



# EU HAVE A DREAM A CHARTER FOR YOUTH CULTURAL PARTICIPATION

This Charter is conceived as an agile and brief document which we hope will help stimulate discussion and will be used as an advocacy tool.

It should be read in conjunction with the report "EU Have a Dream: Summary of key challenges and recommendations". The latter document explores in greater depth the issues listed in the Charter and identifies its main target audiences.



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## 1 Overcoming stigmatisation

### *Reframing youth culture*

**Shift from suspicion to recognition:** move away from viewing youth culture as a “moral panic” or threat and acknowledge it as a legitimate form of expression. Challenge fear-based and moralising narratives that frame young people’s presence and cultural practices as disruptive, deviant or dangerous.

**The paradox of youth participation:** while youth voting rates are often low, engagement in different options like volunteering and digital activism remains high but often unacknowledged by institutions.

**Align with youth rhythms:** institutional timelines (short project cycles) often clash with gradual, non-linear processes required for young people to build trust and feel ownership.

**Humanize the political process:** foster direct, face-to-face encounters between youth and policymakers to reduce symbolic distance to build mutual trust, recognising diverse cultural identities, migration backgrounds and experiences of marginalisation.

## 2 Stimulating cultural participation and civic engagement

### *Participation beyond institutional models*

**Avoid “one size fits all models”:** participation must be situated and designed in relation to the specific local, social, and spatial realities of young people.

**From aesthetics to politics:** genres like rap, trap, and gaming are not just “recreational”; they are vital spaces for narration, social critique, and political positioning.

**Co-design the process:** rather than inviting young people into predefined structures, allow them to help shape the rules and the agendas of participation processes from the beginning, ensuring real influence rather than symbolic inclusion.

## 4 Building civic engagement

### *Democracy as everyday practice*

**Democracy as an applied practice:** view democracy as something enacted in daily life through dialogue and collective problem-solving, not just as a system of periodic voting. Recognition, listening and mutual accountability are preconditions for meaningful participation.

**Cultivating social empathy:** co-creative cultural projects as a rehearsal space for democracy, helping young people to develop the relational skills needed to negotiate differences.

**From numbers to value:** shift the focus from “how many attended” to “what changed”, measuring impacts (for example on confidence, trust, and relational skills).

## 3 Rebalancing infrastructure and services

### *Building the material conditions for participation*

**Infrastructure is the foundation of participation:** participation cannot exist without physical access to rehearsal spaces, recording studios, and community hubs, especially in peripheral areas.

**Build enabling ecosystems:** move beyond isolated silos and create systems that connect physical spaces with mentorship, resources, and local community organisations.

**Addressing place-based inequalities:** cultural provision is currently uneven, requiring a deliberate decentralisation of funding and facilities to underserved neighbourhoods.

## 5 Changing the conversation

### *Redefining impact and narratives*

**The power of professional facilitation:** meaningful engagement is not spontaneous; it requires skilled mediators and educators who can bridge the gap between young people and institutions.

**Strengthen networks and advocacy:** foster alliances between cultural organisations, educators, youth workers, local communities and institutions to influence policy, funding and governance structures.



# PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INSTITUTIONS AND POLICYMAKERS

## Bridging the youth engagement gap

### 1 Institutional recognition

#### *Move from aesthetics to politics*

Recognize informal and digitally mediated forms of participation: acknowledge volunteering, online activism, informal cultural production and peer-based engagement as legitimate forms of civic and political participation.

#### *Combat moral panic stigmatisation*

Develop institutional and media guidelines to avoid framing youth culture as socially threatening or deviant, which currently serves to maintain generational hierarchies.

#### *Value diverse cultural identities*

Move away from cultural diversity as an integration problem and instead recognize it as a source of cultural innovation and democratic renewal.

### 2 Infrastructure investment

#### *Reduce place-based inequalities*

Rebalance cultural provision by decentralising resources and investing specifically in peripheral underserved areas where youth face structural exclusion.

#### *Fund functional enabling ecosystems*

Provide accessible physical tools including rehearsal spaces, recording studios, and digital equipment, paired with professional mentorship and guidance.

#### *Invest in intergenerational mediation*

Fund professional facilitators and community practitioners who can translate and connect the perspectives of youth and institutional actors and facilitate intergenerational exchange. Support partnerships between cultural organisations, schools, youth workers, community groups and public institutions to ensure long-term and coordinated participation strategies.

### 3 Design of participatory processes

#### *Move beyond symbolic inclusion*

Shift from asking young people to participate in pre-decided agendas to involving them in early decision making and agenda setting.

#### *Adopt situated practices*

Design engagement formats that are context-sensitive and responsive to the lived realities of local neighborhoods rather than imposing standardized institutional models.

#### *Prioritise co-creation*

Ensure that young people have real influence over outcomes, acknowledging that they prefer active roles over passive consumption of culture and politics.

### 4 Humanising politics

#### *Facilitate face-to-face encounters*

Create structured, open spaces for direct exchange between young people and policymakers to reduce symbolic distance from those in political roles.

#### *Build social empathy*

Use cultural co-creation to develop relational skills like listening and negotiating differences, which serve as the foundations for broader civic cooperation.

#### *Foster reciprocal trust*

Acknowledge that trust is a gradual process; institutions must move from a logic of control to one of mutual exposure and relational proximity.

#### *Support everyday democratic participation*

Promote spaces for dialogue, collective problem-solving and civic learning beyond electoral participation alone.

### 5 Redefining impact

#### *Quality over quantity*

Shift focus from purely numerical metrics (like headcounts or event totals) to qualitative transformations in participant's confidence and relational skills.

#### *Value micro-transformations*

Recognize that small, incremental changes in attitudes and everyday behaviours are essential indicators of long-term civic agency.

#### *Communicate processes, not just outcomes*

Change the public narrative by highlighting youth voices and the journey of engagement rather than just the final artistic or policy product.



## Read all the project's documents

Scan the QR code to read the report *"EU Have a Dream: Summary of key challenges and recommendations"* as well as the other project's documents.