YOUTH PARTICIPATION HANDBOOK

A guide for young people to be politically active

Funded by the European Union

DEMOCRACY INTERNATIONAL

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LOTA'S BOX

MEER DEMOCRATIE

MEHR DEMOKRATIE

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Fédération Suisse des Parlements des Jeunes
Federazione Svizzera dei Parlamenti dei Giovani

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CENTRE OF EUROPEAN EXPERTISE

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INTRODUCTION

ABSTRACT

This introductory chapter will explain the event that inspired the creation of the handbook and the purpose of this handbook. It will also lay the theoretical foundations and rationale behind this handbook.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1.1 THE INSPIRATION FOR THE HANDBOOK: DEMOCRACY CAMP 2025

Across Europe, democracy is continuously evolving, not only in institutions but also in communities, classrooms and digital spaces where young people make their voices heard. While public debate often highlights challenges like apathy or division, countless young Europeans are proving that democracy thrives through creativity, empathy and collective action. They are redefining what it means to participate from civic engagement and digital advocacy to sustainability initiatives and intercultural dialogue.

The Democracy Camp 2025 brings together youth from diverse backgrounds to explore how participation, innovation and collaboration can strengthen our shared democratic future.

The Camp serves as a transnational platform where participants co-create solutions, exchange experiences and engage in meaningful debates about democracy's role in addressing today's global issues. It continues the legacy of previous Camps by amplifying young voices and showcasing their power to bring about change.

1.2 THE PURPOSE OF THE HANDBOOK

The Youth Participation Handbook is designed to capture the knowledge, ideas and experiences shared by young people exploring democracy in an ever-changing world. Its purpose is to provide an accessible and inspiring resource that helps readers understand democratic concepts, reflect on their role in society and feel empowered to participate.

By translating the Camp's discussions into clear insights and practical tools, the handbook supports youth, educators and communities in strengthening democratic culture across Europe. It serves as a bridge between learning and action, demonstrating how democratic values can be lived every day through dialogue, collaboration and active citizenship.

THE GOALS OF THE HANDBOOK

Inspire young people to take ownership of democratic values in their everyday lives

Offer practical tools, examples and reflections that support meaningful civic participation

Capture the voices, reflections and shared learnings of the participants

Make democratic concepts easy and reliable for young leaders

Motivate activism and involvement beyond the Camp itself

ULTIMATELY, THE PURPOSE OF THE HANDBOOK IS TO:

SHAPE TOMORROW'S DEMOCRACY BY, FOR, AND WITH YOUTH

1.3 PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Participatory democracy is a form of democracy in which citizens are more than just voters in a typical election cycle. It goes beyond electing leaders or representatives. They are active participants in decision-making processes. Citizens work together to share ideas, discuss problems, and influence the choices that affect their lives. This can happen in local communities, schools, workplaces, or even online spaces.

Contrary to direct democracy mechanisms, where referendums or ballot initiatives are legally binding and carry the full decision-making power in the government, participatory democracy often gives citizens a more consultative and supplementary role in the policy-making process.

Participatory is about getting involved, taking part in the conversations, voicing your ideas, and working with others to shape decisions that affect your community. Participation only works if people actually participate.
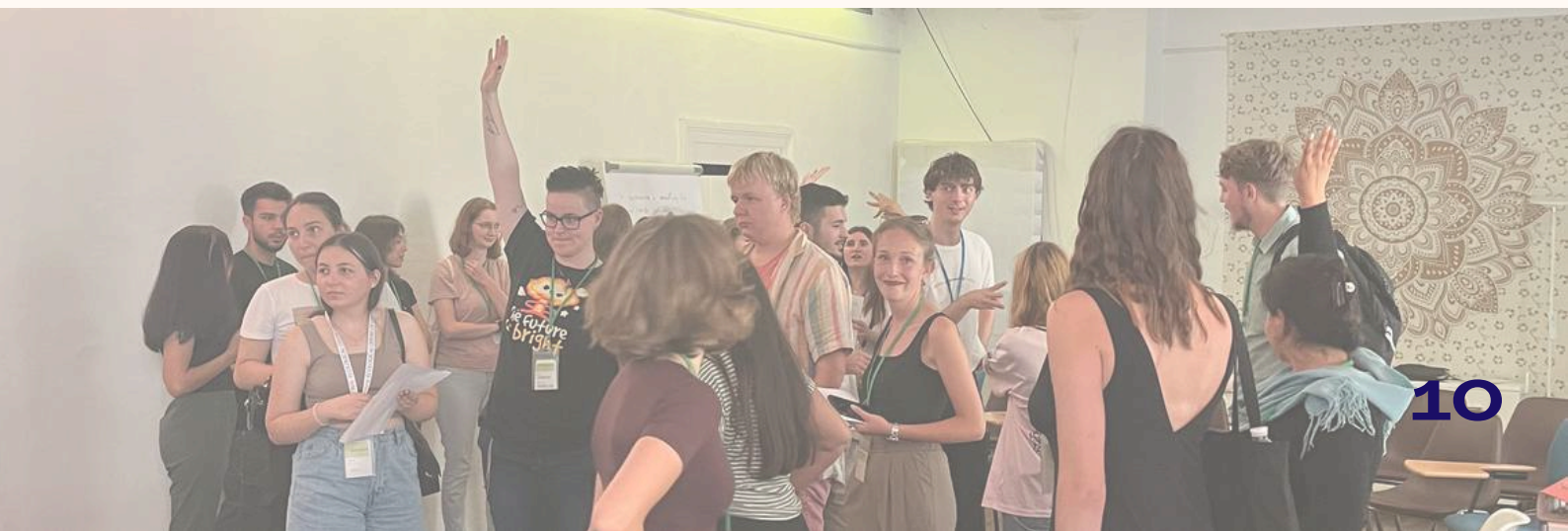
EXAMPLES OF PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

In local communities

Participatory budgeting: Residents help decide how part of the city's money is spent. For example, choosing to fund bike lanes, green spaces, or playgrounds.

Town halls: Citizens meet to discuss local issues such as safety, recycling, or public transport with their elected municipal representatives. They share their ideas and needs with the local government.

Citizen assemblies: Groups of randomly selected people discuss topics like climate action or housing. They deliberate in moderated discussions and draft recommendations to lawmakers.

Public consultations: Governments invite people to comment on new proposals, development plans, or projects before a law is implemented.

In schools and universities

Student councils: Elected students represent their classmates, organise events, and give feedback to school leaders.

Youth parliaments: Young people from different schools or regions, who are part of the youth parliament, come together to debate issues and present their ideas to elected politicians.

Student-faculty committees: Students collaborate with teachers to make schools more sustainable, inclusive, fair, and a safe space to study.

Mock elections and debates: These activities let students experience how democratic participation works in practice.
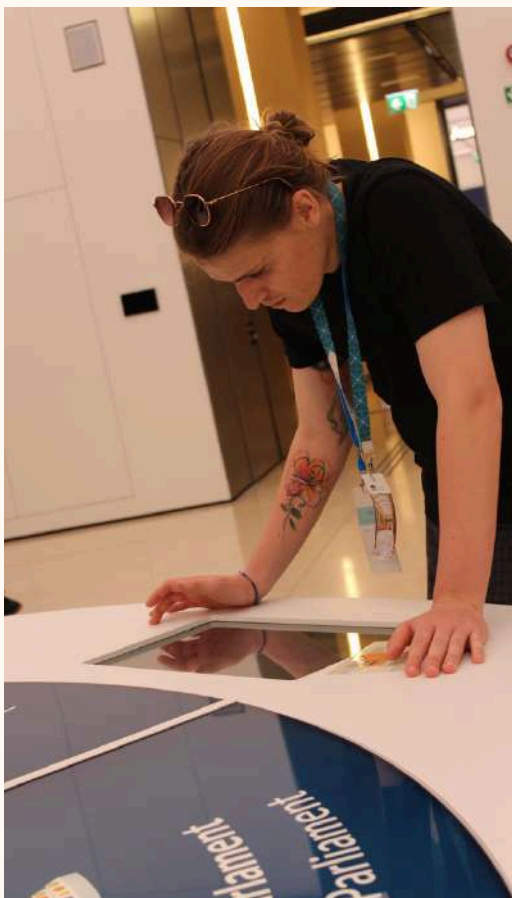
1.4 DIRECT DEMOCRACY

Direct democracy is a form of democracy in which citizens participate in binding decision-making themselves and steer the decisions of elected representatives. It allows people to vote directly on laws, policies, or specific national and local issues, ensuring that political power truly reflects the will of the people.

How It works from the Bottom Up

In direct democracy, citizens can propose a change to a law or propose a new law through a citizens' initiative by collecting signatures until a threshold is met, and triggering a referendum on the topic. Typically, if a simple majority supports it, the result becomes legally binding, and the government must follow the decision made by citizens. Some countries may have a quorum (minimum turnout) or double majority requirement for the vote to pass.

Must direct democracy always be Bottom Up?

No!!! Top-down direct democracy instruments also exist. For example, top-down referendums (plebiscites) are also very much considered direct democracy. This is when the government asks the whole population to vote "yes" or "no" on one specific issue or law.

Nevertheless, **we strongly recommend bottom-up procedures as these originate from the citizens themselves.**

Why it matters

Direct democracy strengthens transparency and trust between governments and citizens. It ensures that everyone, including young people of voting age, can participate actively in shaping laws and policies that impact their societies. It complements representative democracy by making decision-making more inclusive of the people's will.

AGENDA INITIATIVE

Citizens collect signatures to place an issue on the political agenda. Elected officials must discuss it, but does not have to adopt it.

CITIZENS INITIATIVE

Citizens collect signatures to propose a new law or constitutional change.
If successful, the proposal usually goes to a public vote.

VETO INITIATIVE

Citizens collect signatures to challenge a law already passed by the government.
If enough signatures are gathered, the law must be put to a public vote before taking effect.

BOTTOM UP

DIRECT DEMOCRACY EXAMPLES

(Direct Democracy Navigator, 2020)

TOP DOWN

BY LAW

AUTHORITY REFERENDUM

Referendum triggered by the government or parliament.
Citizens vote "yes" or "no," but political authorities decide when and on what.

VETO REFERENDUM

Citizens vote to accept or reject a law passed by the government.
It happens automatically in some systems or when citizens trigger it.

MANDATORY REFERENDUM

A public vote that the government is required by law to hold on specific issues,
such as constitutional changes or major treaties.

DIRECT DEMOCRACY NAVIGATOR

The Direct Democracy Navigator is the world's largest online database for Direct Democracy, currently documenting around 2.000 instruments of direct democracy in more than 100 countries on the national, regional and local levels.

It is a collection of all the legal designs of direct democracy across the world

FIND OUT WHAT DIRECT DEMOCRACY INSTRUMENTS ARE AVAILABLE IN YOUR COUNTRY!!!
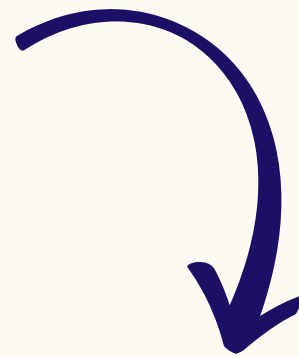
TO THE DIRECT DEMOCRACY NAVIGATOR

1.5 THE POWER OF (YOUTH) PARTICIPATION
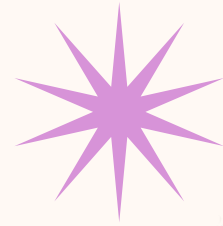
People say that young people are often called the leaders of tomorrow. But to be honest, they are one of the most essential participants today. Democracy depends on the active involvement of all its citizens; the voices of youth bring energy, creativity, and a fresh perspective that every society needs to take as an example.

When young people take part in democratic life — by voting, joining student councils, volunteering, or speaking out on issues that matter — they help shape fairer, more inclusive communities. Their participation challenges old ways of thinking, encourages innovation, and reminds leaders to stay connected to the situations of the next generation.

Democracy is strongest when it reflects everyone's experiences. That's why it's so important for young people to be informed, engaged, and confident in expressing their views. Taking part isn't only about politics; it's about standing up for what you believe in, working with others to create change, and ensuring that decisions about the future include the people who will live in it the longest.

By getting involved, you don't just influence today's world; you help build a better one for tomorrow. For everyone's future.

Your ideas, your energy, and your voice can make democracy more vibrant, fair, and hopeful for all.

02.

BARRIERS, ENGAGEMENT GAPS & SOLUTIONS

ABSTRACT

This chapter sets out the key obstacles that hinder young people's participation in democratic life and explores the reasons behind their disengagement. It also highlights broad breakthroughs in youth participation and outlines actions that can strengthen and expand young people's engagement.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The percentage of young people in the EU that have participated in youth activities. Study published at the portal for European Data.

(European Union, 2022)

2.1 BARRIERS TO YOUTH ENGAGEMENT, MOTIVATION AND PARTICIPATION

Engaging young people in democratic processes is vital for the legitimacy and vitality of democracy, yet youth participation often lags behind older generations. Understanding what motivates young people and how to overcome barriers is key to fostering active democratic involvement.

Cultural norms

Lack of skills and training

Time and money

BARRIERS
(Camur, 2006)

Gender

Poverty and disabilities

Institutional barriers

Language
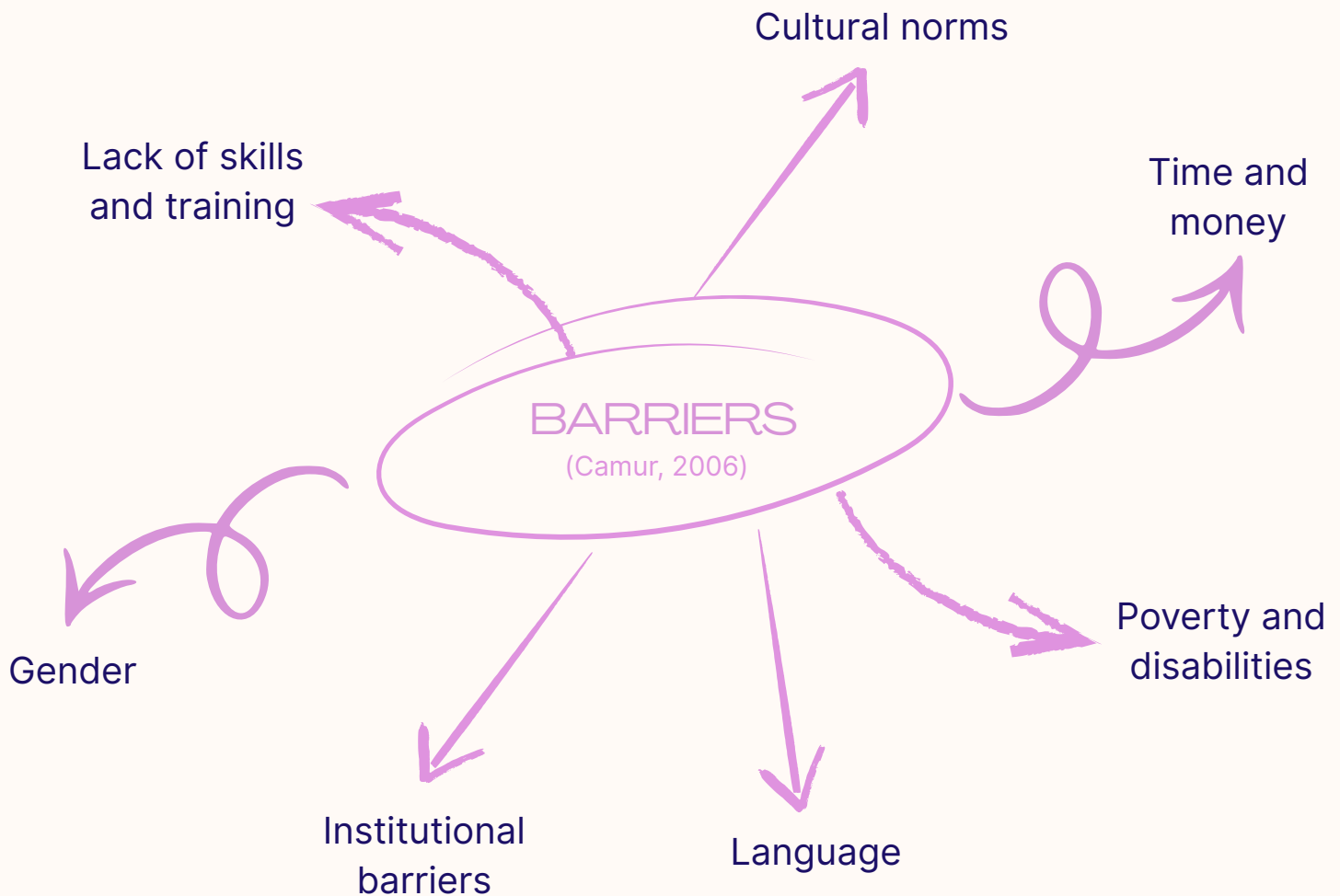
READ MORE HERE:

(PDF) Barriers to Young People's Active Participation and Role of...

PDF | The majority of the one billion young people, ages 15 to 24, who live in the world today are leading healthy lives;...

researchgate.net
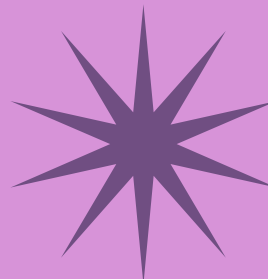
2.2 UNDERSTANDING YOUTH POLITICAL MOTIVATION

1

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations

Youth engagement arises from intrinsic factors, such as interest, civic duty, and the desire for change, and extrinsic ones like recognition or incentives. Intrinsic motivation leads to deeper, longer-term participation and should be cultivated by connecting politics to young people's lived experiences.

2

The Role of Political Efficacy

Political efficacy, or belief in one's influence, includes internal (self-confidence) and external (system responsiveness) dimensions. Education that builds political knowledge and real opportunities for impact strengthens both, boosting sustained engagement.

3

Identity and Belonging

Democratic participation helps youth explore identity and belonging. When their voices are genuinely valued, they see themselves as political actors. Tokenism and exclusion, however, quickly diminish motivation.

2.3 THE STRUGGLE OF BELONGING

(Pacetti, 2022)

One of the main struggles young people face in political participation is finding both the ability and the motivation to take action. These two aspects — ability and willingness — are often closely linked to how much young people feel they belong within the political system and society that they are part of. The more a person feels included in a community, the more likely they are to participate, contribute, and engage in democratic processes.

Recognising and valuing the principles below helps build stronger communities and encourages individuals to take responsibility for shaping the democratic societies they live in. By following these principles, young people are more likely to feel motivated to engage in democracy.

Social Inclusion

Factors such as gender, personal background, professional circumstances, or personal struggles can either foster or hinder inclusion. At times, these characteristics may leave individuals feeling excluded or unheard.

Therefore, active efforts must be made to ensure that everyone feels included.

Promoting multiculturalism, tolerance, and diversity contributes to creating safe and inclusive spaces. It is important to respect each other's cultural practices, so that all people, regardless of ethnicity, religious background or any other personal characteristics, feel they have a place in democracy.

Promoting multiculturalism

To take action, individuals need opportunities, affordances and supportive environments. Community spaces, whether existing or newly created, can provide these opportunities. However, such spaces often emerge only after

Supportive community environments

individuals or groups may highlight needs, mobilise communities, and advocate for change with institutions. Educational initiatives can also play a key role. Programmes designed for students, teachers, and school leaders — such as school clubs or youth forums — can increase young people's participation both at school and in wider society.

Flexibility and personalisation

Of course, every context is different. That is why flexibility and personalisation of participation programmes should be prioritised over standardised models. When we promote diversity, flexibility, and individual adaptation, we also strengthen participation, a sense of belonging, young people's sense

of agency, participation, and confidence. Since most programmes are developed in cooperation with public institutions, it is important that young people share in that power and influence, so they can fully flourish within society.

It is important to remember that no individual should carry this responsibility alone. Professionals play a vital supporting role: teachers act as mediators and role models, and parents can provide emotional and moral support.

The importance of professionals

External assistance, whether from mentors, organisations, or peers, can serve as a valuable springboard for participation.

2.4 STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Creating Meaningful Participation Opportunities
Authentic participation means shared decision-making, not tokenism. Programmes that allow young people to identify issues, deliberate, and shape real outcomes strengthen motivation and ownership.

Leveraging Digital Technologies
Digital tools can make participation more accessible and peer-driven. However, they must address digital divides and support — not replace — the face-to-face engagement that builds trust.

Issue-Based and Project-Based Approaches
Connecting engagement to real issues — like climate change or education — makes it relevant. Project-based participation gives youth structure and clear impact pathways.

Peer-to-Peer Engagement
Youth are more influenced by peers than adults. Peer-led organising and ambassador programmes foster belonging and collective motivation.

Skill-Building and Capacity Development
Practical training in communication, critical thinking, and civic skills empowers young people to participate effectively. Experiential learning ensures relevance and real-world application.

Recognition and Affirmation
Genuine recognition validates young people's contributions and reinforces their sense of agency, without slipping into superficial praise.

Building Democratic Habits
Regular, accessible opportunities — such as community meetings or school forums — help make civic engagement a normal, everyday practice.

Addressing Burnout and Sustaining Hope
Supporting wellbeing, celebrating progress, and fostering intergenerational mentorship help sustain long-term motivation and resilience.

Digital Innovation of Democracy

Technological advances have become one of the most important tools for democratic inclusion. Young people are actively using e-participation platforms and organising social media campaigns to foster dialogue, accountability, and collective action. Digital platforms such as Decidim (Spain) and Zencity (used across Europe) show how transparent, data-driven tools and discussions can help bridge gaps between policymakers and citizens.

Institutional Recognition

Many regions across Europe are developing participation platforms that give young people direct channels to present proposals to policymakers. Youth parliaments, councils, and consultative assemblies — such as the *Consiglio Cantonale dei Giovani* and national youth councils — are not merely symbolic. They can influence legislation, help shape social programmes, and encourage young people to see themselves as legitimate democratic actors.

2.5 GENERAL BREAKTHROUGHS

Despite the many barriers young people face, recent years have also brought remarkable breakthroughs. These advances show that young people can be trusted and equipped — and that their inclusion is essential to strengthening democracy and civic participation.

Educating Youth for Active Citizen Participation

Many schools, NGOs, and youth councils offer participatory learning methods that focus on critical thinking, debate, and collaboration. Initiatives run by bodies such as SALTO Youth and Erasmus+ can be highly transformative: they provide political learning beyond textbooks, help students understand their political environment, and encourage them to become confident participants rather than passive observers.

Global Recognition

Recognition as a breakthrough is not confined by borders. Today's youth movements are global, connected across continents through digital and civic networks. Movements on climate change, human rights, and gender equality show that young people's voices may be rooted locally, but their impact is global.

03.

A GUIDE TO YOUTH PARTICIPATION

ABSTRACT

This chapter is a practical giude on how youth can actively participate in politics and democracies. It explains different ways of engagement, such as voting, student councils, youth parliament, and volunteering.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3.1 GENERAL ACTIONS TO PARTICIPATE

Politics is all around us; there are so many fields in which we can act without noticing at first sight. You are already being active in politics without noticing yourself. However, the more aware you are of your actions, the more effective you will be. Here are a few **general** ways to participate:

3.1.1 POLITICALLY RELATED (INSTITUTIONS)

Voting

Voting is one of the first options one has in general; however, it is often less attractive for young adults, and it is not in every country that voting is an expressive and efficient way to give an opinion. **When voting, do not forget to do research**. If you need help to understand what you are asked to vote on, try to find articles or videos about the project. It is very important to be critical when facing ideas or opinions. It might be possible to find in your country some platforms, websites, or newspapers which clarify terms or main ideas. For example, in Switzerland, young adults receive a letter via EasyVote before the voting session; you might have one platform like that in your own country!

Civic Participation or Activities

Through your civic participation or activities, like youth organisations, clubs or regional communities, you can already act among other participants, citizens or groups. By being active in your civic participation, you reinforce democratic policies by encouraging local integrity and building shared values. Some communities might need volunteers to help with an activism event or support for political parties. Understanding one's government is already a huge path; nevertheless, by participating actively, you will also meet many opportunities while learning about politics in your own country.

Protest Movements

You can also participate in protest movements that highlight single issues demanding immediate action. Some organisations hold meetings to protest, which can bring credibility to the values you want to defend. Be curious about those protests and don't be shy to participate if you want action. You may meet some interesting protestors!

3.1.2 OUTSIDE (POLITICAL) INSTITUTIONS

Youth Activism through Social Media and Digital Tools (see more in Chapter 4)

You can create your own platform to engage in political action by establishing a forum, leading a blog, or responding to hashtags like BLM (Black Lives Matter) or #MeToo. The positive aspect is the creativity and freedom of mind you can have in expressing your opinion on such matters or other issues you want to highlight. Social media and online platforms can also be a space to host online meetings, share memes, or participate in debates. On social media, it is always important to consider other opinions to avoid getting the rabbit hole effect.

"You do not even need so much visibility; expressing yourself is already a brave part in politics."

Youth Activities Through the Use of Public Spaces

Some cities or organisations use public spaces for alternative purposes, such as youth activism and political participation. Parks, public squares, community centres, libraries, schools and public libraries are sometimes transformed into a space to express ideas, discuss issues, and find solutions.

If you want to know more about an example, or get inspired, you can consult LINZ ZAHLSTADT (Stadt Linz). Their newspaper or website offers a space for people in the city by organising such events where individuals can express themselves.

3.1.3 OTHER GENERAL WAYS TO PARTICIPATE

EU Feedback

Provide feedback on existing EU laws and regulations and complete public opinion surveys conducted regularly by the European Commission. This feedback is extremely accessible for young people as it is done online.

The Participation Playbook

by People Powered

"An interactive online guide to help you successfully advocate for and implement a participatory program"
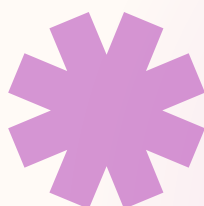
Find out more here

EU INITIATIVES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The European Union has developed several initiatives for young people such as the European Youth Week, Young Journalists, Europe and DiscoverEU and the Erasmus Solidarity Corps.

Access all the EU initiatives for young people here:

[EU initiatives │European Youth Portal](#)

3.2 THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE (ECI)

The EU is home to the first-ever and only transnational tool of near direct democracy: The European Citizens' Initiative!

The ECI is a mechanism that allows EU citizens to directly participate in shaping EU policies. A group of seven citizens from seven different EU countries can launch an initiative in an area where the EU has competence to act. If the initiative collects one million signatures across seven EU countries, the European Commission is obliged to respond to the citizens' policy proposal and decide whether or not to take action. A public hearing in the European Parliament is also held, with the possibility of a plenary vote.

It is required to be an EU citizen to sign an ECI. Seven EU countries even allow their citizens between 16-17 years old to sign an ECI.

Learn more here:

European Citizens' Initiative

The European Citizens' Initiative is a unique way for you to help shape the EU by calling on the European Commission to propose new laws. Once an initiativ...

europa.eu

HOW DOES THE ECI WORK

Who can launch an initiative?

A group of at least 7 EU citizens, each residing in a different EU Member State.

How it works

How it works - a step by step guide to the European citizens' initiative (ECI)

European Citizens' Initiative

01

Prepare & Register

- Form an organising committee.
- Draft your initiative's proposal, including the legal basis.
- Submit it to the European Commission for review before it can become officially registered.

02

Collect Signatures

- Gather at least 1 million statements of support from EU citizens.
- Reach minimum required signature thresholds in at least 7 EU countries

03

Verification & Submission

- National authorities in each country verify the collected signatures.
- After verification, the organisers formally submit the confirmations of verification to the European Commission.

04

Political Review and Commission Response

- The Commission invites the organisers to meet and explain the issues raised in the initiative.
- The European Parliament invites the organisers to a public hearing. A plenary debate and vote on the topic may be held.
- The European Commission publishes a written response explaining what action, if any, it will take on the topic. If no action is taken, the Commission must explain why not.
- The Commission is not obliged to propose legislation on the issues raised in the initiative. It may instead decide to pursue non-legislative action, such as launching a public consultation, impact assessment, or exploring the topic further through stakeholders.

It is one of the few direct instruments that young people under 18 can participate in. In Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Malta, Austria, and Finland, 16-year-olds can sign and launch an ECI. In Greece, 17-year-olds can sign.

It is a digitally heavy tool. The wide majority of signatures are collected digitally, meaning youth can take part easily from anywhere without needing access to formal networks or physical campaigning events.

WHY DOES THE ECI MATTER FOR THE YOUTH

As a transnational participation tool, it allows young people to shape EU policy beyond elections.

Signing or supporting an initiative is simple and accessible, and a good first step into political engagement.

Many of the topics raised by ECIs affect youth or are issues often important to youth.

3.3 YOUTH DEMOCRACY COHORT

Youth Democracy Cohort is a global platform that aims to enhance youth involvements in democratic processes such as civic engagement and political participation.

SOME OF THE THINGS YOU CAN EXPLORE:

Global Youth Participation Index (GYPI)

The Global Youth Participation Index (GYPI) is a youth-led research that compares the levels of youth participation across the world.
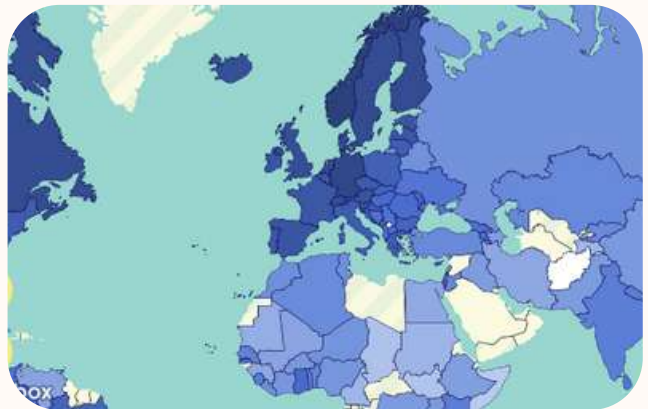
The Youth Democracy Map

Explore youth participation and civic engagement across the world. You can find impactful projects, inspiring stories, advocacy projects and much more.

FIND OUT MORE HERE

3.4 YOUTH PARLIAMENTS

A youth parliament is an organisation that brings together young people in a municipality, city, region or even nation who are politically motivated and want to make a change in the world they live in. A youth parliament can have many forms and sizes; it can have big events at regular intervals, or just small ones every now and then, it can have hundreds of members or exist just thanks to two or three people. The age limits also vary widely.

What youth parliaments have in common is their objective in teaching young people about political instruments and procedures, inspiring them to use such tools, and acting as an intermediary between the youth and the broader political world.

REGIONAL EXAMPLE: THE "CONSIGLIO CANTONALE DEI GIOVANI"

The "Consiglio cantonale dei giovani" was first created in 2001, after the Ufficio Giovani (cantonal department for youth) was charged in 1998 by the state council to draft a project for the realisation of a "consultative parliament for the young ticinesi". The idea for the project came already in 1996, inspired by the national "Jugendsession". The newly created youth parliament was anchored in the cantonal law in 2005.

The youth parliament is composed of an assembly, of which every young resident of Ticino between the ages of 14 and 19 can take part, and the organisational committee, which is elected by the assembly.

The assembly meets three times a year. The first time to gather ideas and exchange opinions with experts about various themes. The second time to vote on the proposals that are brought by the assembly, and eventually decide on their modification. After this, the leading committee sends the proposals to the cantonal authorities. The last time the parliament meets, it is to discuss the answers it got from the cantonal authorities and to have a direct exchange with some of their representatives, who have the occasion to personally answer the questions of the members of the assembly. (https://ccg-ti.ch/)

Many proposals get rejected by the cantonal authorities, but now and then, one passes that can have a big impact on the lives of the youth. One example is the "Carta IoStudio", a student card that the assembly of the youth parliament had insisted on creating for more than 10 years. This card is now part of the daily life of every middle and high schooler in Ticino. Apart from being used as an identification and library card, it also holds many discounts and special offers for those holding it.

The "Consiglio cantonale dei giovani" holds a close relationship to the two existing municipal youth parliaments of Lugano and Mendrisiotto, and is also part of the federation of Swiss youth parliaments (DSJ), through which the committee members meet other young people from the many different youth parliaments in Switzerland and outside.

In Switzerland and Liechtenstein, there are, at the moment, around 80 youth parliaments, in which more than 1500 young people are active. 65 of those are members of the federation. There are municipal, regional and cantonal youth parliaments, and the delegate assembly voted in 2024 to also create a national youth parliament. The map below shows where they are.

https://dsj.ch/jugendparlamente/
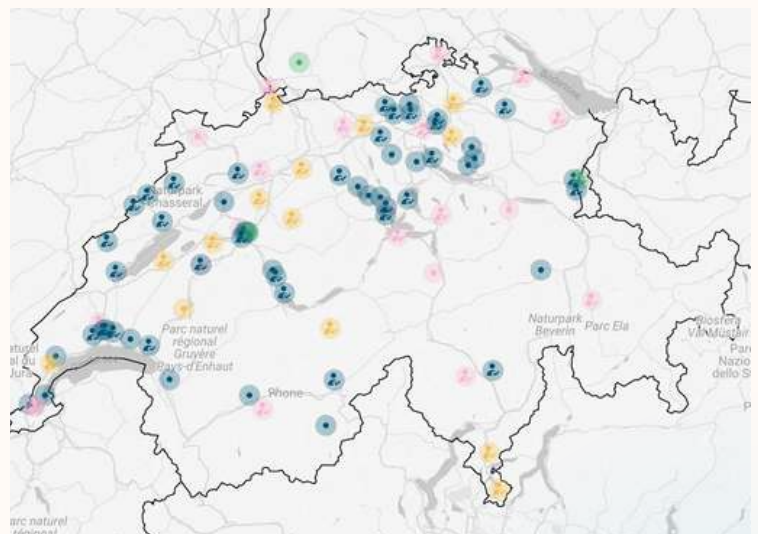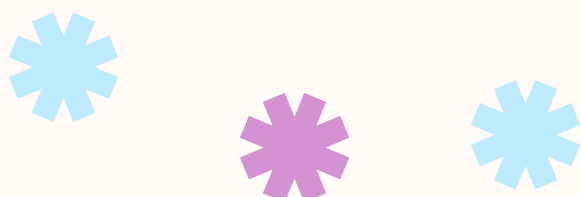
3.5 YOUTH PARTIES

General Structure

Youth parties are mostly, but not always, wings of already established political parties in a country. Those parties usually have a lower limit that can vary from 14 to 18 years old, and an upper limit at 35 years, though it can be lower depending on the party.

The goal of the party is to inform its young members about the values it represents and to teach them about political instruments and procedures. The party prepares the next generation of its leaders and representatives. It can exist on a communal, regional or national level.

The parties are composed of an assembly and the leading committee. The assembly is open to everyone of age who decides to become a member of the party. The members go to the events and keep up with what the party is up to. One tool for that is the inscription to the newsletter. The assembly's task consists in approving or updating the party's constitution and political platform, electing and reviewing the work of the leading committee and discussing the strategy for different policies.

The leading committee is the organisatory part behind the party. They get elected by the assembly and are divided into different positions or roles. What is always present is the president, the vice-president(s) and the secretary. Other roles may vary. The tasks of the leading committee consist of organising the assembly and various events around the year, implementing the strategy voted by the assembly and representing the youth party towards other actors, for example, other regional branches of the same party or the mother party.

Example: GdC Ticino

The "Giovani del Centro Ticino" (GdC Ticino) is a political association who share the values and objectives of "Il Centro Ticino" but remains independent from it and promotes discussion and political action. It is open to members up to the age of 33, though those holding political office can remain until the end of their term.

The organs of GdC Ticino are the assembly, the committee and the directorate. The assembly is the supreme body composed of all members. It meets at least once a year, and decides on statutory changes, elections of the president and committee, approval of financial reports, and major political or organizational matters. Decisions are made by a simple majority, and in case of a tie, the president of the committee has the casting vote. The committee promotes the creation of sections of GdC Ticino on regions and communal level, these can be organized mostly autonomously.

Each section has a designated contact person appointed by the committee to promote communication and local activities.

The association is non-profit and funded through third-party contributions, public funds, and revenues from events. Only the association's assets are liable for its obligations, not individual members or sections.

The GdC is a cantonal section of the youth party of "Die Mitte"/"le Centre"/"il Centro", in Ticino, but other sections exist in every other canton. They are brought together by the "Die junge Mitte"/"Jeunes du Centre"/"Giovani del Centro", the youth party that acts on national level. Delegates from all sections come together at the delegate assembly. The party is also active internationally, for example as members of the YEPP (youth European people's party).

3.6 STUDENT COUNCILS

What are Student Councils?

Student councils are the union of the representatives of an educational system. These councils exist in many different private and public schools and universities. Their task is to organise events for the students and to represent them towards the authorities when they want to make improvements or changes in their education system. Other tasks can be to bring the students closer to the politicians and teach them about the political instruments.

Every student can participate in these councils; they do not need to have any qualifications. Through these councils, the students have a chance to bring their opinions to the political world and personally make a change. Engagement and youth participation are fundamentals of a democratic society. It's really important to learn from a young age about participatory tools and how to influence one's personal environment.

In Germany

In Germany, there are several different levels one could participate in: class, school, district, federal state and country. Starting from the bottom, each class has a representative. Together, the class representatives choose every year the school representatives, whose job is to represent the wishes and needs of all students. These representatives are the leaders of the student councils, which are open to all students as long as they are also elected.

One position in the student council is the delegation, which consists of two delegates and two vice delegates. These delegates go to one of about four meetings of the district student council and represent their school in these meetings.

The delegates of the region each hold a different position in the district student council, and elect the president, vice presidents, the committee presidents and two delegates who then represent the district in the student council on the federal level. The same goes on at the federal and national levels.

Almost all councils, at different levels, organise a few events different from the regular meetings. They do something like sports events, schooling days, panel discussions, et cetera, to make the students share a sense of belonging outside of the obligatory classes. Each and every level is significant and can help change something, even if it is small.
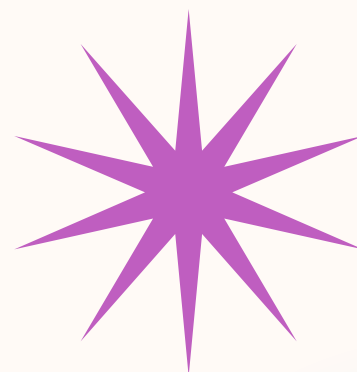
GENERAL STRUCTURE:

Each level elects a delegation that represents them on a higher level. These delegations then elect a delegation for another, higher level. A student can, trough election, even participate, represent and share their opinions in the student council at the country level.

In other countries and on an international level
The system of having a school representative and a student council is common in many countries, but having a student council at the district, federal state or country level, like in Germany, is rare.

A country that has a similar system is Austria, where they also have a Student Council in schools, at the federal, state and country level. There is also the European Student Council and other councils on the European level.

3.7 VOLUNTEERING WORK

Another possibility is the European Solidarity Corps: A flagship programme that encourages young Europeans (between 18 and 30) to engage in volunteer work, civil society projects, and other forms of civic participation for a sustainable continent through volunteering.

DIGITAL TOOLS FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION

ABSTRACT

This chapter is a practical toolbox of digital tools. from youth initiatives and platforms to visual and organisational tools, that can young people to be civically engaged. It also outlines the roles and problems with digital tools for effective youth participation.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4.1 THE ROLES OF DIGITAL TOOLS YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Digital tools and social media platforms have transformed the way young people engage in politics. They offer spaces for information, mobilisation, and advocacy that were previously inaccessible. When used strategically, they can strengthen youth voices, connect local actions to global causes, and enable creative forms of participation. While digital tools expand participation, they also create new barriers and risks that can undermine meaningful engagement.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

Online spaces such as Reddit communities or Instagram Lives enable open political discussions among peers and foster civic literacy.

MOBILISATION AND CAMPAIGNS

Social media and digital tools can increase the visibility of campaigns and make advocacy for topics you believe in easier.

Example: The #SAFESCHOOLS PETITION collected 35,000 signatures using mainly email and WhatsApp.

INFORMATION ACCESS

Platforms like Instagram or TikTok make complex political issues more accessible through short-form videos, infographics, and explainer posts.
Example: The account @euyouthforum on Instagram shares digestible content about EU youth rights and participation opportunities.

MOBILISATION AND CAMPAIGNS

Communication tools like WhatsApp, and Discord enable youth-led movements to coordinate protests or online campaigns rapidly.
Example: During the Fridays for Future movement, youth organisers used Telegram groups to synchronise global climate strikes.

4.2 THE PROBLEMS WITH DIGITAL TOOLS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

MISINFORMATION AND ECHO CHAMBERS

Social media algorithms are designed to prioritise engagement over accuracy, often amplifying emotional or divisive content. This creates echo chambers where people are repeatedly exposed to viewpoints similar to their own, limiting critical reflection and dialogue across differences. Moreover, the rapid spread of unverified information online can distort public understanding and polarise opinions.

ONLINE HARASSMENT AND BURNOUT

Young people who express political opinions online frequently encounter hate speech, discrimination, and targeted attacks. The lack of effective moderation and protection mechanisms on many platforms can make participation emotionally exhausting and even unsafe.

DIGITAL INEQUALITY

Access to digital tools and stable internet connections remains uneven across regions and social groups. People in rural areas or from low-income backgrounds often face barriers in accessing digital spaces for participation. This digital divide reinforces existing social inequalities and leaves many voices unheard.

READ MORE HERE:

- Social media algorithms 'amplifying misogynistic content'
- Social-Media Algorithms Have Hijacked "Social Learning"
- As AI Spreads, Experts Predict the Best and Worst Changes in Digital Life by 2035

4.3 DIGITAL TOOLS FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION

FACT-CHECKING AND MEDIA LITERACY

CONSUL DEMOCRACY

An open-source digital participation platform to promote open, inclusive and democratic societies in which citizens participate in decision making processes. It allows governments and civil society to involve citizens in transparent and structured decision making through a variety of tools.

CONSUL DEMOCRACY

YOUTH NETWORKING AND LEARNING

SALTO PARTICIPATION & INFORMATION

SALTO:Participation Pool

A European Commission-supported platform providing high-quality learning materials, training opportunities, and examples of youth participation projects.It connects young people and youth workers across Europe to exchange best practices and strengthen democratic engagement.

FACT-CHECKING AND MEDIA LITERACY

EUVSDISINFO

An initiative by the European External Action Service that exposes disinformation targeting EU citizens. It helps young people critically assess media content, identify manipulative narratives, and develop responsible online behaviour.

EU vs DiSiNFO

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & ADVOCACY

DECIDIM

An open-source participatory democracy platform used by cities, NGOs, and youth organisations to design consultations, debates, and participatory budgets. It also allows people to participate in such democratic spaces.
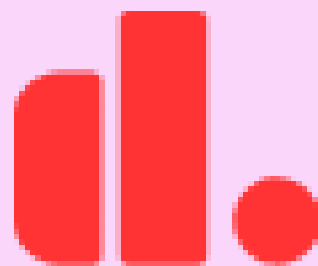
COLLABORATIVE DECISION-MAKING

LOOMIO

A digital space for inclusive discussions and collective decision-making within youth groups or organizations.

SECURE COMMUNICATION

SIGNAL

A privacy-focused messaging app with end-to-end encryption, allowing youth activists and organizations to communicate safely.

ONLINE CAMPAIGNS & PETITIONS

WEMOVE.E

On this platform you can create and sign petitions and campaigns on issues that matter to them. It helps build collective pressure on institutions or decision-makers, amplifying youth voices in policy and social debates.

4.4 DIGITAL VISUAL TOOLS

LAYOUT AND DESIGN

Canva

A free design platform to create posters, infographics, presentations, and social media content. It helps you communicate ideas visually and make civic campaigns more engaging.

INTERACTIVE STORYTELLING & TIMELINES

Knight Lab

A collection of free, open-source storytelling tools developed by Northwestern University.

INTERACTIVE PRESENTATION AND AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Mentimeter

Enables interactive presentations with live polls, word clouds, and Q&As.

4.5 COLLABORATION AND ORGANISATION DIGITAL TOOLS

COLLABORATIVE IDEA BOARD

Padlet

A simple, interactive online board where participants can post text, images, or videos.

SCHEDULING AND COORDINATION

Doodle

Simplifies meeting scheduling by allowing participants to indicate availability in polls.

TASK MANAGEMENT & DEADLINES

Trello

A free, card-based project management tool that helps teams track progress, assign tasks, and visualise project workflows. Ideal for organising campaigns or events.

ORGANIATION AND MANAGEMENT

Notion

An all-in-one workspace that combines notes, tasks, calendars, and databases.

Not sure who to vote for?
4.6 Meet Palumba

From Miriam Egger, a Democracy Camp participant

Across Europe, only 46% of young people are aware of European elections, and many feel lost when trying to understand who actually represents their views.

Many young voters feel overwhelmed by politics. Party programmes are long, political language is complicated, and traditional media doesn't always reach younger audiences.

As a result, first time voters ask themselves: **"Who should I vote for?" "Which candidate aligns with my values?"**

That is where Palumba steps in

Palumba helps young people:
- Understand political parties and candidates in simple, youth-friendly language
- Identify which political values match their own through interactive tools
- Navigate European elections with confidence, clarity, and independence
- Engage with democracy in a way that is relevant, accessible, and empowering

Learn more

Here

4.7 A SMALL GUIDE ON HOW TO USE DIGITAL TOOLS

Double check your sources

1 Always cross-check political information using reliable fact-checking sites (e.g. EUvsDisinfo, Snopes, Reuters Fact Check).

Diversify your information sources

2 Follow youth-led NGOs, independent journalists, and official institutions to avoid echo chambers.

Engage beyond the screen

3 Use online platforms to also connect with people offline. Talk to others about what you see online.

Protect your digital safety

4 Use strong passwords, avoid oversharing personal data, and use two-factor authentication as much as possible.

Collaborate digitally

5 Use tools that support co-creation, transparency, and collective decision-making

05.

THE FUTURE OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION

ABSTRACT

This chapter outlines essential next steps for building an ideal future for youth participation. It calls for a shift from symbolic involvement to genuine shared power, where young people co-create, co-decide and co-manage democratic processes at every level. By strengthening participation infrastructures, embedding youth voices in policymaking, ensuring inclusion, and using technology responsibly, institutions can move towards a democracy shaped with young people instead of merely for them.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5.1 WHAT SHOULD AN IDEAL FUTURE FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION LOOK LIKE

Democracy is not anyone's possession; rather, it is an idea that needs the practice of all who believe in it. The future of youth participation depends on the action of today's youth, not as passive observers waiting for the permission of the authorities, but as co-creators of change.

Across Europe, youth participation has entered a phase other than traditional politics. It is no longer limited to voting or joining a youth council; rather, it focuses on how to embed participation in everyday scenarios. The beauty of the youth participation lies in its constant phase of motion- from local level community mandates to global projects, from highlighting climate crises to demanding digital rights, democracy is no longer confined to closed doors of parliaments, rather it is thriving because of the voices which carry purposes with enthusiasm.

Nevertheless, when looking at the future, youth participation needs more than pure enthusiasm. The passion-driven Young-enthusiasm needs infrastructure. Institutions must evolve to change their existing structures to allow the participation of youth from a symbolic to a systemic level.

In a literal sense, this notion stands as giving young voices the space to sit with those who are policymakers, who manage budgets, foreign policies, infrastructures and economic affairs. In short, every table where the future is being discussed should include young voices and take them into account when reaching final decisions. Young people should co-discuss, co-create, and co-manage policies. This co-management should be from the grassroots to the global level, from schools to cross-border levels. Youth participation, beyond a symbolic one, is not an exceptional demand; it is a very natural and needed one.
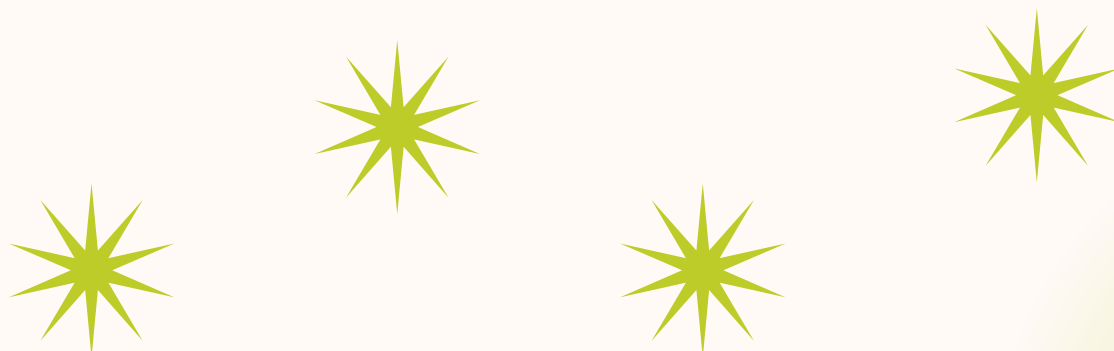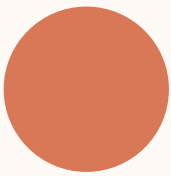
In the current times, the most challenging issue is to tackle the fast-paced evolution of technology, as it is a double-edged sword. Digital tools have the tendency to risk participation by trapping users using echo chambers and algorithms, as shown in the social dilemma. Such issues are also one of the reasons for the distrust which has grown in an exceptional amount between the institutions and the locals. The involvement of youth is much needed in combating such scenarios and turning technology into a tool which empowers, promotes dialogue, and inclusion instead of manipulating and dividing.

For the sake of the collective future, democracy needs a shift of co-management in different zones. Just think how this co-management can flourish our future, by the passion of young minds with new information and knowledge sitting on the table with those who have the expertise of the previous times. Participation is not the possession or privilege of a few democracies belongs to all, and talking of shaping "democracy's future" would be incomplete without those whose future is being discussed.

Photo credit: Democracy Camp participants

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS TO GET THERE

1

Make co-management with youth the norm

Create permanent youth co-management boards, which should be composed at least 50% of young people nominated by youth organisations. Give these boards a formal role, such as in the model used in the youth sector of the Council of Europe.

2

Lowering the voting age

Lowering the voting age and the age for signing citizens' initiatives, such as the ECI, in all EU member states, but also at the national and local level, as citizens increasingly use citizens' initiatives to promote sustainable and inclusive societies. These citizen-led initiatives also empower marginalised communities to put their solutions on the political agenda.

3

Invest in education and improve access to educational projects

This includes integrating practical democracy learning in schools through curriculum reforms, funding non-formal education projects, expanding exchange and mobility programmes, and ensuring accessible resources for marginalised youth. By equipping young people with skills, critical thinking, and real opportunities to practise participation, education becomes a launchpad for long-term democratic engagement.

4

Turn dialogue into shared decision-making

Policymakers should commit to a formal follow-up mechanism for youth dialogues: for each dialogue cycle, committees adopt a short "response report" explaining which recommendations will be implemented, which not, and why. This should not be restricted to EU level, but be done on all political leves.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS TO GET THERE

5

Introduce a binding "Youth Test" for all EU laws

Build on the Commission's new EU Yoth Test and make it a mandatory part of the Parliament's legislative process: every report should include an explicit assessment of impacts on different groups of young people.

6

Prioritise inclusion of under-represented youth

Set measurable targets for the participation of rural youth, migrants, young people with disabilities, working-class youth and those not in education or training, and require all EU-funded participation projects to report on who is not in the room.

7

Stronger dissemination of best practices

Stronger dissemination of best practices such as the ECI, Youth Councils, the EU Youth Dialogue, European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV), or the European Solidarity Corps. Any communication should use inclusive, gender-sensitive language and representations and rely on diverse communication channels among which influencers.

8

Make accountability visible

Build a public platform with a scoreboard that tracks how often youth tests are used, how many laws have been influenced by EU Youth Dialogue recommendations and how diverse youth participation has been in each EU committee.

INSPIRING STORIES

6.1 A JOURNEY OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Testimony from Ali

A Democracy Camp 2025 participant

My journey in youth participation began during a period of uncertainty in my academic path. I moved to France seeking new opportunities and slowly discovered that youth engagement could be more than volunteering; it could become a way to build a voice, a network, and a future.

I started getting involved in local and European initiatives through Service Civique Européen, where I supported activities for children, cultural workshops, and community events. This experience helped me understand how meaningful youth participation can be, not only as service but also as empowerment.

In 2025, I expanded my engagement by joining several European events, including activities at UNESCO and the European Union in Paris, as well as participating in Youth4Ukraine Week in Romania. During this week, I helped organize diverse activities such as creative workshops, break-dance sessions for children, and game based educational programs. These opportunities allowed me to interact with young people from different backgrounds and understand how participation can shape confidence, creativity, and solidarity.

What truly marked my trajectory was realising that **youth participation can change lives,** including my own. Coming from years of academic challenges, language barriers, and unstable housing, I found in youth engagement a way to rebuild myself. It became my engine to develop new skills, contribute to society, and regain motivation. This is also what encouraged me to join Académie Notre Europe, where I now follow courses to deepen my understanding of European cooperation, hoping eventually to contribute to international organisations.

Today, I see youth participation as a long-term commitment. It taught me resilience, gave me a community, and helped me grow personally and professionally. My goal now is to continue supporting initiatives that give young people a space to be heard and to build new opportunities just as I found mine.

6.2 Youth Networking Agency: Uplifting Young People in Marginalised Groups
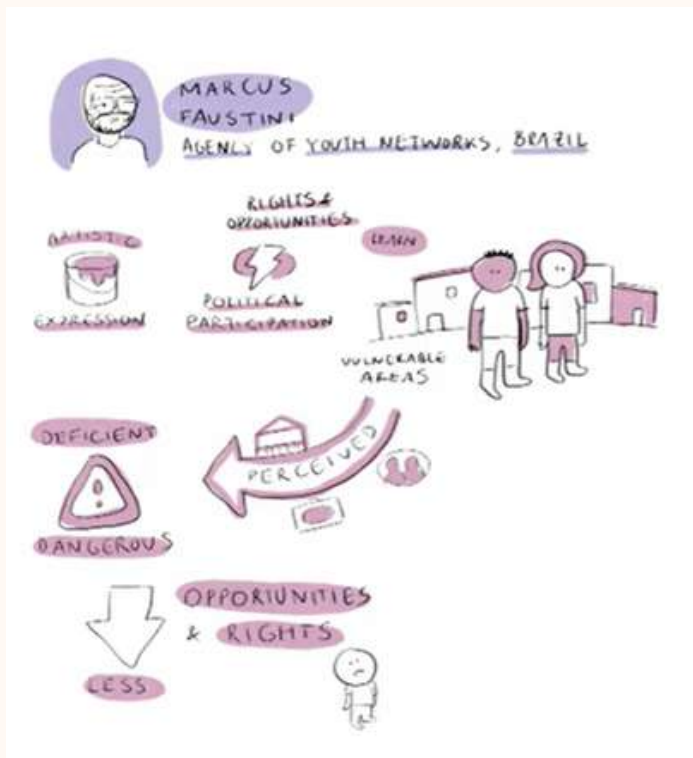
Marcus Faustini engaged youths in politics in Brazil through an artistic methodology that trains young people from favelas and peripheries to become leaders of socio-cultural actions and have a positive impact in their communities (Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2025).

Individuals were sensitised, listened during the meetings, and had opportunities to speak.

Black individuals, LGBTQIA+ or foreign individuals have fewer opportunities and fewer rights (educational access, little money to live on) only because some authorities identify them as deficient. Marcus Faustini and others from the world participate in the social inclusion of communities by leading conferences and organising official and direct meetings with communities.

Learn more here:

How to engage marginalised young people in politics?

(EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership, 2020)

If you need help with something that is hindering your participation, you should ask for support or help by approaching professionals or specialised hubs like help centres or migration centres. You can also reach some organisations or websites, such as HowCanIHelp.org or Reach4Help in order to have a group to work with or have an idea on how you can help or get help.

6.3 The Importance of Reaching Out
(Hosie, 2020)

Kerry Wright (from Aberdeen, Scotland) is a teen who lived in poverty in Glasgow. She lacked access to sanitary products, such as menstrual products, making her skip school. Kerry had to use what she could, like socks or toilet paper.

The little income from her house was not dedicated to children's care but rather to the survival of the family. Fortunately, Kerry had some help from CFINE, which helped women and girls to have access to sanitary products and awareness of contraception and health care. Free access to sanitary products such as tampons or pads has been made in schools and some public areas with the help of the CNICE Organisation. Families with low incomes also received help for better general child health care. Kerry and other families had been taken care of by some organisation, but their situation is similar to other women or girls around the world.

6.4 Descreasing the Digital Divide

Cristina Quirino Marino is a young Ticuna (indigenous community) woman from Brazil who expressed how she felt rejected by the digital expression of their smartphone. The standard language (Portuguese), often takes the place of their indigenous language, which needs some specific letters (e.g. diacritics). Some individuals were forced to communicate with only voice messages or simplified communication in Portuguese. In 2022 and in 4 days, two Amazonians created a platform (Linklado) offering an expressive way for indigenous individuals. This platform also permits some women to have an income by working with the app for translations.

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Please note that throughout the Handbook there are several embedded links. Those are not referenced here.

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