

YouthProAktiv Youth declaration on “The Way to Increase Youth Democratic Participation”

YouthProAktiv, a coalition leading the promotion of proactivity and entrepreneurship in education and policy, emphasizes the European Union's dedication to encouraging active youth engagement in democracy and society.

Engaging youth in decision-making is a key EU priority, especially in 2024, marked by the June European Parliament elections. With 366 million eligible voters, these elections were crucial for nearly 30 million first-time young voters. The April Flash Eurobarometer survey on *Youth and Democracy* showed 64% of young people intended to vote. However, while 38% believed voting is the most effective way to be heard, 19% were uninterested in politics, and 13% in voting. Following the June elections, the question remains whether the EU institutions have been successful in increasing young voter turnout.

While the 2019 elections saw an unprecedented 50.6% turnout—largely due to youth participation—the 2024 elections saw only a slight increase to 51%. Nonetheless, European democracy encompasses more than just voting; it includes civic engagement and participation in the democratic process, where youth play a crucial role. This highlights the need for comprehensive strategies to enhance youth participation, as outlined in several key documents and initiatives.

The Committee of the Regions' *Charter on Youth and Democracy* (2022) offers concrete recommendations for enhancing youth participation in social, political, and civic life at all levels of governance. It aims to create a youth-friendly democratic space where young voices are formally, continuously, and permanently represented in the EU. Similarly, Citizens' proposals 36–38 from the *Conference on the Future of Europe* (2022) present a wide range of ideas for improving European democracies through better information provision, information processing abilities, and access to strong democratic institutions and processes.

In response to these recommendations and building on the legacy of the European Year of Youth 2022, the European Commission announced in January 2024 its plans to shape the future of EU youth policy. This initiative aligns with the *2019-2027 EU Youth Strategy* and focuses on giving youth a stronger voice in EU policymaking to sustain democratic processes and ideals. It also aims to address youth concerns across various policy areas to achieve socio-economic development and political stability.

Additionally, the Council of Europe's *2024-2027 Priorities for the Youth Sector*, particularly “Priority 1: Revitalising Pluralistic Democracy”, aim to enhance the capacity of youth organizations and member states to develop youth policy and youth work for democratic participation.

To truly enhance youth democratic participation, concrete mechanisms and policies are essential. Concretely, we propose the following actions:

At the EU level:

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1. We strongly encourage the sustainability of the *together.eu* platform to:
 - a. Ensure the accessibility of information on voting procedures with targeted campaigns for first-time voters.
 - b. Promote democratic understanding and engagement among European youth by hosting a community engaged in the democratic process.
2. We call on the new European Commission to:
 - a. Build on lessons from the Conference on the Future of Europe to enhance youth consultation, fully utilizing mechanisms like the EU Youth Dialogue and ensuring outcomes are considered in decision-making.
 - b. As promoted by the Future Generations Initiative, of which YouthProAktiv is an active member, the establishment of a European Commissioner for Future Generations will provide more opportunities for youth to contribute to policymaking, ensuring their generation is represented.
3. We encourage the European Commission and the Council of the EU to support Member States in gathering and analysing data on the use of services such as the EU online youth portal, to identify whether the information reaches socio-economically disadvantaged youth.

At the national level:

4. We endorse the 2022 European Parliament *Report on the implementation of citizenship education actions*, calling on local and regional authorities in Member States to fund and enhance citizenship education and EU education at all levels.
5. We call upon Member States to improve the participation of young people facing socio-economic disadvantages in national politics through better representation on National Youth Councils, Advisory Boards, Youth Parliaments, Forums, and non-governmental organizations.
6. We strongly encourage Member States to:
 - a. Enhance dialogue and coordination between ministries responsible for youth matters to improve effective policymaking and evaluation.
 - b. Increase sustainable financial support to youth organizations to promote democratic participation and citizenship skills.
7. We call on local and regional authorities to cooperate with youth organizations to promote participation in the Youth Test.

We firmly believe that the perspectives, aspirations, and expectations of young people are critically important. Decisions made today shape the world of tomorrow, so it is essential to include youth in decision-making processes that affect their future. The recent European Parliament elections highlighted the importance of youth participation by increasing their involvement, listening to their viewpoints, and taking concrete actions based on their feedback.

While many participation tools are already available to young Europeans, democracy is an ongoing process. By advocating for legislative changes that empower young people and fostering meaningful engagements between young individuals and decision-makers, we can amplify youth voices and enhance their role in shaping their communities and societies.