

EU Youth Conference Riga

Joint Conclusions on “Youth empowerment for political participation”

Riga, 23 - 26 March, 2015

In the framework of the EU Youth conference, youth representatives, together with representatives from member states have gathered to reflect on solutions to empower young people for participation in political processes.

Create a Culture of Participation At School

1) Member States should introduce and support a framework in educational institutions, such as students' councils or other student initiatives that enable and ensure the engagement of students to take part in the decision-making of the school system. Other forms of civic engagements such as volunteering should also be recognised by the educational institutions in order to stimulate a culture of participation.

2) Member States should further develop or include civic education in the curricula at all levels of formal education, bringing a local, national and European perspective. Formal education providers must include non-formal learning methodologies to encourage critical thinking and enable young people from all backgrounds to develop attitudes and values to participate actively in the society.

CULT Committee is invited to advance the civic education discussion in the European Parliament.

Involving young people in political decision-making

1) In order to further involve young people in democratic life, Member States and local authorities are invited to implement pilot programmes starting at local level, where voting age is lowered to 16, accompanied by the adequate preparation, including quality civic education.

2) By implementing transparent, sustainable and collaborative structures and providing financial support, authorities on the local, regional and national levels should ensure full participation of youth NGOs in decision making processes of the policies that affect young people.

Enhancing policy makers' engagement and commitment with young people

1) European Commission and Member States should put in place a framework to engage policy makers, providing them with all the necessary tools to involve young people and youth organizations in developing, implementing and evaluating the policies that affect them through shared decision-making.

2) Policy makers on all levels, should continuously perform an open political culture of communication using multiple youth targeted methods in order to increase transparency and accountability of the policymaking process.

Strengthening the role of youth work for political empowerment of all young people

1) The crucial role of youth work for fostering a political participation which is based on the values of diversity, human rights, democracy and on critical thinking, should be strengthened and socially and politically recognized by the European Commission and Member States. Therefore, youth work should be provided with the necessary resources, support structures and formal recognition.

2) EU institutions and Member States are encouraged to put up cross-sectorial initiatives and long-term partnerships at all levels with youth workers and non-governmental organizations, with the aim of transferring knowledge and developing political participation competencies of all young people, especially those with fewer opportunities.

Developing youth friendly tools for political participation

1) To ensure access of young people to information and opportunities to experience online tools for political participation, Member States should ensure that trainings on the existence of such tools are provided for teachers and other professionals working with young people.

2) Private and public organisations should involve young people in the development, implementation and monitoring of online tools for youth political participation., To ensure recognition of young people's participation and sustain their involvement in political processes, online tools should be complemented by offline methods and have a follow-up phase in which decision-makers reflect on how young people's contributions were taken into account.

Developing local and direct democracy

1) Member States and youth organisations should acknowledge and make better use of alternative forms of young people's political engagement (e.g. arts, sports) aiming to enrich the debate and decision-making processes.

2) Member States, local or regional authorities should encourage the establishment and the strengthening of local and regional youth councils or other equivalent youth platforms that should be open, inclusive and sustainable in order to enable young people from all backgrounds to participate and be involved in decision-making processes in accordance with the *Revised European Charter on the Participation of young people in local and regional life* (Congress of Local & Regional Authorities, Council of Europe).

Increasing synergies and cooperation between different actors

1) In order to involve young people in political processes and to enable easy and sustainable collaboration between all relevant stakeholders, the EU institutions and Member States should develop or improve coordinated cross-sectorial communication at all levels.

2) We call on the European Commission to set the ground for a progressive implementation of a youth impact assessment of all EU policies. This should involve all relevant stakeholders to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of policies affecting young people's lives, thus increasing the attractiveness of political participation for young people.