

Young democratic citizens in Europe

Throughout the European Union elections for the European Parliament will take place from 6 to 9 June 2024. Close to four hundred million citizens, including millions of young people, will be able to cast their vote for the future of Europe. Approximately one in six Europeans is between 15 and 29 years old. So it is important that young people are properly engaged in politics and policy making.

Democratic citizenship involves more than just voting in elections. It regards how you, as a citizen, relate to others, and to government. It has to do with rights and duties, but also with values. It concerns dealing with different opinions and cultures, and what is needed to live together in freedom. Ample attention is paid to this in the Netherlands. Just as in the rest of Europe.

Young people's participation in elections

In most European countries young people are entitled to vote from 18 onwards. At the same time an increasing number of countries have lowered the voting age. In Austria young people are allowed to vote from their 16th, at local, regional, national and European elections. In Malta too young people may vote when they're 16, and in Greece when they're 17. In Belgium and Germany the age when people are qualified to vote for the European elections has recently been lowered to 16.

In many countries young people can be elected from their 18th in for instance parliament. But in practice this hardly ever happens. Although 20 percent of the European population is under 35, only 6 percent of representatives in European Parliament is under 35. Therefore the European Youth Forum calls on political parties to list more young candidates for the European elections.

Democratic citizenship and awareness

Various European countries have institutions or organisations that inform young people on democracy and politics and increase awareness of their role as democratic citizens. These organisations have primarily been established by governments or national parliaments. Often they cooperate closely with schools and other educational institutions. Many countries also have online means to inform young people on democratic citizenship. This is where children and young people may find out more about politics, democracy, legislation and elections.

Some countries organise campaigns to warn young people to elections. Germany has various competitions aiming to strengthen the democratic culture among children and young people. Many countries have established campaigns or activities aimed specifically at young people entitled to vote for the first time. For instance Denmark, where first time voters are sent a copy of the Danish constitution by mail. In other countries first time voters may receive a personal letter or a present.

Campaigns around the European elections

Leading towards the European Parliament elections, various campaigns have been organised to call attention to the vote of young people in the elections. The European Youth Forum launched a petition encouraging more voting rights for young people. The petition calls on all European governments and the European Parliament to lower the voting age to 16 years for all local, regional, national and European elections.

UNICEF, Eurochild, ChildFund Alliance, Save the Children and SOS Children's Villages together organised the campaign 'The Europe Kids Want'. In an online questionnaire more than nine thousand children and young people shared their ideas and thoughts on the future of Europe. Also there are several European campaigns informing young voters on the European elections and encouraging them to use their vote.

Meer informatie

- Read the full article [here](#).
- [Jongeren doen mee, in heel Europa](#) [Young people participate, throughout Europe]: article on youth participation in Europe.
- [Youth Wiki](#): information on youth policies in 33 countries in Europe. The information is available in English.

This article is part of a series. It is meant to inspire all persons working with young people in the Netherlands. The articles introduce Youth Wiki to them as a source of inspiration regarding youth policies in Europe.