



UN Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and Rule of Law: the role of youth in public decision-making

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PROPOSALS FROM THE EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM

This document outlines the European Youth Forum's proposals for the panel discussions to be held during the 2016 UN Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law.

High-level opening session

This session should underline the importance of youth participation and the right of young people to participate today.

1. Youth participation in peace-building and countering violent extremism

Aim/key issues to be addressed: UN Security Council resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security recognises the need to increase inclusive representation of youth in decision-making at all levels in local, national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflict, institutions and mechanisms to counter violent extremism. Participation has been recognised as a core priority when it comes to youth, peace and security, and this participation is important at all levels and in all types of public decision-making, whether related to peacebuilding and countering violent extremism or not. This panel could explore the links between youth participation and peacebuilding, as well as youth participation and countering violent extremism, looking into the practicalities of how this participation can be encouraged and the ways in which inclusive representation can be increased.

2. Citizenship and Human Rights Education

Aim/key issues to be addressed: There are fewer and fewer opportunities for young people to learn a democratic culture, values and develop the competences that are needed to fight for their rights. This panel would aim to explore the different environments and settings in which citizenship education takes place and democratic and human rights values are internalised. The panel would further aim to discuss best practices in the field of citizenship education and examples of partnerships between stakeholders, and how to ensure more young people have access and take part in citizenship education activities.

3. Participatory policy-making

Aim/key issues to be addressed: The aim of this panel would be to explore emerging alternative participatory mechanisms that provide the opportunity to citizens to have a direct say in the policy making that affects them. From participatory budgeting schemes by municipalities, to citizens' assemblies, to co-management systems of citizens with member states, the panel would aim at sharing best practices on how to look beyond elections when we think of democracy and the inclusion of citizens, especially youth, in decision making.



4. **Young people and elections**

Aim/key issues to be addressed: According to research by the European Youth Forum,¹ young people are trapped in a vicious circle of political marginalisation, as it is increasingly difficult for them to participate in the more traditional forms of democratic processes, especially elections. With decreasing youth turnouts across elections in most developed democracies, young people's interests are less and less a priority for politicians, there are very low levels of young people in parliaments, which leads to low levels of trust in the system of representative democracy and high levels of political inequality.

Yet young people are far from being apathetic and turning their noses up at politics, as can be seen from high participation rates in new forms of activism, volunteering, online discussions and social movements. This panel would seek to discuss reforms to the institutions of representative democracy that would lead to a politics that is more youth-inclusive. These include, for example, lowering the voting age to 16, reserved seats for young people on political parties' governing boards, regulating political party financing and quotas for young people in parliament, among others.

5. **Effective, accountable and transparent institutions in relation to youth**

Aim/key issues to be addressed: Youth participation in public decision-making cannot be possible, and certainly not meaningful, in the absence of effective, accountable and transparent institutions. Such institutions, at all levels, have been recognised as necessary for sustainable development on a global scale. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development also calls for responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

The accountability and transparency of institutions and the inclusivity of decision-making depends in part on the space and enabling environment that exists for civil society, including youth organisations, to assemble, organise, access and have an impact on institutions and processes, and hold governments to account.

This panel would aim to discuss the links between effective, accountable and transparent institutions, space and enabling environment for civil society and youth participation in public decision-making.

¹ Young People and Democratic Life in Europe – What next after the 2014 European Elections? (2015)
http://www.youthup.eu/app/uploads/2015/11/YFJ_YoungPeopleAndDemocraticLifeInEurope_B1_web-9e4bd8be22.pdf