



Final Declaration of the 25th Conference of the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (OIDP) Kraków 2026

21–23 September 2026, Kraków, Poland

Hope and Renewal in The Face of a Global Crisis of Democracy.

The Future of Participatory Democracy from Local to International Governance.

We, the Participants of the 25th Conference of the International Observatory on **Participatory** Democracy (OIDP), organised by the Municipality of Kraków, Poland, in cooperation with the World Organisation of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

- representing local and regional governments, civil society organisations, citizens' movements, academic institutions, international organisations, and public administrations from around the world,
- referring to the 25 years of OIDP's work in promoting participatory democracy, strengthening international cooperation, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and good practices, and supporting cities, regions, and communities in developing innovative forms of citizen participation,
- gathered in Kraków, Poland on 21-23 September 2026 under the theme, "Hope and Renewal in the Face of a Global Crisis of Democracy: The Future of Participatory Democracy from Local to International Governance",

**hereby adopt this Declaration expressing our shared diagnoses,
commitments and call to action.**



I. Democracy at a Turning Point: Shared Diagnosis

Building on the discussions held during the OIDP Conference Kraków 2026,

We recognise that:

1. democracy stands at a critical turning point, facing a convergence of complex and interconnected challenges, including declining public trust in institutions, increasing political and social polarisation, the consequences of armed conflicts and geopolitical instability, migration pressures, widening inequalities, and the climate crisis. These developments are placing growing strain on democratic institutions, weakening social cohesion, and challenging the ability of governments at all levels to respond effectively to citizens' needs and expectations;
2. the contemporary challenges facing democratic societies can be addressed through democratic renewal rooted in meaningful citizen participation. We believe that enabling citizens to take an active role in public decision-making strengthens democratic resilience, rebuilds trust in public institutions, and fosters social cohesion;
3. the protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms, respect for the rule of law, and the promotion of democratic governance remain a constant and shared responsibility. In a time of growing global uncertainty, these principles are essential for strengthening democracy, preserving human dignity, and fostering peaceful, inclusive, and resilient societies worldwide;
4. the development and widespread use of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, is increasingly shifting public debate, civic engagement, and political communication into the digital sphere, creating both significant opportunities and challenges for democracy. While these technologies can expand access to information, strengthen participation, and facilitate public dialogue, they may also contribute to exclusion, disinformation, manipulation, discrimination, and the erosion of public trust;
5. local and regional governments play a crucial role in promoting and strengthening participatory democracy. Citizen participation begins at the local level, where communities can collectively address concrete problems, deliberate on public priorities, and develop practical solutions tailored to local needs. As the level of



governance closest to citizens, cities, municipalities, and regions serve as laboratories of democratic innovation, where new participatory and deliberative practices are developed, tested, and refined;

6. local and regional governments bear a unique responsibility for safeguarding democratic values, maintaining social cohesion, and responding effectively to citizens' needs, particularly during periods of crisis and uncertainty. In increasingly diverse societies, they also play a leading role in promoting inclusive forms of participation and advancing more open models of urban citizenship that enable all residents to contribute to the democratic life of their communities.

II. Future of Participatory Democracy: Shared Commitments

Believing that the future of democracy itself depends on participatory democracy, **We commit to:**

1. **strengthening citizen participation** by creating and expanding meaningful, continuous, and accessible opportunities for people to influence public decision-making; ensuring that the voice of citizens will be truly taken into account in decision-making;
2. **fostering inclusive participation** by identifying and removing social, economic, cultural, linguistic, digital, and institutional barriers to engagement; developing targeted measures to ensure the meaningful participation of women, young people, migrants, minorities, persons with disabilities, and other historically underrepresented groups;
3. **advancing democratic innovation** by supporting experimentation with new participatory and deliberative methods; facilitating collaboration among governments, civil society organisations, academic institutions, and citizens to develop, evaluate, and scale effective democratic practices;
4. **protecting fundamental human rights and freedoms** that form the essential basis for the genuine participation and activities of civil society in a democratic state governed by the rule of law;



5. **using digital technologies and artificial intelligence** in a responsible and human-centred manner to broaden participation whilst preventing discrimination, manipulation, disinformation and digital exclusion;
6. **providing formal and informal lifelong civic education** by developing civic knowledge and skills and attitudes necessary for conscious, responsible and active participation in public life; strengthening media, digital, legal and deliberative competences; promoting critical thinking, dialogue, cooperation and a democratic culture; as well as counteracting disinformation, manipulation and civic exclusion through education;
7. **strengthening the global participatory democracy movement** by fostering international partnerships, networks, and joint initiatives; sharing knowledge, evidence, and good practices across borders, sectors, and all levels of governance;
8. **establishing the OIDP Central and Eastern Europe Regional Office** aimed at increasing recognition and effectiveness of the OIDP in Central and Eastern Europe.

III. The Call to Action

Convinced that participatory democracy is a fundamental condition for building peaceful, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable societies capable of addressing the challenges of the twenty-first century, **We call upon national governments, international organisations, and all relevant stakeholders for:**

1. **rebuilding democratic trust** by ensuring transparency, open governance, and accountability in public institutions; ensuring that citizens receive clear information about how their contributions influence decisions and public policies;
2. **promoting participatory and deliberative democracy at all levels of governance** by consistently and systematically integrating participatory and deliberative mechanisms into public decision-making;



3. **supporting local and regional governments** by strengthening their institutional capacities, ensuring access to appropriate tools, resources and stable funding, supportive legislation;
4. **protecting and expanding civic space** by safeguarding the human rights and freedoms necessary for democratic participation, including freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of assembly, and access to public information, while supporting the grassroots activities by civil society organisations and citizens;
5. **ensuring that digital transformation serves democracy** by promoting the development and use of artificial intelligence and other digital technologies within a framework grounded in human rights, democratic values, transparency, inclusiveness, and political accountability; strengthening democratic oversight and public scrutiny of technological innovation; and preventing disinformation, manipulation, discrimination, digital exclusion, and the weakening of public trust in democratic institutions;
6. **investing in civic education** to equip people of all ages with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to participate effectively in democratic life, engage in informed public dialogue, and strengthen resilience against disinformation;
7. **supporting research, innovation, and capacity-building in democratic participation** by fostering collaboration between local and regional governments, civil society organisations and academic institutions to develop, test, evaluate, and scale innovative democratic practices.

Adopted in Kraków, Poland on September 23, 2026

***By the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy
General Assembly***