation, and welcomed the steps taken to prepare an Action Plan for the integration of a youth perspective in the intergovernmental work and other deliberations of the Council of Europe.

Appendix 1 – AGENDA

1. Opening of the Conference
- Address by **Hon. Clifton Grima**, Minister for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation of Malta, Chair of the Conference
- Address by **Alain Berset**, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Short addresses
- Address by **Theodoros Rousopoulos**, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
- Address by **Marc Cools**, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
- Address by **Glenn Micallef**, European Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport
- Address by **Nina Grmuša**, Chairperson of the Advisory Council on Youth and of the Joint Council on Youth
- Address by **Rareș Voicu**, President of the European Youth Forum

2. Thematic session 1 – "Young People and the New Democratic Pact for Europe"
- Keynote address: Young people and democracy in today's Europe by **Federica Mogherini**
- Intervention by **Yevheniia Fedotova**, member of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe
- Exchange of views among ministers and youth delegates

3. Presentation of the main outcomes of the 4th European Youth Work Convention
- Address by Miriam Teuma, the Chair of the European Steering Committee for Youth

4. Thematic session 2 – "Integrating a Youth Perspective: An Opportunity to Shape Policies Together"
- Introduction to the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective by **Séverine Origny - Fleishman**, member of the European Steering Committee for Youth of the Council of Europe and by **Jessý Rún Jónsdóttir,** member of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe
- Exchange of views among ministers and youth delegates on national implementation

5. Presentation of the main findings of the revision of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life
- Addresses by **Aida Karimli**, member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Rapporteur for the Revision of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life and **Matías María Rubio Morillo – Velarde**, member of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe

6. Concluding session
- Adoption of the Resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective
- Adoption of the Final Declaration of the 10th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth
- Presentation of the conclusions of the Chair of the Conference, Minister **Clifton Grima**
- Concluding remarks by **Matjaž Gruden,** Director for Democracy Council of Europe and by **Francesca Camilleri Vettiger**, President of the Ministers' Deputies and Permanent Representative of Malta to the Council of Europe

Appendix 2 – National delegations

Participants whose names appear in bold took the floor during the meeting.

ALBANIA	Apologised
ANDORRA	**Mònica BONELL TUSET**, Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport **Lisa CRUZ LACKNER**, President of the National Youth Council (FNJA) H.E Alain CABANES GALIAN, Secretary of State for Youth and Sport Joaquim PUJOL SÁNCHEZ, Head of Youth Promotion and Volunteering, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport / CDEJ member Andreu JORDI, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Principality of Andorra to the Council of Europe
ARMENIA	**Artur MARTIROSYAN**, Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport **Shushanik BOYAKHCHYAN**, Co-ordinator, Pando Community Development NGO Artur NAJARYAN, Expert of youth field and President of the, Gyumri youth initiative center NGO Zara ASLANYAN, Head of Youth Policy Department / CDEJ member H.E. Armen PAPIKYAN, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Armenia to the Council of Europe
AUSTRIA	**Bernadett HUMER**, Director General for Family and Youth Michael STADLMANN, Youth Representative, National Youth Council (ÖJV) Andreas SCHNEIDER, Head of Department, European and International Youth and Family Policy Markus WOLF, Officer, European and International Youth and Family Policy / CDEJ and GSO member Markus GRAF, Personal Assistant to Markus Wolf
AZERBAIJAN	**Indira HAJIYEVA**, Deputy Minister of Youth and Sport Rafael HAJIBAYLI, Head of National Youth Council (NAYORA) Zarifa ZULFUGAROVA, Head of International Relations Department / CDEJ member Ulviyya AKHUNDOVA, Deputy Head of Youth Affairs Department
BELGIUM	*German-speaking community* Gregor FRECHES, Minister for Culture, Sport, Tourism and Media **Lara BONGARTZ**, Co-ordinator of the National Youth Council (RdJ) Lena PANKERT, Head of the Youth Unit Jennifer NYSSEN, Youth Adviser *French-speaking community* Valérie LESCRENIER, Vice-présidente et Ministre en charge de l'Enfance, de l Jeunesse, de l'Aide à la jeunesse et des Maisons de Justice de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles ; Ministre en charge du Tourisme, du Patrimoine et de la Petite enfance de la Wallonie **Mathilde GRAAS**, European Youth Delegate, National Youth Council (FJ) Laurence HERMAND, Director, Bureau International Jeunesse / CDEJ member Séverine WOLFS, Cabinet Adviser

	Dutch-speaking community **Melissa DEPRAETERE**, Minister of Youth, Flemish Community **Lore SLEECKX**, Youth Representative, NationalYouth Council (VJR) Bart DE BOISERIE, Director of Youth at the Department of Culture, Youth and Media of the Flemish government/ CDEJ member Jan RAYMAEKERS, Youth Adviser, Cabinet of Minister DEPRAETERE
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	Apologised
BULGARIA	**Petar MLADENOV**, Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports **Atanas RADEV**, Chairperson, National Youth Council (NYF) Liliya ELENKOVA, Advisor to the Minister of Youth and Sports / CDEJ member Teodorina TODOROVA, Director of International Co-operation
CROATIA	**Radovan FUCHS**, Minister of Science, Education and Youth Vlasta MIJIĆ, Chief of Cabinet Vanja PAVLOVIĆ, Minister's Counsellor Ivana BARAC LEKO, Ministry of Science, Education and Youth / CDEJ member
CYPRUS	**Constantina ACHILLEOS**, President, Youth Board of Cyprus **Antonis TAMPOURAS**, First Vice President, National Youth Council (CYC)
CZECH REPUBLIC	**Jiří NANTL**, Deputy Minister of Education, Youth and Sports **Lukáš LANGER**, National Youth Council (CRDM) Jana TICHÁČKOVÁ, Head of Youth Policy Unit, Youth Department / CDEJ member Matěj PROKOP, Cabinet Member
DENMARK	**Magnus Kulmsee HAGMANN**, Ministry of Children and Education **Emma KLINT HANSEN**, Youth Delegate, National Youth Council (DUF)
ESTONIA	**Kairi KALDOJA**, Deputy Secretary General **Kaarel TAIMLA**, Chairman, National Youth Council (ENL) Heili GRIFFITH, Head of Youth and Talent Policy Department / CDEJ member Anna Linda VARIK, Adviser, EU and International Co-operation Aino LEPPIK VON WIRÉN, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Permanent Representative
FINLAND	**Mika POUTALA**, Minister of Youth, Sport and Physical Activity **Maria MARKKULA**, Youth Representative, National Youth Council (FYCS) Sanna PUURA, Senior Ministerial Adviser / CDEJ member Annika LYYTIKÄINEN, Special Adviser to the Minister Sini PAUKKUNEN-MYKKÄNEN, Permanent Representative of Finland to the Council of Europe
FRANCE	**Sandrine LELONG-MOTTA**, Ambassador of France to Malta **Célia DÉDÉYAN**, National Youth Council (CNAJEP) Noémie CLARET, Deputy Director of the Minister's Office, responsible for Sports and Economic and Diplomatic Affairs Séverine ORIGNY FLEISHMAN, Head of the International Relations Office of the Directorate for Youth, Public Education and Community Life (DJEPVA) Marie GOISET, Deputy to the Ministry's International Relations Office (DJEPVA), member of the CDEJ

GEORGIA	**Givi MIKANADZE**, Minister of Education, Science and Youth Vakhtang BAAKASHVILI, Acting Head, LEPL Youth Agency/ CDEJ member Nikoloz BESELIA, Head of International Co-operation Khatia TSILOSANI, Permanent Representative of Georgia to the Council of Europe
GERMANY	**Petra BAHR**, State Secretary **Özge ERDOĞAN**, Youth Representative, National Youth Council (DBJR) Uwe FINKE-TIMPE, Head of Unit, European and International Youth Policy Jochen SCHLENK, Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth Heike THIELE, Permanent Representative of Germany to the Council of Europe
GREECE	**Konstantinos GLOUMIS-ATSALAKIS**, Secretary General at the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family Affairs **Elvira MENTZELIOTI**, National Youth Council (ESYN) Fani LAMPROU, Youth Directorate, GSO member Konstantina PISLI, Secretary General's Office Collaborator for Demography and Housing Policy Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family Affairs of the Hellenic Republic, CDEJ member
HOLY SEE	**Dario GERVASI**, Adjunct Secretary of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life Benjamin FLORES MARTIN, Youth Representative Renato CURSI, Expert on youth policies, CDEJ member Rev. Franco Michel SILVA GALDINO, Co-ordinator, Youth Office
HUNGARY	**Zsófia NAGY-VARGHA**, Deputy Minister of State **Réka GAJÁN**, National Youth Council (NIT) Gergely MOHAY, Head of Youth Affairs
ICELAND	Apologised
IRELAND	**Caitríona DOYLE**, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the Council of Europe **Adam LAMBE**, National Youth Council (NYCI) Karl DUFF, Head of Youth Affairs, CDEJ member Lisa KAVANAGH, Youth Sector Specialist
ITALY	**Valentina SETTA**, Ambassador of Italy to Malta Federica VALERI, Youth Policy Officer
KAZAKHSTAN	**Anel BAKYTBEKKYZY**, Consul General in Strasbourg Valikhan BAKHRETDINOV, Head of the NGO "The Country of the Great Steppe", CDEJ member
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Appendix 3 – Final documents

Final Declaration of the 10th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth

1. We, the Ministers responsible for Youth, gathered in Valletta on 9 October 2025, with the objective of increasing confidence, improving quality and strengthening the resilience of our democracies through stronger youth participation, drawing on the Council of Europe's New Democratic Pact for Europe, affirm our commitment to enhancing democracy, human rights and the rule of law by consolidating young people's role in democratic life and their perspectives in decision-making processes. We decide, therefore, to reinforce European youth policy and the Council of Europe's work in the field of youth.

2. In today's Europe, the pursuit of peace, based on justice and international co-operation, is vital for preserving young people's access to rights. Our efforts must focus on the ability to live in peaceful and inclusive societies. Recognising the vital role of young people in peacebuilding, we stress the importance of reinforcing citizenship education in peacebuilding and intercultural dialogue as a valuable means to strengthen respect for human rights and democratic values, as well as the resilience and social cohesion of European societies.

3. Young people are dynamic, diverse and dedicated drivers for positive change. They are shaping 21st century European societies in a new digital, demographic, and environmental context, based on their support for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

4. Young generations have the knowledge, skills and perspectives to be change-makers and to build a present and future rooted in the Council of Europe's youth policy standards. Through mutual trust, open dialogue, meaningful participation and co-creation with public institutions, they contribute to building societies in which they have confidence.

5. Young people are not a homogeneous group, yet many of them face common challenges. These can include high unemployment rates, unfavourable, unsafe or precarious working conditions, wage discrimination, and limited and unequal access to quality healthcare, education and affordable housing, which are barriers to their autonomy. Young people are also underrepresented in political decision-making and must be supported in their electoral participation and involvement in democratic processes, both as voters and as candidates. Access to rights and quality youth information remain issues, particularly for young people with fewer opportunities. Youth democratic participation is further hindered by the impact of conflicts and wars, which threaten their security. Poor mental health prevents many young people from participating fully.

6. Young people are crucial to the shaping of our shared and democratic future; their perspectives are key to strengthening democratic institutions and improving the quality of decision-making processes. Consequently, we adopt a Resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective, which provides a model to guide the Council of Europe and its member States in integrating a youth perspective across areas of policymaking that concern young people. The aim is to develop more forward-looking and future-proof policies that reflect the needs and energy of young people and are responsive to current and future challenges. This approach builds on the Reykjavík Declaration; it embraces a new way of thinking and charters a progressive way forward. We commit to ensuring its implementation.

7. The Council of Europe is an essential partner in empowering young people to take action and respond to these challenges, to uphold and defend human rights and to participate fully in democratic life. Thirteen years after the last Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth, the Council of Europe remains a key actor in youth policy within the architecture of international organisations and European institutions.

8. For decades, the Council of Europe has been a key driving force behind the development of youth policy in Europe. Thanks to its pioneering co-management system in the youth field, the Organisation's member States and young people have worked together to build more democratic and inclusive societies across Europe, supported by key instruments, namely the European Youth Centres, the European Youth Foundation; the Partial Agreement on Youth Mobility through the Youth Card, and the partnership with the European Commission in the youth field. The Organisation's work in this area has included setting standards for knowledge and evidence-based youth policies, youth-policy co-operation, human rights and education for democratic citizenship programmes, campaigns, capacity-building and youth-work activities.

9. We reaffirm the need for support for and recognition of the role of youth structures and national, regional and local youth councils in increasing the participation of young people in democratic life, especially in times when the civic space is shrinking. We commit to ensuring that young people's democratic rights in electoral processes are respected, as the basis for democracy. To this end we invite the Committee of Ministers to entrust the youth statutory bodies with carrying out a study to examine the experience of countries having lowered the voting age.

10. We welcome the progress towards the adoption of the European Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life, jointly elaborated with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. The Charter will give a new impetus to youth participation and to the support of youth organisations at local and regional levels. We are committed to fostering these through Council of Europe and national initiatives.

11. We support the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030 that has identified, as the guiding principles for the Council of Europe's work until the end of the decade: strengthening democratic participation and enlarging the civic space for young people, broadening young people's access to rights, supporting young people to live in peaceful and inclusive societies, and improving the recognition and quality of youth work across Europe. We invite the Committee of Ministers to entrust the youth statutory bodies with assessing the need for and the feasibility of a new instrument to consolidate and update the Council of Europe's acquis in the youth field. This instrument could also serve to acknowledge a rights-based approach.

12. We reconfirm that young people's access to rights, notably social rights, is an indispensable precondition for the democratic participation of young people, particularly in a new digital era marked by powerful and transformative technologies such as artificial intelligence. Mitigating the risks arising from such technologies and developing appropriate safeguards for young people to enjoy their rights –including digital literacy for a democratic space - is of key importance. A special focus should be placed on youth policies for young people with fewer opportunities and in vulnerable situations; their perspectives should be included in policymaking.

13. We acknowledge the urgency of the climate crisis, and the vital role young people play in addressing it. We welcome their contributions in tackling present and future challenges, notably combating the triple planetary crisis (pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss) and its economic and social consequences, and in ensuring that the reflection on the nature and implications of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment moves forward. In the spirit of the New Democratic Pact for Europe and based on European human rights standards we commit to the safeguarding of their right of free speech, their right to protest and their right of collective action, in defending the aforementioned goals. We encourage member States to explore investment options in programmes that empower youth to lead climate action and pro-environmental initiatives, promoting sustainability and resilience at local and regional levels.

14. We reaffirm that the Council of Europe's support for Ukraine in the field of youth remains a priority. This includes solidarity, targeted intergovernmental activities, and co-operation with non-governmental youth organisations and networks that foster young people's participation in democratic life and contribute to the recovery of Ukraine, including its youth infrastructure and the reintegration of young veterans. We value transnational voluntary services for young people as an important instrument to support youth engagement in solidarity and reconstruction efforts, with a view to building a peaceful and democratic future.

15. As a sign of our commitment to ensuring that young people in Ukraine, and the wider region, can uphold, defend, and benefit from the core values of the Council of Europe, we invite the Committee of Ministers to carry out a feasibility study on the basis of the fundamental principles of the Council of Europe youth policy on the creation of the third venue of the European Youth Centre in the Black Sea region, within available resources, to provide a dedicated space for youth co-operation, capacity building, and democratic engagement. At the same time, we underline the need to invest in the existing European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest to ensure their continued role and well-functioning as hubs for youth participation and policy development. We underline that securing sustainable financial contributions from member States is essential for maintaining these structures, ensuring they effectively support youth engagement and democratic resilience across the continent.

16. We express appreciation for the co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the areas of youth research and youth work and call on both Institutions to strengthen their collaboration beyond existing programmes.

17. We emphasise the importance of youth research as a foundation for evidence-based youth policy, ensuring that policy decisions are informed by robust data, analysis, and the realities faced by young people.

18. We welcome the conclusions of the 4th European Youth Work Convention, held in Malta in May 2025, and support its follow-up as a means of prioritising a strategic vision for the future of youth work in Europe. We reaffirm our commitment to strengthening and advancing youth work in our respective countries and ensuring it remains a key priority through sustained support for youth organisations and youth-work providers. This includes investing in their capacity-building and fostering co-operation between both professional and volunteer youth workers to promote the recognition and visibility of youth work, as well as disseminating standards, knowledge, and good practices while embracing innovative approaches.

19. We welcome the reform of the European Youth Foundation, and agree that co-management, intergovernmental co-operation, including through policy assistance and the Council of Europe's country action plans, the programme of the Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres, the European Youth Information Quality Label and the promotion of innovative approaches to youth participation in democratic and civic spaces, should remain priorities for the Council of Europe youth policy and action in the coming years.

20. We reaffirm that conferences of ministers responsible for youth are an important decision-making platform at the European level and call upon member States to commit to hosting future conferences and note with gratitude the invitation of the authorities of Luxembourg to host the next Conference in 2028.

21. We thank the Maltese authorities for their initiative to host the 10th Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth and their generous hospitality.

Resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective

The specialised Ministers of the Council of Europe member States, on the occasion of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth, "Young People for Democracy: Youth Perspective in Action", jointly organised by the Council of Europe and Malta on 8 and 9 October 2025, Valletta, adopt the following resolution:

1. Welcoming the positive contribution and creative potential that young people bring to our democracies and to European unity, and convinced that developing with young people the conditions for their meaningful participation in democracy will strengthen mutual trust in constitutional democracy, democratic institutions and the shared civic space;

2. Confident that the integration of young people's views and needs in areas of policymaking that concern them, leads to more forward-looking, future-proof policies and strengthens participatory democracy;

3. Having regard to the Declaration of the 4th Council of Europe Summit in Reykjavík, in which the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe underlined the importance of a "youth perspective in the Organisation's intergovernmental and other deliberations as youth participation in decision-making processes improves the effectiveness of public policies and strengthens democratic institutions through open dialogue";

4. Recalling the Reykjavík Principles of Democracy of the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, adopted at their 4th Summit held in 2023, in which they also committed to give priority "to supporting the participation of young persons in democratic life and decision-making processes, including through education about human rights and core democratic values, such as pluralism, inclusion, non-discrimination, transparency and accountability";

5. Resolved to create new and innovative approaches to empowering young people and fostering their active citizenship, taking into account the values of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture[1] and the objectives of the European Year of Digital Citizenship Education 2025;

6. Considering the Declaration of the Committee of Ministers, adopted at its 133rd Session in Strasbourg (May 2024, Strasbourg), on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Organisation, underlining the renewed and strengthened relationship between the Council of Europe and young people, and welcoming the adoption of the four elements articulating the youth perspective – Think with young people, Learn from and with young people, Participate with young people, and Act with and for young people – to guide the development of a Reference Framework on a youth perspective;

7. Recalling the Council of Europe's standards on young people's access to rights, on young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods' access to social rights, and on youth work, as set out in the relevant recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to member States and in the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education[2];

8. Taking into account the standards on young people's participation, set out in the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, and relevant recommendations and guidelines of the Committee of Ministers[3];

9. Drawing attention to Resolution CM/Res(2020)2 on the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030, which places emphasis on revitalising pluralistic democracy by increasing the capacity of youth civil society to advance participatory democracy and democratic citizenship, and on strengthening youth policy and youth work to remove barriers to youth participation;

10. Recognising the Council of Europe's leading role in promoting youth participation through its innovative co-management system in the field of youth, which serves as a commendable model of co-operation between young people and public authorities in policy and decision-making processes, and its landmark instruments, namely the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest, the European Youth Foundation and the Partial Agreement on Youth Mobility through the Youth Card;

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[1] The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture can be found via this link: https://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture.

[2] Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to member States: respectively CM/Rec(2016)7 on young people's access to rights, CM/Rec(2015)3 on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighborhoods to social rights, CM/Rec(2017)4 on youth work, CM/Rec(2010)7 on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education.

[3] Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on supporting youth civil society and young people and "Youth Participation 2.0" guidelines for enhancing youth participation at local, regional and national levels.

11. Convinced that young people and youth civil society organisations are powerful agents of change, bringing fresh insights and innovative solutions to the development of European societies, and playing an important role in opening public discourse;

12. Expressing appreciation for the progress achieved by the Council of Europe and its youth sector since 1972 in fostering youth participation and putting young people's perspectives at the forefront of policy- and decision-making processes and congratulating the youth statutory bodies for paving the way for significant developments in policy and action.

In view of the above:

13. We welcome the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective, in appendix to this Resolution, as a unique and novel approach offering a practical path towards more dynamic and relevant policymaking, so that young people's experiences, needs and interests are taken into account in all policy areas affecting them.

14. We underline that the Reference Framework is a significant and innovative instrument for strengthening democracy through youth participation, and for developing just and inclusive policies that benefit both current and future generations.

15. We agree that the youth perspective is structured around four interconnected conceptual elements:

a) Attitude: *Think with young people:* the mindset recognising young people as active contributors to policymaking,

b) Experience: *Learn from and with young people:* the interactive processes enabling intergenerational learning, fostering mutual understanding and respect between policymakers and young people,

c) Skills: *Participate with young people:* the competencies needed for meaningful youth participation, grounded in democratic values like inclusion, pluralism, and non-discrimination,

d) Action: *Act with and for young people:* the commitment to actively including youth views and aspirations in the various stages of the policy cycle - deliberation, formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

16. We further agree that the effective integration of a youth perspective into policy work relies on two key factors: on the one hand, recognising young people as rights holders, valuing their knowledge, skills and perspectives, and ensuring their active participation in policymaking in areas concerning them, from the development of policies to their implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and impact assessment; and, on the other, a sustained commitment from both policymakers and young people, grounded in intergenerational solidarity and collaboration and supported by adequate financial and human resources.

17. We encourage the integration of a youth perspective into policy and decision-making processes in areas concerning youth through a step-by-step approach capitalising on context-specific realities and allowing each entity to assess its own starting position and how to move forward.

18. We undertake to consider further integrating the youth perspective into national policies that concern young people, inspired by the Reference Framework, while taking into account the specific contexts of our member States, with a view to developing responsive, inclusive, and effective policies addressing the needs and aspirations of young people.

19. We invite the Council of Europe:

a) To support member States in their efforts to integrate a youth perspective into their policies, drawing on the Reference Framework, the expertise, resources and good practices of the Council of Europe youth sector, and promoting intergovernmental co-operation in the field of youth.

b) To continue its work in this field and to mandate the Joint Council on Youth to develop practical tools (such as guidelines, checklists, and training modules) to support the implementation of the Reference Framework and strengthen related capacity-building efforts.

c) To prioritise efforts to integrate a youth perspective across the Organisation highlighting the importance of the Council of Europe Reference Framework, emphasising the central role of the Council of Europe's youth statutory bodies and Youth Department, particularly in providing high-quality support.

Appendix I to the Resolution

Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective

1. Introduction

1.1 Young people[4] and youth organisations are powerful agents of positive change, addressing societal challenges with creativity and determination. They play a key role in shaping public discourse on issues such as climate change, social justice, digital rights, and democratic participation and are committed to finding solutions to both local and global problems.

1.2 At the youth event *Confidence in Tomorrow*, organised on the occasion of the Council of Europe's 75th anniversary (May 2024), young people voiced their dedication to a democratic Europe and discussed their anxiety/worries about the state of democracy. They expressed frustration with democratic institutions that fail to protect human rights, uphold the rule of law, and promote peace. They shared a deep concern that their civic space is not only shrinking, but is actively under attack, highlighting the rise of authoritarianism and anti-democratic trends as key factors contributing to this decline, and emphasising the threat these pose to their ability to operate and advocate for rights and freedoms.[5]

1.3 Young people in Council of Europe member States face barriers to civic participation, demographic marginalisation, discrimination, economic insecurity and an unsafe digital environment which can, inter alia, discourage them from participating. As a result, member States face low youth voter turnout, which can be as low as 50% or less, depending on the type of election[6]. Limited representation of young people in policymaking, in turn, creates a significant gap between policy decisions and their lived experiences. A 2022 survey shows that young people's trust in their governments to adequately protect their rights has declined significantly.[7]

1.4 Furthermore, young people face a complex web of social challenges that prevent them from fully exercising their rights. They are especially vulnerable to poverty, homelessness, and health issues, both physical and mental. Barriers to education, vocational training, and employment opportunities remain, particularly for vulnerable and marginalised groups of young people.

1.5 As social and economic inequalities rise and challenges to the Council of Europe's values persist, young people are losing trust in democracy and institutions and are exposed to social exclusion. They feel a real need for peace, and an environment that creates safe spaces where they can learn and grow, including through education that fosters critical thinking and civic engagement. By staying informed and involved in the policy and decision-making processes, they can contribute to creating a more inclusive and just future in an uncertain world, where the voices of all young people are heard and heeded. Developing and ensuring conditions for youth participation in democracy with young people themselves will also strengthen mutual trust in constitutional democracy, democratic institutions and the shared civic space.

2. The Council of Europe's work in the youth field and the emergence of a new Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective

2.1 For over 50 years, the Council of Europe has recognised the crucial role of young people and youth organisations in promoting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. The Organisation has created structures that encourage youth participation, and their active involvement has been key to preserving and advancing these values. In the Youth Department, the co-management system, where young people and public authorities collaborate in policy- and decision-making processes, is a notable example. The European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest provide safe spaces for youth work, while the European Youth Foundation supports youth activities across member States. The Youth Partnership between the EU and the Council of Europe in the field of youth has fostered co-operation between the two Organisations on subjects of common interest.

[4] Youth is understood as a period of transitions to autonomy, from childhood through adolescence to adulthood. There is no fixed age-group for youth. The Council of Europe youth sector offers activities for young people aged 18 to 30. The broadest range of Council of Europe member States' youth policies is from 12 to 35 years.
[5] Confidence in Tomorrow youth event – participants' message to Council of Europe duty bearers.
[6] https://data.europa.eu/en/publications/datastories/understanding-youth-engagement-europe-through-open-data.
[7] https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/delivering-for-youth-how-governments-can-put-young-people-at-the-centre-of-the-recovery_92c9d060-en/full-report.html

2.2 Youth participation is embedded in various Council of Europe policies and initiatives. Committee of Ministers' Recommendation Rec(2006)14 on citizenship and participation of young people in public life emphasises the importance of young people's involvement in democracy, offering guidelines for member States on how to further this. The Organisation's Strategic Framework 2020 and its Roadmap on Civil society engagement with the Council of Europe 2024-2027[8] both highlight the importance of youth participation in promoting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. The revised European Charter on Youth Participation of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities provides a set of principles, best practices and guidelines to enhance youth participation at local and regional levels. The Congress' Resolution 152(2023) stresses that participation should include the right, the means, and the opportunity for young people to engage in decision-making, with adequate support. Concrete tools, such as the Partial Agreement on Youth Mobility through the Youth Card, also support young people's participation and facilitate their access to rights.

2.3 The 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe's 46 member States (May 2023) set out a novel approach for the Organisation, notably the integration of a youth perspective in its work, including intergovernmental and other activities. "*We set the Council of Europe on a new path of increased transparency and co-operation with its stakeholders, with strengthened visibility and sufficient resources. This should include a youth perspective in the Organisation's intergovernmental and other deliberations as youth participation in decision-making processes improves the effectiveness of public policies and strengthens democratic institutions through open dialogue. We also call for a review and further reinforcement of the Organisation's outreach to, and meaningful engagement with, civil society organisations and national human rights institutions.*" *Reykjavík Declaration, 16 May 2023*.

2.4 The Reykjavík Principles for Democracy[9] underlined the need "*to invest in a democratic future by ensuring that everyone is able to play their role in democratic processes*", underlining that *"priority will be given to supporting the participation of young persons in democratic life and decision-making processes, including through education about human rights and core democratic values, such as pluralism, inclusion, non-discrimination, transparency and accountability*". They also reaffirmed that "*civil society is a prerequisite for a functioning democracy and commit[ted] to supporting and maintaining a safe and enabling environment in which civil society, as well as human rights defenders, can operate free from hindrance, insecurity and violence."*

2.5 The Reykjavík Declaration signals a clear commitment from the Council of Europe and member States to enhance youth participation in policy- and decision-making processes, with the opportunity to further strengthen political will, co-operation, resources, and innovation in youth engagement.

2.6 At the level of both member States and the Council of Europe, the inclusion of a youth perspective can help counteract trends of non-participation of young people in democratic processes and declining trust in public institutions. It can further democratise policymaking by enabling the development of policies based on dialogue and an intergenerational approach, which are likely to be more responsive to citizens' needs and therefore have a direct impact on society as a whole. A broad participatory culture is a strong enabling factor for the youth perspective to thrive.

2.7 Consequently, the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) initiated work on a Reference Framework to integrate a youth perspective across diverse policy areas. The Reference Framework includes four conceptual elements: **Think with young people, Learn from and with young people, Participate with young people, and Act with and for young people**. In 2024, the Committee of Ministers endorsed these elements to guide the preparation and implementation of the Reference Framework.

2.8 The Framework is designed to enhance collaboration between young people, youth civil society, and political decision-makers at national, regional and local levels, in line with the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030 in policy and decision-making. Moreover, it aims at supporting Council of Europe bodies and intergovernmental committees in their efforts to integrate a youth perspective in their work.

2.9 The Reference Framework is flexible, allowing users to adapt it to their specific contexts and needs, drawing on the expertise of the Council of Europe youth sector and other relevant experience. It is expected to evolve into a toolbox to further support the integration of a youth perspective, through practical tools such as training modules, checklists, guidelines and a compendium of good practices at all levels. Awareness-raising and capacity-building activities will accompany it.

[8] SG/Inf(2023)28.
[9] Adopted as part of the Reykjavík Declaration.

2.10 The following sections are intended to provide guidance on the substantive and methodological foundations of the Reference Framework and how it can be implemented within the Council of Europe. The Reference Framework can also be used by member States.

3. The vision

3.1 Acknowledging the positive contribution and change that young people bring to democracy and European unity, and renewing commitment to the improvement of the living conditions and the protection and strengthening of the human rights of young people, the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective envisions:

a) Participatory democracy – guaranteeing young people's meaningful participation in democratic processes, and enhancing the impact, relevance, and resilience of public policies across Europe;

b) Inclusive policies that benefit young people – present and future generations – across policy fields that affect them, while promoting transparency, equity, and open dialogue with diverse stakeholders.

4. The four conceptual elements of the "youth perspective"

4.1 A "youth perspective" is a strategic approach to policy and decision-making that ensures young people's experiences, needs, and interests are consistently included throughout the various stages of the policy process. It recognises the competent contributions of young people and ensures their meaningful participation. This approach aims to create more relevant and future-oriented policies by introducing structural changes in how policies are elaborated, adopted, adapted, implemented, and evaluated with and for young people.

4.2 A "youth perspective" can be approached through four interconnected conceptual elements: **Think with young people, Learn from and with young people, Participate with young people, and Act with and for young people**. Each of these contributes to a comprehensive approach, and together they can foster meaningful youth engagement in policy processes. The elements are described as follows:

4.3 **Think with young people – Attitude:** the mindset recognising young people as active contributors to policymaking. This entails:

a) Opening communication channels with young people and youth organisations and structures to understand better their aspirations, needs and concerns;

b) Conducting research to understand the ambitions and experiences of young people, with a view to developing evidence-based policies;

c) Challenging stereotypes and promoting respect for young people's perspectives and lived experiences.

4.4 **Learn from and with young people – Experience**: the interactive processes enabling intergenerational learning, fostering mutual understanding and respect between policymakers and young people. This entails:

a) Encouraging open dialogue with a wide and diverse range of young people and creating an inclusive, empathetic environment with shared responsibility;

b) Establishing or strengthening mechanisms that allow young people to contribute meaningfully to policy- and decision-making in the areas that concern them;

c) Building and adapting participatory tools with young people that meet their diverse needs and foster solidarity and intergenerational learning.

4.5 **Participate with young people – Skills**: the competencies needed for meaningful youth participation, grounded in democratic values such as inclusion, pluralism, and non-discrimination. This involves:

a) Developing the capacity of policymakers, youth workers, young people and youth organisations and structures to enhance the skills needed for meaningful participation and effective intergenerational collaboration;

b) Using accessible language and adapting methods for effective youth engagement;

c) Co-developing tools for intergenerational decision-making and strengthening youth participation infrastructure.

4.6 **Act with and for young people – Action:** the commitment to actively include young people's views and aspirations in the policy cycle – deliberation, formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. This involves:

a) Creating safe spaces for dialogue and meaningful youth participation;

b) Allocating resources to jointly create policies that shape a sustainable and inclusive future;

c) Ensuring proper follow-up to young people's proposals and implementation of agreed policy changes.

4.7 Together, these four conceptual elements lay the foundations for ensuring that young people's voices are meaningfully and sustainably integrated into policy and decision-making processes. However, integrating a youth perspective into policy processes requires the understanding that different institutions and structures may start from different points. The approach should be context-specific, with each structure assessing its own starting point to make practical progress. The focus should be on continuous reflection and improvement, ensuring that young people's involvement is included across the various policy areas concerning youth.

4.8 Effective integration relies on two main factors:

a) **Recognition of young people's knowledge, skills and perspectives**: recognising young people as rights holders, ensuring their active participation in policy and decision-making, from the development of policies to their implementation, monitoring and evaluation, including impact assessment.

b) **Commitment and resources**: integration of a youth perspective must be sustained over time, requiring both institutional commitment and adequate resources. The latter include:

i. Financial resources: Sufficient funding to support youth participation and the processes needed to integrate a youth perspective.

ii. Human resources: Dedicated staff time and capacity for effective cross-sectoral collaboration to integrate youth perspectives into policy.

5. Guiding principles for integrating a youth perspective in decision-making processes

5.1 The principles for integrating a youth perspective in decision-making processes include:

a) **Young people as rights holders**: Young people have specific needs that should be included across policy areas that concern them. They have the right to equal participation and to influence various stages of the policy cycle. Co-operation with the youth sector to adapt policy and decision-making processes, ensuring the effective incorporation of the views and aspirations of young people should be encouraged.

b) **Human rights-based approach**: Youth participation should be guided by the values of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, as outlined in the European Convention on Human Rights. Young people are diverse, with differences in age, gender, socio-economic background, and region, which can impact their ability to exercise their rights.

c) **Cross-sectoral approach**: A youth perspective should be included in all sectors. Collaboration between entities in charge of youth policy and those in charge of other policy areas should be a focus, with transparent structures and adequate resources dedicated to youth engagement.

d) **Intergenerational justice and solidarity**: Integrating a youth perspective should consider fairness and mutual respect between generations, while also addressing the impact and consequences of today's decisions on both current and future generations of society.

e) **Interdisciplinary and multi-stakeholder co-operation**: Expertise from various fields, civil society, youth organisations, academia and advocacy groups should be systematically integrated to create fair and sustainable policies.

f) **Intersectionality:** Policies must address the barriers faced by young people from different backgrounds and intersecting identities, ensuring equitable participation, particularly for vulnerable and marginalised groups.

g) **Multilevel action:** Authorities at all levels should actively promote and facilitate the capacity-building of young people to engage in decision-making processes in the areas concerning them.

h) **Sustainability**: Long-term investment in youth leadership, civic education, and sustainable partnerships with youth structures is essential for meaningful participation. Mechanism for integrating a youth perspective should be regularly assessed and adapted to ensure they remain relevant and responsive.

6. Practical guidance for integrating a youth perspective in decision-making processes

6.1 While the conceptual elements outlined in section 4 enable users to build a solid foundation for this process, the following three-phase approach describes in practical terms how a youth perspective can be fully implemented sequentially.

6.2 This approach builds on three consecutive phases: 1) Preparation, 2) Design and implementation, and 3) Monitoring and evaluation, which need to be adapted to the different needs and contexts in the member States and at Council of Europe level[10]. These three phases set the path for proposing or revising policies to meet the needs and protect the rights of young people.[11]

PHASE 1. PREPARATION

6.3 This phase involves setting a solid ground for integrating a youth perspective, with several key requirements:

a) **High-level political commitment from senior policy actors** to support the integration of a youth perspective in policy areas that concern young people.

b) **Commitment from young people to actively participate in decision-making processes** once the high-level political commitment has been confirmed.

c) **Enabling standards and legislation** that help to shift policymaking from a traditional sector-based approach to one that incorporates youth concerns across all policies. It may:

i. Define governance mechanisms for policy interactions across sectors on youth-related matters.

[10] At the level of the Council of Europe, specific complementary mechanisand programmes for integrating a youth perspective exist, ranging from the appointment of youth rapporteurs and the employment of youth experts to the admission of young people's organisations as observers, to the participation of the Advisory Council in Youth in intergovernmental work and other activities. There are also complementary mechanisand programmes at national, regional and local level, as identified in the study "Learning from national and local approaches to youth mainstreaming and use of youth perspective in policymaking across Europe".

[11] Some proposals and concepts can be found in the study "Learning from national and local approaches to youth mainstreaming and use of youth perspective in policymaking across Europe" by Dan Moxon, Marko Kovačić, Veronica Ștefan, December 2024.

ii. Require actors outside the youth sector to engage with youth-related matters.

iii. Enable the youth sector, including youth organisations, to share its expertise, while ensuring that other sectors contribute resources and actively support the integration of a youth perspective.

d) **Increased organisational capacity** by bolstering resources and skills in both the youth sector and other policy sectors to facilitate the integration of a youth perspective. Efforts should include:

i. Capacity-building for dialogue, information sharing, and co-designing tools.
ii. Investments in creating and safeguarding spaces for youth participation, both formal and non-formal.

PHASE 2. DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

6.4 This phase involves operationalising the integration of a youth perspective by identifying priority policies that have the most significant impact on young people, gathering input and adapting policies accordingly. This includes:

a) **Sustainable participatory mechanisms**: Execute mechanisms for youth participation in policy deliberation at different stages, such as youth consultations, forums, advisory groups, or co-management structures. These should be developed collaboratively with young people and youth organisations to ensure meaningful participation.

b) **Human rights-based expert impact assessments**: Consider conducting assessments to evaluate how policies impact young people before making policy decisions (ex-ante) and after implementation (ex-post).

PHASE 3. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

6.5 This phase aims to ensure the continued effective integration of a youth perspective, involving:

a) **Technical assessment**: Evaluating how well youth perspectives are integrated in line with the Reference Framework.

b) **Human rights-based monitoring and evaluation**: Evaluations of the impact of policies on young people should be conducted after their implementation. These assessments should involve young people and youth organisations, researchers, workers and policymakers, and use measurable indicators, including human rights indicators.

6.6 Institutions and structures interested in meaningfully integrating a youth perspective are encouraged to start by assessing their current position within this framework. From there, they can take concrete steps towards integrating a youth perspective into policy processes using the three-phase operational approach.

7. Commitment and support for the integration of a youth perspective

7.1 The integration of a youth perspective should continue to be a priority for the Council of Europe. It requires a proactive, long-term commitment and effort to make youth participation a core component of policymaking processes. Appropriate resources (both financial and human) and capacity building are needed to implement it successfully.

7.2 More specifically for the Council of Europe, it is important to:

a) Adopt an over-arching strategic approach, based on this Reference Framework, and an action plan to ensure the integration of a youth perspective across the Organisation.

b) Encourage opportunities for mutual learning between Council of Europe staff, representations, and young people, based on the Youth Department's expertise and networks.

c) Strengthen quality assurance and access to supporting tools and materials, recognising the central role of the Youth Department in this regard, and guidance to operationalise the Reference Framework.

d) Continue supporting the integration of the youth perspective across different sectors, instruments and bodies, relying on the active contribution and expertise of the Advisory Council on Youth and its partner organisations.

7.3 Furthermore, when it comes to co-operation with member States and youth civil society organisations, the Youth Department, subject to appropriate resources, will:

a) Offer advice on participatory mechanisms and identify good practice to address sectoral needs across the Organisation and in member States, through its Joint Council on Youth.

b) Continue empowering young people, promoting knowledge sharing and competence transfer by supporting youth representatives in advocacy work and campaigning, communities of practice and platform for peer exchange.

c) Step up policy assistance measures for member States (including youth policy advisory missions, peer reviews, 50/50 training models) to support the integration of a youth perspective in national policies and actions.

d) Develop new tools (guidelines, checklists, training modules) to facilitate the practical implementation of the Reference Framework.

8. Conclusion

8.1 At the Reykjavík Summit, the Council of Europe and its member States reaffirmed their commitment to effective public policies and stronger democratic institutions through open dialogue. This Reference Framework aims to honour this commitment by supporting the integration of a youth perspective in policy areas that concern young people. Integrating a youth perspective is not just a matter of inclusiveness, intergenerational justice and equity. It is a political need to create policies in an agile way that are both forward-looking and responsive to the evolving needs of young people.

8.2 As the Council of Europe has shown, young people and youth organisations are powerful agents of positive change, bringing fresh insights and innovative solutions to pressing societal challenges. They are ready to express their needs and aspirations. Their involvement in relevant policy- and decision-making processes is essential to ensure policies are relevant, future-proof and adapted to dynamic realities.

8.3 The real challenge, however, is to ensure that young people's voices are heard, listened to and acted upon in a way that leads to meaningful and tangible policy changes. The Reference Framework provides a clear path for reforming policymaking and transforming youth participation and engagement into a substantial force for change, bringing young people's demands to an equal standing across policy areas that concern them.

8.4 The successful integration of the Reference Framework depends on the continuous political will and commitment of institutions and policymakers, and the continuous engagement and support of young people and youth organisations. Young people have knowledge, skills and perspectives, and can bring expertise; they must be recognised as rights holders. Their meaningful participation should be ensured at every stage of policy development. Further, without the adaptation or adoption of policies that reflect the findings of consultation mechanisms and impact assessments, the youth perspective exercise risks being tokenistic and reinforcing the existing disconnect between young people and policymakers. For a lasting impact, the Reference Framework should also be supported by sufficient resources and a continuous process of reflection and improvement.

8.5 By committing to the Reference Framework and its implementation, the Council of Europe and European policymakers reaffirm their dedication to integrating a youth perspective in shaping a future of just and inclusive policies that will benefit both current and future generations.