

# AGENDA FOR YOUTH AND DEMOCRACY



**INTERNATIONAL  
ORGANIZATIONS**



**PUBLIC  
AUTHORITIES**



**CIVIL  
SOCIETY**

**CONCLUSIONS FROM THE EVENT:**

## CONNECTING THE DOTS



# AGENDA FOR YOUTH AND DEMOCRACY

## About

Young people are the largest constituency in our society and the driving force necessary for the effective and inclusive functioning of democratic institutions. Their enthusiasm, engagement in political and public life and their innovative vision shapes the state of democracy across the OSCE region both now, and in the future.

In light of the COVID-19 crisis, it's especially important to safeguard democratic values and re-build the trust in democratic processes and institutions, which has been witnessing a sharp decline in the last decades. Young people do not live in a vacuum unaffected by current events, awaiting to eventually participate in some "distant-future world." According to a recent UN report<sup>1</sup> "young people are already among the most affected by the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 response." Questions are already being raised about the future of the "COVID-19 generation," what will be their needs, and how many of them risk falling behind.<sup>2</sup>

In September 2020, young people, parliamentarians, international organizations, private sector representatives and other youth stakeholders gathered in a virtual space to "connect the dots" and support intergenerational dialogue to leverage existing institutional assistance for young people's contributions to political and public life. The occasion served as a platform for youth voices to contribute substantively to future policy-making in the OSCE and the Council of Europe regions, also noting the increasing importance of digital access to institutions and decision-making processes.

To this end, the "*Connecting the Dots*" organizers, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and

Human Rights (ODIHR), the Council of Europe (CoE), the Embassy of Georgia to the Republic of Poland, PricewaterhouseCoopers Central and Eastern Europe and European Academy of Diplomacy - have committed to propose an "*Agenda for Youth and Democracy*" based on the conclusions gathered during the panel discussion and the three thematic workshop tracks on:

- 1. Democratic institutions and meaningful youth engagement in decision-making;**
- 2. Youth activism and participation through non-conventional means;**
- 3. Civic education as the foundation for youth engagement.**

1. "Shared responsibility, global solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19", United Nations, available at: [www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg\\_report\\_socioeconomic\\_impact\\_of\\_covid19.pdf](http://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_report_socioeconomic_impact_of_covid19.pdf).

2. According to UNESCO, roughly 826 million students globally do not have access to either a household computer, or the internet, highlighting startling disparities in access to critical technology; [en.unesco.org/news/startling-digital-divides-distance-learning-emerge](https://en.unesco.org/news/startling-digital-divides-distance-learning-emerge).

**1**

**The need for systematic change: appeal to OSCE participating States and CoE Member States**

Young people, often ignored by the current political system seek to channel their voices through non-conventional ways of participation. Democratic institutions are reluctant to fully understand and offer answers to the needs of a new generation, hence newly emerged groups and platforms are filling the gap that traditional actors are not able to fill. The COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, unemployment

and the so-called digital revolution are shifting the paradigm of the existing social contract in our societies. Institutions, political parties, businesses, and civil society organizations are not immune to recent developments. Hence, transparency and inclusiveness of the political process should be ensured, giving young people the space to bring innovative solutions to a wide range of democratic processes.

**2**

**Ensure the independence of youth organizations**

Leaders across the OSCE region and beyond are taking significant decisions on COVID-19 recovery strategies that will impact societies for years to come. States cannot afford young people to become a

“lockdown generation,” yet youth organizations are not adequately represented at decision-making tables. A recent study by the European Youth Forum shows that one fifth of youth organizations (20.9%) across Europe fear retribution from the government when expressing their views or demands. Often the functioning and effectiveness of youth organizations ultimately depends on access to public funds and a youth-favorable environment. Analysis suggests that

the bureaucratic operating methods of many institutions, as well as a perceived low return-on-investment propagate a cycle of either low or no financial support for youth activities.<sup>3</sup> A lack of adequate resources diminishes the role youth organizations can play in resolving current challenges and hinders their ability to be present at the decision-making table. Therefore, sustainable funding is necessary to ensure the independent functioning of youth organizations.

**Action points for:**

**YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS**

To reinforce their mandate and keep public authorities and international organizations accountable in the delivery of inclusive policies and political reforms (including, COVID-19 recovery strategies). As advocates for change, youth organizations are advised to challenge inter-governmental organizations to place young people more at the center of their work and request their own governments and national institutions to be formally involved in COVID-19 recovery task forces, as well as other decision-making platforms.

**YOUNG PARLIAMENTARIANS**

To advocate for inclusive law-making processes and for better representation of the interests of young people in parliamentary work; to strengthen the institutional capacity of parliaments by conducting youth-orientated parliamentary assessments in co-operation with youth organizations and international institutions, as well as to support youth-led parliamentary caucuses.

**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

To identify the needs of young people in rural areas and target programming to bridge the gap between communities; to facilitate the dialogue between youth organizations and public authorities to ensure adequate funding lines for youth activities.

3. Safeguarding Civic Space for Young People in Europe, available at: [www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/SAFEGUARDING%20CIVIC%20SPACE%20FOR%20YOUNG%20PEOPLE%20IN%20EUROPE%202020\\_v4.0%20%281%29.pdf](http://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/SAFEGUARDING%20CIVIC%20SPACE%20FOR%20YOUNG%20PEOPLE%20IN%20EUROPE%202020_v4.0%20%281%29.pdf).

**3**

**Reform institutions: bring young people at the decision-making table**

In order to make institutions accountable to improving the inclusion of youth voices in the policy cycle, the principle of co-management should find its formal dimension, to be shared between government officials and youth organizations. Academia and international organizations agree that widespread political participation is a necessary precondition for the existence of a vibrant and pluralistic democracy. State policies should be analyzed comprehensively,

with the understanding that state preferences are formed by interest groups that aim at influencing the policy-making processes. To this end there is a need to combine direct and indirect forms of participation, which will allow young people to have a bigger say through their representatives and a more impact in certain reform processes.

As a step in the right direction, it is noteworthy to recall the recent adoption of the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030, by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, during the Georgian CoE Presidency. The Strategy defines the framework within which the Council of Europe and the youth sector will pursue its aim to enable young people across Europe to actively uphold, defend, promote and benefit from the Council of Europe's core

values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Furthermore, young people could benefit from an increased cooperation between the public and private sector. The private sector can and does play a large role in empowering young people through numerous projects, usually focused on their upskilling and employment. The private sector is also in a position to support other relevant policies and tap into cross-generational dialogues. With a growing Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) agenda within private corporations and businesses there is a stronger understanding of the greater role young people play in our societies. Enhanced cooperation can boost collective efforts and offer young people platforms and channels to have their voices heard.

**Action points for:**

**PUBLIC AUTHORITIES**

To engage young people in designing youth-related institutional policies and strategies on education, youth unemployment, youth justice, digital technologies and social media, climate change, tolerance, inclusion and diversity.

**OSCE PARTICIPATING STATES AND THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE MEMBER STATES**

OSCE and CoE States are encouraged to find a formal dimension to the co-management principle, making a note of institutional and inter-personal challenges young people are facing and work to address them when engaging youth. Lundy's model of participation, which is comprised of four criteria: **Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence**, might serve as a guide to analyze and uphold a more youth-orientated

environment. This way, young people are provided safe and inclusive opportunities to form and express views (**Space**); young people are supported to express these views through making available all the information needed to form a view, and a range of options to express themselves (**Voice**); young people's views are listened to by someone with the power to effect change (**Audience**); young people's views are acted on as appropriate, and if not, decision-makers provide reasons to the young people as to why they have not been listened to (**Influence**).

**OSCE PARTICIPATING STATES AND THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE MEMBER STATES**

OSCE and CoE States are advised to enhance co-operation with the private sector on the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG)

agenda that the private sector is developing to tackle climate change and the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. With this, States will enable an entry point for young people to interact with the private sector on issues of importance for them.

**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

To establish youth parliamentary working groups in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, aiming to facilitate inter-parliamentary dialogue and exchange good practices in youth-orientated parliamentary assessments and young peoples' involvement in politics.

**4**

**Uphold activism and creativity: do you hear young people?**

Recent research suggests that youth engagement is increasingly channeled through non-conventional means. Young people are more likely to use digital tools to make their voices heard, including signing petitions and expressing opinions on social media. Young people participate in large-scale protest movements that focus on issues of importance to them.

By acknowledging and following youth-led movements, decision-makers can listen to young voices and consider them.

As of today, institutions often fail to reach young people due to bureaucratic communication policies and outdated channels of communication. Institutions and young people use different communication channels that result in a lack of consultations with youth representatives. Conversations are often structured in a way that hampers meaningful participation of young people and puts them

in a “listener” mode. At the same time, young people stress the need to ensure inclusive involvement of young people from rural areas. To bridge existing communication gaps, young people have advised on improving the following enabling mechanisms:

- 1. Outreach mechanisms** simple messages with catchy editorial);
- 2. Capacity building mechanisms** to advance digital skills, and
- 3. Follow up mechanisms** to keep authorities accountable.

**Action points for:**

**PUBLIC AUTHORITIES**

To improve the way institutions interact with young people by introducing appropriate language, channels and forms for communication. Young professionals should be engaged in drafting outreach plans targeting different cohorts of youth in order to tap into non-conventional channels and attract young women and men.

**PUBLIC AUTHORITIES**

Introduce training modules for public employees and media representatives to enhance their knowledge of new forms of political expression (e.g. Artivism) and digital platforms.

**CIVIL SOCIETY**

To bring a more diverse youth representation as part of national and local initiatives and give them the necessary training and tools to become active and empowered at all levels.

**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

To embrace young people’s creativity, social commitment and their contribution to society at large. International institutions (should) strengthen youth work policies and practices, by supporting participating States/ Member States. Further, international institutions are advised to reinforce cross-sectoral co-operation within existing frameworks, such as the European Youth Work Agenda, and establish inclusive coordination formats.

**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

To enhance intergenerational cooperation focused on knowledge sharing. Young people often are in a “listener” position without an opportunity to channel their voice to decision-makers. To enable mutual learning experiences, international institutions are advised to invite senior management to simulation exercises, such as Model OSCE for Youth.

**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

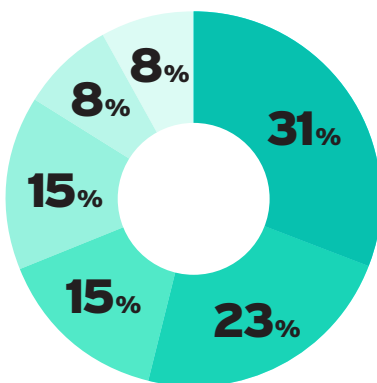
In order for young women and men to understand better the work of ODIHR and contribute more actively to the youth and human dimension agenda, it is advised to develop innovative tools, which could bring its work closer to young people. The tools should elaborate OSCE commitments and structures in an entertaining and educational manner.

**5**

**Invest in civic education and media literacy**

An active and engaged citizenry is closely linked to improved democratic governance and state-citizen relations. Such engagement requires that citizens are not only aware of their rights and responsibilities in a pluralistic society, but also know how to leverage these rights to access public institutions, elected officials, and other state actors, as well as effectively advocate for a change within their communities by serving as community leaders, elected officials, or in other public service roles.

**Best source of civic education**



- Non-governmental organizations
- International organizations
- Public institutions other than schools
- Schools
- Universities and other higher education institutions
- Other

Civic education should be intersectional and interdisciplinary, underpinned within the international context (e.g. youth exchanges, Erasmus program, Young Ambassadors program under the MFA of Georgia). **Experiential learning is an effective method of inspiring long-term civic engagement. Initiatives that incorporate this approach tend to take place in non-formal educational settings and often have better results than formal civic education programs in universities/schools. This finding suggests there is a need to update civic education curricula to connect the theory of political participation to the practice of it.**

The **“Connecting the Dots” survey** shows that Civil Society Organizations and international organizations deliver the most effective and inspiring civic educational programs (see chart below).

Young people highlight the need for customized solutions for educational programs based on needs assessments. Inadequate cross-sectoral coordination between public institutions, the educational sector and CSOs often obstructs resource allocation for effective and long-term civic education initiatives. Further, young people underline the importance of fostering media literacy and the lack of proper outlets dedicated to younger audience.

**Action points for:**

**PUBLIC AUTHORITIES**

To establish **local youth offices** to educate, advise, support, and provide information on available programs and resources. To be self-empowering, they would be run by young people and serve as a point of contact when it comes to explaining the political system, informing about youth rights, and promoting participation in different national and international programs organized by public and private institutions. Due to COVID-19 developments offices should work both online and offline.

**CIVIL SOCIETY**

CSOs are advised to identify and showcase role models whom young people would trust or ones they aspire to emulate.

**CIVIL SOCIETY**

Educational programs should be tailored depending on their target groups, including marginalized groups such as minorities, migrants, women, rural youth, and as the COVID-19 pandemic revealed also those without access to the internet. As such, there is a need to customize the civic education curricula depending on the basic knowledge and access to the public life of the given group.

**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

To design educational programs expanding on youth participatory budgeting and political participation mechanisms, among other methods.