

# Youth Partnership

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



## Call for experts Drafting analytical paper(s) on Youth Participation

(Deadline for applications: Sunday 4 May 2014, midnight)

### Background

At European level participation of young people is a key topic of youth policy since about 40 years, obviously with changing focal points throughout the years. The European institutions, Council of Europe and European Communities / European Union and their respective bodies (Parliamentary Assembly, Committee of Ministers, Congress for Local and Regional Authorities in Europe – European Commission, European Parliament, Council of the European Union and the Committees) have developed opinions and adopted numerous political statements on various subjects addressing youth participation. Today, the most relevant political documents are the European Union's Renewed EU youth strategy 'Investing and Empowering' and the Council of Europe's 'Agenda 2020 – the future youth policy in the Council of Europe'. Both demonstrate the institutional commitment for youth participation and their relevance for policy making.

The debates today are concerned by an obvious decline of interest in traditional policy making and formal political institutions and - at the same time - the growing relevance of new forms of engagement. Also other increasing reactions of young people such as absenteeism and indifference, individualisation and push-and-shove mentality or undemocratic, xenophobe and discriminatory behaviour can be observed. Numerous studies, research and reports show evidence of changing patterns in last years and provide knowledge on various quantitative and qualitative factors, facts and figures. Key questions resulting from these findings are how to foster youth participation, how to engage in a dialogue with young people, how to promote participation of underrepresented groups, and how to support ways of learning to participate?

For the discussion around participation often strongly focuses on civic participation and participation in formal political processes such as elections, what is to be discussed is a larger concept of participation, relating to the various environments in which young people live: education and training, work, communities and neighbourhoods, and civil society structures, among others. It is also to be taken into account that today many young people

engage differently, in (new) social movements, in social media, through (sub)cultural expression and various, including new forms of youth work.

More conceptual reflection can be found [here](#)

## Purpose of the analytical papers on youth participation

Despite the fact that there are numerous political and research documents, as well as good practice examples, it seems rather difficult to keep track of the state of affairs in the reflections and discussions on youth participation. The EU-CoE youth partnership has therefore planned in its 2014 (and potentially in the following years') work plan to continue focusing on the topic of youth participation and to deepen its activities herein. This will allow following up on the work done on the topic by both partner institutions, such as the work provided by Eurofound or the LSE report on 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life', commissioned by the European Commission, and the Finnish Youth Research Network report 'Youth Participation, Good Practices in Different Forms of Regional and Local Democracy', commissioned by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. This will also build on – amongst others - the reflections on youth participation matters carried out in the framework of the EU-CoE youth partnership so far, particularly in the 2013 activities (e.g. the symposium 'The Current Crisis and Youth – Impact and Ways Forward', Strasbourg; the conference 'Youth in 2020', Budapest; the seminar 'Youth and Citizenship – focus on participation', Jordan; and the symposium 'Youth Policy with EECA countries on the role of youth work in education for democratic citizenship and participation' in Yerevan).

As a first step it is foreseen to ***draft an analytical paper gathering knowledge and summarizing the state of affairs*** in the debates around the topic of youth participation (what do we know about youth participation, what is being done?) and stating further needs (what we do not know (knowledge gaps), what needs to be done?). The paper should also reflect the state of play in young people's situations, needs and aspirations, tendencies and prognosis including the impact of the so-called economic crisis and access to the labour market as well as new models of participation and ways of promoting them.

The analytical paper(s) should particularly identify the essential key findings and conclusions of existing material (from policy, research and practice) and start exploring what are recommendations towards policy, research and practice can be drawn from this knowledge.

The ***analytical paper*** (or papers which will be connected or gathered into one single product) will then be ***discussed in a reflection group of experts***; this expert seminar of approximately 35-40 experts (from policy, research and practice) will take place 30 June – 2 July 2014 in Brussels and will discuss emerging patterns in participation, identified challenges and possible solutions and lead to a number of ***conclusions and recommendations on new and broad forms of youth participation*** addressed at policy, research and practice.

## Structure and key items of the analytical papers on youth participation

A small core group of researchers, policy makers and youth work practitioners has reflected which sub-topics the analytical paper(s) should cover and what the scope and structure of a following reflection seminar should be. The discussions can be summarized under the title 'THE NEVER-ENDING STORY OF DEMOCRACY' and clustered around 3 key questions, all against a concept of current social changes (i.e. 'participation in the 21st century'):

1. Why participation?
2. What is participation?
3. How is participation learned?

### **1. Why participation?**

What is the motivation of policy makers, (democratic) institutions, economy, etc. and young people themselves to participate? It is to promote the democratic values of societies, to foster social integration of young citizens, to support individual development and to manage social change...? Starting from the perspective of young people as actors of social change we first need to know what is changing and why?

It is about knowing more about the changing role of traditional organisations and institutions such as religions and churches, trade unions, political parties, youth organisations, the role of old and new social movements, the information and communication technologies and the change in communication cultures, the demographic development and changing age pyramid, the economic crisis and its impact on young people's life, the increasing cultural diversity in societies, the growing need of mobility, etc.

It is also about knowing what is to safeguard, to promote, to further develop and what leads to a rather normative dimension of values, human rights, rule of law and to the *never ending story of democracy*, and the fact that democracy needs to be further developed with and by each single generation, also in fight against supposed authoritarian, 'alternative' solutions?

### **2. What is participation?**

When talking about (youth) participation we mean political and social participation of all groups of (young) people / citizens in all areas in which they live: civil society, neighbourhoods, groups / communities, education and training, work places, and leisure time activities, among others. We know about traditional forms of participation in elections and representative democracy, in youth parliaments, in school and student councils, youth and apprentice representation in enterprises, in 'old' social movements such as trade unions or religious bodies, in long-standing youth NGO's, etc. We also know about new forms of youth participation, in youth initiatives or in voluntary activities, new social movements, in social media, amongst others.

We can identify various fields of participation according to the areas in which young people live (see above), various cultural dimensions that impact participation (and the way how participation is expressed) such as social classes, ethnic dimensions and gender; and we need to distinguish the various forms of participation in accordance with the age of young

people (considering that participation must start at a very early age, in families, via child care, in various types of schools, high schools and universities, in the work place... ). Further it is crucial that young people should have the right to choose and shape the ways they participate.

We also need to accept that participation is not a one-dimensional act of communication: it is rather a dialogue and an interplay between young people's views and those of institutions / society. It sees various forms and practices. The *structured dialogue* in the European Union and the *co-management system* in the Council of Europe are prominent and proved models of participation, but also new models are such as peer-learning projects and bar-camps (a kind of new and enlarged model based on the Open Space Technology).

In this section a reflection also took place on what works and what does not work (e.g. specific tools to increase voting and lowering voting age, reaching out through social media and the Internet, opportunities and limits of youth initiatives, private, public, civic delivery of services and projects). A link to the debate about values (former cluster 1) and the learning dimension (see next cluster 3) must be made.

### 3. How is participation learned?

We learn to participate in formal, non-formal and informal settings. Formal means intentional, based on curricula, obligatory and in formal structures (e.g. schools and universities) and procedures. Non-formal means as well intentional and often based on curricula, but on a voluntary basis and in non-formal settings out of school (such as in youth work). And informal learning means by doing and in an experiential manner in everyday activities, including formal and non-formal learning / education settings.

In all these settings youth participation should be an issue and start at an early age, in families, pre-schools, schools, out-of-schools, etc. In formal settings such as schools, teachers play a key role in not only teaching about participation and citizenship but as well in making it a principle of the curricula and the learning and teaching culture; this also refers to teacher training which is crucial to promote new or alternative forms of democratic learning and teaching approaches.

Also (youth) NGO's and youth work have a crucial role to play in this respect, in non-formal education / learning foremost, but as well as cooperation partner in formal education approaches and settings. With regard to the learning dimension, we ought not to omit the link to youth information and new media.

In this section the historical and normative dimension of participation should also be kept in mind. As a matter of principle it was suggested that the key aims of education & training should be the protection of democracies and human rights, while promoting the ideal of educating critical citizens and consumers rather than patriotic ones.

### Nature of the analytical papers

The analytical paper(s) should further explore, analyse and summarize, what we know about each question (and what do we not know) and which conclusions can be drawn from this knowledge. Findings from research, policy and practice should be taken into account, including additional ones which are so far not in the focus of discussions. It was proposed mapping the knowledge that exists in terms of:

- Political documents of the European Union and Council of Europe, as well as potentially their member states;
- Academic / scientific work (research), including for example the LSE study on youth participation and the work provided by Eurofound; and
- Practical and experiential findings (good practices, showcases, projects, existing tools and methods) as for example identified by the Finnish Youth Research Network in the study 'Youth Participation Good Practices in different forms of regional and local democracy'.

First reflections on conclusions and recommendations should be rather concrete and focus on subjects identified in the three clusters highlighted on pages 3 and 4, e.g. teacher training and change of school curricula and educational approaches; role of non-formal and informal learning; impact of peer learning and youth initiatives; participation tools that work, etc. The analytical paper(s) and the work of the reflection group should lead to conclusions and recommendations that can be addressed to policy makers, to youth work practitioners and others, such as research.

### Practical issues

- Applications should be submitted by Sunday, 4 May 2014, midnight. Applicants can be individuals, pairs or small teams representing ideally research and practice. Proposals can be submitted for one single cluster or for several. In total the maximum of 5 working days can be calculated per cluster (in total 15 days maximum), based on a daily fee of 260 €. The analytical papers should not be longer than 2.500 words or 5 pages plus references that should indicate the sources used for drafting the paper and highlight the most relevant documents in this regard.
- **Deadline** for submission of the papers (in the working draft format) is **Sunday, 15 June 2014**. After consolidating the papers one coherent document will be provided to the experts / participants of the reflection group that meets on 30 June – 2 July 2014. The authors of the analytical papers will have to present their work in the reflection seminar.

### Process/Timeline:

- Week 16 (15-16 April): first consultative meeting of a small reflection group: identification of themes for analytical paper(s)
- Week 17 (22 April): call for experts for drafting the analytical paper(s)
- Week 18 (4 May): deadline for applications for experts
- Week 24 (by 15 June): provision of analytical paper(s)

- Week 27 (30 June – 2 July): reflection meeting with experts
- Week 28 (by 11 July): elaborations of the recommendations and conclusions
- 2015: the reflection on youth participation may continue

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