



# European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life

The Plain Language Version

## **“Have Your Say!”**

## ***Introduction:***

Have your Say! is the plain language version of the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life (Charter) developed by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) <sup>◊</sup>, which is part of the Council of Europe <sup>◊</sup>.

The Charter contains many important principles, ideas and actions in the area of youth participation <sup>◊</sup>. However, as an official document it was written in a form that is not always easy to read. As a result, CLRAE decided to produce 'Have Your Say!' in order to assist and support everybody to better understand the Charter.

It is our hope that young people, Local and Regional Authorities <sup>◊</sup> and everyone working in this area find this version helpful when implementing the Charter. However, it should be used as an aid alongside the Charter and does not aim to replace it. Therefore, at the bottom of every section the reference to the actual section in the Charter is included.

'Have Your Say!' follows the layout of the Charter. The first part deals with those areas where young people should be involved, the second part focuses on how young people can be supported to participate and finally the third part provides concrete examples of structures and models in youth participation.

### ***Preamble***:

Young people have the right and should have the opportunity to have a real say when decisions affecting them are being made at local and regional level. They should also be supported and given the space to be involved in all kinds of activities and actions. Of course, having a right is no good, unless young people have the opportunity, support and knowledge to use it. Therefore, this Charter says what and how Local and Regional Authorities should support young people. Through this experience young people will gain the knowledge and experience to use these rights and opportunities to the maximum. This is participation and is one of the keys on which our democratic society is based.

Enabling young people to participate in their community is not only about helping young people to have a say now. It is also about supporting young people to experience the opportunities and challenges of participation and being involved in community life. If the participation is to be real and meaningful for young people it not only requires their commitment, it also requires the strong and lasting commitment by everyone else, in particular the Local and Regional Authorities, as the authorities closest to young people.

Anything done to promote youth participation should take into account the diverse needs, circumstances, dreams and hopes of young people. It should also include some fun.

### ***The Principles of this Charter:***

The participation of young people in local and regional affairs is central to any work done to promote participation in general.

Local and Regional Authorities should ensure that all the areas (*→ Part I*) in which they have a role should take into account the needs and views of young people. This should be done in cooperation and consultation with young people.

The principles, ideas and forms of participation discussed in this charter apply to all young people. In particular young people from different backgrounds and situations should be encouraged and supported to participate.

### ***The Areas where young people should be involved*** **Social, Sports and Cultural Activities:**

Leisure, sports, cultural activities and events run by youth groups and other clubs and organisations play a very important part in the lives of young people. In many communities there are not enough interesting or exciting activities for young people. These activities and events not only help those involved to learn new things, such as how to organise events, how to work with others, find out more about their local community, they also allow young people to meet new friends and to build their skills and confidence.

Local and Regional Authorities<sup>☞</sup> should encourage and support young people to get involved in, to set up and run clubs and groups for young people. They can do this by giving money and providing facilities<sup>☞</sup> to youth groups and clubs, so that they can run activities and events in the local community. Such activities could be: sports, plays, concerts, trips away etc.

*(→ See Part 1.1 and 1.9)*

## **Work and Employment**

Life can be more difficult for young people who are unemployed because they might not have enough money, may feel isolated and left out of society. As a result unemployed young people are less interested, or can find it harder to get involved in activities and groups.

Local and Regional Authorities<sup>☞</sup> should, together with young people, develop ways to help them find jobs and reduce unemployment. This can be done by setting up and running job centres that prepare young people for the world of work and could help them find employment. Also if young people want they should be supported to set up their own business.

*(→ See Part 1.2)*

## **Housing and where you live.**

When young people want to have their own home it should be possible for them to get good quality and affordable housing. To make this possible Local and Regional Authorities<sup>☞</sup> should provide housing information as well as funding and advice to young people who want to buy or rent a home.

Local and Regional Authorities<sup>☞</sup> should also involve young people and youth groups when making decisions and carrying out work in public areas in cities and towns. In particular, this should happen when new housing and other facilities are being built or renewed. This would ensure that there are more facilities i.e. sport grounds, parks, playgrounds and places to hang out for young people. Authorities should also actively encourage and support young people and their organisations to be involved in decisions and projects aiming to protect and to improve the places where they live.

*(→ See Part 1.3 and 1.10)*

## **Transport:**

Cheap, available and reliable public transport is really important if young people are going to be involved in the local community. They often have difficulties getting to their local youth club or other leisure or sporting activities because public transport<sup>☞</sup> does not run when they need it, is too expensive, or is not available at all. This can especially be the case in the countryside. As a result, many young people are excluded from activities and from being involved in local clubs and groups.

Local and Regional Authorities<sup>☞</sup> should, in cooperation with young people and youth organisations, work on improving these services and make public transport<sup>☞</sup> meet their needs.

(→ *Part I.3*)

### **Education and School:**

Young people go to school to get an education, which is necessary. As a result, a lot of their time is spent in school studying different subjects and preparing for exams. But schools should be about more than this, since school is a place where young people develop views and attitudes on the world around them. Therefore schools should be places where young people learn about democracy. However, school should not only be a place where young people are taught about democracy, it should also be a place where they experience democracy in action.

Local and Regional Authorities<sup>☞</sup> should work with students and teachers to ensure young people are consulted and have a real say in how their school is run. Students should also have the right and opportunity and be funded to set up their own independent school councils (→ *Part III*). Teachers and school authorities should recognise that student councils have an important role to play and should work with them in running the school.

(→ *Part I.4*)

### **Health:**

Young people should be able to get information and advice about how best to live a healthy life. In particular, they should be given information on the effects of tobacco, alcohol and drugs. This information and advice should be provided without going into the rights and wrongs.

Local and Regional Authorities<sup>☞</sup> should provide advice, support and information that young people need to make informed decisions about these issues. This should be done in close cooperation with young people and their organisations.

(→ *Part I.6*)

### **Love and Sexuality:**

Being in love and being in a relationship can be great. However, everybody has questions and doubts about love, relationships and sexuality. Young people are no different and in some cases may need more support because they may have less experience in dealing with these issues. So it is important that they can get advice, information and support about relationships, sex and sexuality if they need it. In particular, young people should get advice about how to avoid unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases<sup>☞</sup>.

People have different sexual orientations<sup>☞</sup>, many are straight, but others are gay, lesbian and/or bisexual. Everyone wants to find love and happiness, however

sometimes they find it more difficult than straight young people because of a lack of support or understanding from others.

Local and Regional Authorities<sup>◊</sup> should support families, agencies<sup>◊</sup> and groups who are providing young people with the information, advice and supports they need about love, sex and sexuality. Young people and youth organisations should be actively involved in developing and running these services.

*(→ Part 1.6 and 1.13)*

### **Equality for Young Women and Young Men**

Women and men are still not always treated the same. This can be a problem for both, but in particular for young women. It would be better for all if everyone were treated equally.

Local and Regional Authorities<sup>◊</sup> should make sure that young women and men are treated equally in all their activities and work. They should provide training on this topic and support all, especially young women to achieve their full potential in school, university, work and in all areas of their lives.

*(→ Part 1.7)*

### **Young People in Rural Areas:**

Living on the countryside and outside a city or town can be great. But there are some downsides. Sometimes it means that young people have little or no transport and as result might be involved in fewer activities. They may also find it hard to get a job in their local area.

Local and Regional Authorities<sup>◊</sup> should make special efforts to provide transport, employment, housing etc, for young people in rural areas so that they can have a good quality of life. Local and Regional Authorities<sup>◊</sup> should also fund, support and help groups and clubs for, and run by, young people in rural areas.

*(→ Part 1.8)*

### **Respect for Every Young Person**

Everyone is different but also equal<sup>◊</sup>. Our community is made up of people from different backgrounds and situations, i.e. customs, cultures and lifestyles. This also includes people with disabilities. We all expect to be treated equally and with respect and we should treat others likewise.

Local and Regional Authorities<sup>◊</sup> should promote understanding and a respect for human rights<sup>◊</sup>. They should also make sure that all young people no matter what their background or situation, should be given equal access to all public services and facilities such as schools, public places, activities, etc. Local and Regional Authorities<sup>◊</sup> should work and consult with young people and youth groups to promote equality and understanding among people from different backgrounds.

*(→ Part 1.12)*

## **The Rights of Young People and the Law**

Every community and country needs rules and regulations in the form of laws, which we must all respect. These laws state people's rights and responsibilities. However, many young people are not aware of their rights and responsibilities and sometimes it is not clear what is expected from them and what they should expect in return.

Local and Regional Authorities should provide young people with information on laws in all places where they spend time, such as in schools, youth clubs, public spaces, etc. They should develop and provide more information to young people on their rights and responsibilities. Authorities should also ask them for their views when they are changing the current rules and laws or when they plan to make new ones.

(→ Part 1.14)

### **Intercultural Learning:**

Travelling to and living in another European country for a short or long period can help young people to find out and experience how others live. This can help develop greater understanding among people from different backgrounds and countries.

Local and Regional Authorities should support and help young people, schools, youth organisations, volunteers and others to organise and run exchanges between young people and groups in other countries.

(→ Part 1.5)

### **Crime and Violence**

Crime and violence is a major issue for young people. Many are victims of crime and violence, while a small minority is also involved in it. There is a need to involve young people in tackling crime and violence and to build trust between all the authorities, young people and the police.

Local and Regional Authorities should work with those young people at risk of becoming involved in crime and violence, and those already involved. They should also support projects, groups or agencies working to prevent crime and violence of all types, including the sexual exploitation of young people. Authorities should also ensure that young people are consulted and involved in local structures such as crime prevention councils.

(→ Part 1.11)

### ***How to support the participation of young people.***

#### **Youth Participation and Training:**

Young people should be given advice, guidance and support about how best to be involved in decisions and actions that affect them in school, youth groups and in

their community. However older people may also need training in how best to support young people in having their say.

Local and Regional Authorities<sup>◊</sup> should make sure that teachers, youth workers and all others working with or for young people, receive training and guidance on this topic. They should also provide training, advice and support to young people and should make sure it is run and organised to suit young people's needs.

*(→ Part II.1)*

### **Youth Participation and Information:**

One of the biggest problems is the lack of relevant and available information concerning activities, opportunities and events. This can sometimes also include the lack of information about many important issues in young people's lives. These may include: housing, employment, sexuality, law, rights, etc.

Local and Regional Authorities<sup>◊</sup> should support youth information centres where all this information is located, and where young people are able and feel comfortable accessing it. These centres can be in schools, libraries, youth clubs etc. Additionally, Local and Regional Authorities<sup>◊</sup> should use modern means of communications, e.g. websites to provide this information. Websites should not be the only means as not every young person has access to the Internet.

*(→ Part II.2 and Part II.3)*

### **Youth Participation and the Media:**

Magazines and newspapers, radio and television programmes and the internet play an important role in the lives of young people. They can provide entertainment, information and can help consumers<sup>◊</sup> to develop their opinions and to make decisions.

Despite this, young people rarely have an opportunity to be involved in and contribute to media products<sup>◊</sup>. It is more difficult for them to contribute to or develop their own media products, such as newspapers, local radio and TV programmes.

Local and Regional Authorities<sup>◊</sup> should provide training to enable young people to get easier access to media and to produce their own media products. At the same time they should also provide support for the creation of young people's own media.

*(→ Part II.4)*

### **Youth Participation and Voluntary activity:**

Young people today are under a lot of pressure to do well in school and in work. As a result, there is less time available to get involved in activities in the community. Because of this young people should be supported to do voluntary work if they

want; not only because it can be good fun, but also as it can be beneficial for themselves and for the community.

Local and Regional Authorities<sup>☞</sup> should assist young people to volunteer by funding voluntary organisations, especially youth organisations and volunteer centres. They should also organise promotional and information campaigns on volunteering and give recognition to young people for their voluntary work.

(→ Part II.5)

### **Youth Participation and Youth Projects:**

Young people often have ideas about how to improve life or tackle problems in their community, but lack the encouragement and necessary support from the authorities to make them a reality.

Local and Regional Authorities<sup>☞</sup> should help young people to develop their ideas and projects with advice, money, space etc. If the proposal is successful it has the potential to improve life for all in the community. Even when ideas or proposals cannot be set up or are not successful, young people and the authorities can learn a lot from the experience.

(→ Part II.6)

### **Youth Participation and Youth Groups:**

Youth groups that are set up and run by young people themselves are an ideal way for young people to learn about participation. In these groups young people can have a real say in deciding what they want to do which allows them to take full responsibility for their own affairs. All young people should be able to join or set up a youth group if they want to.

Local and Regional Authorities<sup>☞</sup> should have a specific fund to support youth clubs and groups, which special emphasis on helping those groups set up and run by young people themselves.

(→ Part II.7)

### **Youth Participation and Co-Management:**

At European level and at a local and national level in some countries, a system called "Co-Management" is in place. This means that there is a structure where the authorities and young people representing youth organisations meet frequently. Both sides should have the same number of representatives and they should have the same rights.

Local and Regional Authorities<sup>☞</sup> should set up these ("co-management") structures to provide young people with the opportunity and ability to have a real say in decisions and actions affecting them.

(→ Part II.7)

## **Youth Participation and Other Groups and Political Parties:**

Young people should be encouraged to get involved in all types of organisations and causes. Therefore it is important that they have the choice, opportunity and support to be involved in all types of organisations and groups, such as political parties, issue specific organisations, etc.

Local and Regional Authorities<sup>☞</sup> should provide funding to groups and organisations which actively welcome and support young people to be involved in their activities and structures at all levels. They should support all political parties to encourage young people to become interested and active in politics.

(→ *Part II.8*)

### ***III Structures to support the Participation of Young People***

In order to support the participation of young people certain structures and supports should be put in place.

#### **Youth Parliaments, Youth Councils, Youth Forums**

All structures such as youth parliaments, youth councils, youth forums, student councils, etc. may take many different forms depending on the needs of young people and the authorities involved. They can achieve the same result, as long as young people are treated with respect and as equals. It is vital that these structures are flexible and can change according to the needs and views of the young people involved. All structures should include people from all backgrounds and situations. To make sure young people have a real say in decisions and actions affecting them these should be permanent structures and not once-off meetings.

(→ *Part III.1*)

#### **Support for Structures of Youth Participation**

So that these structures can work effectively, it is important that the Authorities give them financial support and the use of facilities<sup>☞</sup>. However they should also be given advice and information on how to get money and facilities<sup>☞</sup> from other sources e.g. private companies.

All those elected and working within Local and Regional Authorities<sup>☞</sup> should support youth participation. However, the Authorities should appoint a person or a group of person (guarantor<sup>☞</sup>) to be the main contact for young people and to support them in taking the lead in youth participation.

(→ *Part III.2*)

## APPENDIX

### Charter Jargon Buster

**Accommodation:** Place where you live or stay

**Agencies:** An organisation providing specific services

**Charity:** Working for the benefit of others, outside your own family

**Congress:** Congress of Local and regional Authorities of Europe, a consultative body representing local and regional authorities

**Cohesion:** Holding strongly together

**Commute:** To travel to and from your place of work.

**Consultation:** Asking people for their views

**Consumer Advice Bureau:** Office where you get advice on your rights as a shopper/user of services

**Consumer:** A person who buys and used goods and services

**Cooperation:** people working together

**Council of Europe:** European organisation founded in 1949, which aims to protect and promote human rights and democracy, and to achieve greater unity between its 46 member countries

**Crime Prevention Councils:** Groups set up to fight against violence

**Democratic society:** the idea that government is elected by the people

**Discriminate:** Treating people differently due to their appearance, background

**Drug abuse:** Taking drugs that have a long term bad impact on your health/life

**Drug addict:** A person who is dependent on drugs

**Equal:** The idea that even though we are all different we all have the same rights

**Facilities:** Places and venues where young people can do things and hang out

**Guarantor:** Somebody who helps and advices and is a link person

**Human Rights:** Your basic rights as a person, based on respect for each individual human life and human dignity

**Landlords:** Owner of a place that is rented out

**Local and Regional Authorities:** Public administration structures, led by elected officials, responsible for aspects of citizens' lives not dealt with by the national government level

**Media products:** Press and Media, e.g. TV, radio, newspapers

**Negotiate:** Discussing an issue or problem with others and trying to find a solution and a common agreement.

**Preamble:** an introductory statement

**Prevention:** Working to stop something before it has happens

**Principles:** values and central ideas

**Proactive:** Not waiting for others to act, but taking the initiative yourself

**Prosecution:** When you have to go to court to defend yourself against others who say you have broken the law.

**Public Transport:** means of transport that can be used by everybody (e.g. train, bus)

**Rehabilitation:** Helping someone to get back to normal or to rebuild their lives after going through a difficult time/experience.

**Responsibilities:** Something that you should or are required to do

**Sexual orientations:** people with different sexual preferences

**Sexually abused:** Forced sex or unwanted sexual suggestions or contact

**Sexually transmitted infection (STI):** any infection acquired through sexual intercourse

**Tenant:** Person who rents accommodation

**Twinning:** Normally and exchange agreement between two towns/cities in different countries

**Youth Participation:** young people taking part in how decisions are made