

## Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission  
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



## Seminar and tool on supporting young people's critical thinking in a digital age

### Concept note

21-23 April 2026, *Timisoara Youth House (FITT), Romania*

#### Context

The Youth Partnership has a long-standing tradition of supporting youth work development and practice across Europe, notably through the creation of capacity-building tools and publications for the youth work community of practice.

In 2026-2028, under the goal of enhancing the [youth work environment](#), the Youth Partnership will contribute to the professional development of youth workers, supporting and empowering young people, and addressing new challenges and emerging topics. This will build on the specific nature of this co-operation programme between the European Commission and the Council of Europe, grounded in youth research, bridging research and practice, and situated at the intersection of both institutions' strategies and political agendas.

Among the actions foreseen under this goal, the Youth Partnership will organise an evidence-based seminar on supporting young people's critical thinking in a digital age.

#### Aim and objectives

The seminar will explore the role of youth work in empowering young people to think critically, understand, challenge, and engage meaningfully in the digital era. As technology, digitalisation, and artificial intelligence (AI) have become integral to young people's lives – offering both opportunities and risks – the seminar will reinforce the democratic foundations of youth work as a socio-political practice that fosters democratic and critical citizenship.

The seminar will draw on existing research, as well as on recent studies conducted by the Youth Partnership, including:

- [Youth Work and TECHLASH: What Are the New Challenges of Digitalisation for Young People? \(2022\)](#)
- [Young people's participation in AI governance and implementation \(2023\)](#)

- [Insights into Artificial Intelligence and Its Impact on the Youth Sector \(2024\)](#)

It will align with relevant initiatives of the two partner institutions, among others the [EU Preparedness Strategy](#) and the latest development for [protecting democracy](#) (in particular the Democracy Shield and considerations regarding the Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) and disinformation), and with the [Council of Europe's New Democratic Pact for Europe](#), and its pillar Learning and Practising Democracy, which emphasises equipping young people with the skills, attitudes and critical thinking necessary for active citizenship. The outcomes of the seminar will also feed in into the development of the future EU youth strategy and the new generation of the EU youth programmes. Complementarity with the initiatives of the Council of Europe's Youth Department will also be ensured, with special respect to digital citizenship and artificial intelligence and youth work.

#### **The aim of the seminar:**

The seminar aims at creating space for an exchange and capacity building about role of youth work and youth organisations in empowering young people to think critically, understand, challenge, and engage meaningfully in the digital era. It will equip participants with up-to-date knowledge on the topic, inspire them through existing practices and initiatives and provide guidance for the creation of a new support tool for youth workers.

#### **Its specific objectives include:**

- Provide space for critical reflection on this topic and emerging dilemmas on national and international youth work practice, looking at continuing challenges for youth work practitioners and the latest trends;
- Map out knowledge initiatives relevant for competence development and everyday action for youth workers and the youth work community of practice, including leaders and managers of youth work programmes and centres;
- Identify the needs, practices, resources and gaps for a support tool for young people's critical thinking in a digital age at individual and organisational levels for youth work;
- Encourage peer learning, networking and exchange among members of the youth work community of practice.
- Promote and disseminate tools, materials and publications developed by the Youth Partnership, increasing their visibility and uptake.

#### **Expected outcomes**

- Enhanced cooperation on youth work among practitioners, researchers and policy-makers
- Updated knowledge, case studies and examples of approaches on youth work supporting critical thinking of young people
- Mapping of existing tools and inputs to the development of a new support tool for youth workers.

#### **Participants**

The event is aimed at youth work practitioners and experts on the topic, members of the youth work community of practice having expertise and/or interest in working with young people on critical thinking. 50 participants will be invited through the partner institutions, and organisations working on the topics of the seminar from member states of the Council of Europe.

## **Indicative timeline**

### **2026**

- Mid-February – online consultation with experts and actors working on the topic to identify contributors, participants, resources and content
- Mid-March – list of participants, contributors and experts supporting the seminar and resource development
- 21-23 April – seminar of 3 working days, with arrivals on 20 and departures on 24 April.
- Autumn – outline of the support tool shared with participants and experts for feedback

### **2027**

Finalisation of the support tool, communication and promotion material.

## **Background documents**

An overview of existing tools and initiatives will be prepared shared before the meeting.