YOUTH 4 CHANGE

ANALYSIS OF NEEDS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

TRANSNATIONAL SUMMATIVE REPORT

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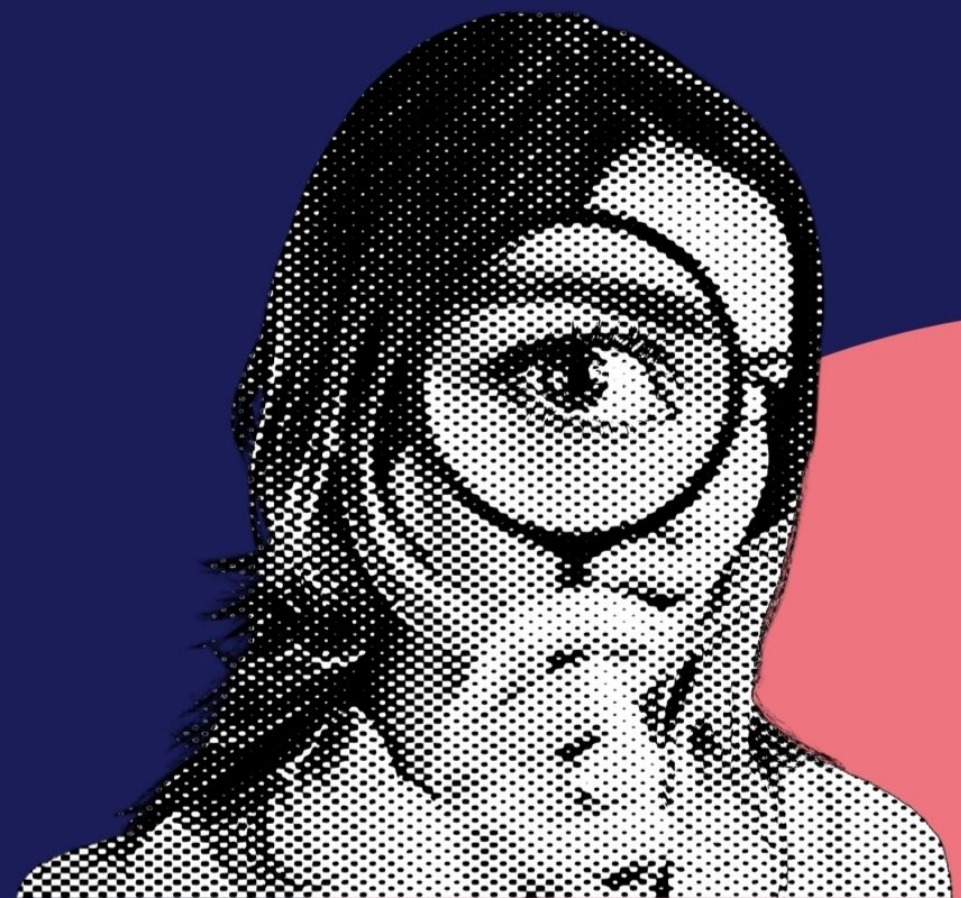

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WP1 – AWARENESS RAISING & NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION 4

1.1. Contextualization 4

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 4

2.1. Youth participation and active citizenship: foundations and contemporary approaches 4

2.2. Intercultural dialogue and diversity 6

2.3. Civic education: content, competencies and pedagogical approaches 6

2.4. Pedagogical methods for participation: active learning and transformative pedagogies 7

2.5. Deliberative democracy and structured dialogue: theory and practice in the European context 9

2.6. Media literacy and digital citizenship: competencies for participation in the digital age 9

2.7. Theoretical integration and operationalization for transnational analysis 11

3. OBJECTIVE 11

3.1. General objective 11

3.2. Specific objectives 12

4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH 12

4.1. Evidence-based research 13

4.2. Mixed-methods approach (Mixed Methods Research) 13

4.3. Methodological triangulation 13

4.4. Cross-national comparability 13

4.5. Sample composition: focus group by country 13

4.6. Sample composition: surveys by country 17

4.6.1 Composition of the survey sample in Germany 17

4.6.2 Composition of the survey sample in the Netherlands. 18

4.6.3 Composition of the survey sample in Lithuania. 18

4.6.4 Composition of the survey sample in Belgium. 19

4.6.5 Composition of the survey sample in Italy. 20

4.6.6 Composition of the survey sample in Spain. 20

4.7. Applied approach and curriculum development 21

5. COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES 21

5.1. Introduction 21
5.2. Participating countries and associations 22
5.3. Comparative characterization of national contexts 23
6. DESK RESEARCH COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BY DIMENSIONS 26
6.1. Youth participation 27
6.2. Intercultural dialogue 42
6.3. Civic education 56
6.4. Pedagogical methods 70
6.5. Structured dialogue 82
6.6. Media literacy 91
7. FIELD RESEARCH COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BY DIMENSIONS 102
7.1. Youth participation 103
7.2. Intercultural dialogue 114
7.3. Civic education 126
7.4. Pedagogical methods 136
7.5. Structured dialogue 147
7.6. Media literacy 154
7.7. Field research synthesis of the comparative European context 164
8. TRANSVERSAL SYNTHESIS 167
8.1. What currently characterizes youth democratic participation in Europe? 168
8.2. What needs appear most consistently? 168
8.3. What factors best explain the results obtained? 169
8.4. What challenges should the Youth4Change curriculum prioritize? 170
9. CONCLUSIONS AND GLOBAL INTERPRETATION 170
10. REFERENCES 175
ANNEX 1. CHART INDEX 178
ANNEX 2. TABLE INDEX 181

1. INTRODUCTION

This **Transnational Comparative Needs Assessment Report** represents the primary scientific output of Work Package 1 (WP1) within the **Youth4Change – My City, My Country, My Europe: Youth Shaping the Future project**. Its purpose is to integrate, analyse, and interpret in a comparative manner the evidence gathered by consortium partners during the research process carried out in each of the participating countries.

Its objective is to generate a new level of knowledge through the systematic comparison of the results obtained, identifying both the needs shared by European youth and those stemming from territorial, institutional, or socio-cultural specificities.

In line with the **Evidence-based Needs Assessment Framework**, this document is grounded in an evidence-based research methodology, the integration of mixed methods research, and the systematic triangulation of different information sources. Consequently, the report serves as a bridge between the research phase conducted in WP1 and the curricular design planned in WP2, ensuring that all subsequent educational decisions are based on rigorous, comparable, and methodologically consistent empirical findings.

Furthermore, this report aims to provide a European perspective on the needs of young people regarding youth participation, intercultural dialogue, civic education, pedagogical methods, structured dialogue and media literacy, facilitating the identification of common trends, national divergences, and opportunities for the transfer of good practices across the various participating contexts.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of Youth4Change is structured around six interrelated conceptual pillars that, collectively, provide the necessary framework for understanding, analysing, and interpreting the findings of the comparative report. These pillars define the project's dimensions and have established the criteria for formulating recommendations.

2.1. Youth participation and active citizenship: foundations and contemporary approaches

Youth participation and active citizenship form the core theoretical foundation of Youth4Change. Marshall's (1950) classic theory structures citizenship into three

components: civil, political, and social. For his part, Turner (2001) argued that Marshall's focus on citizenship rights offered a passive view of the citizen, neglecting obligations and duties, as well as the distinction between active and passive citizenship.

Thus, we understand that the notion of citizenship transcends legal status to encompass a set of practices, identities, and forms of participation developed in daily social and political life (Isin and Turner, 2002). Heggart (2020) proposes an "activist citizenship" approach that goes beyond active citizenship to account for the varied and seemingly contradictory nature of youth participation in civil society. This approach moves away from traditional models of citizenship education and acknowledges the diversity inherent in youth engagement and participation.

The study by Hoskins and Mascherini (2009) conceptualises active citizenship as "participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterised by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy" (p. 10). This definition, which remains a key benchmark, has been expanded by contemporary research highlighting youth agency beyond traditional forms of engagement. Zlobina et al. (2024) demonstrated that young people exhibit a sensitivity to socio-political events that correlates directly with their active participation, challenging the view of youth as "non-participatory" citizens. Their study, based on a sample of 969 university students, found that more than half actively participate, and that the impact of events categorised under "social justice" is associated with unconventional forms of participation, such as activism and volunteering.

Banaji and Mejias (2020), in their ethnoChart study on youth and active citizenship across six European countries (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Italy, Portugal, and the United Kingdom), examine how young people engage in civic and political movements within a climate marked by the resurgence of populism and xenophobic nationalism. Their research reveals that friendship, emotion, social media, and working for diversity are fundamental elements motivating and sustaining youth democratic activism.

A recent study by Buzzacchi (2024) addresses youth participation from a pedagogical perspective, positioning lived experience as a privileged vantage point for understanding the networks and meanings that structure participation. From this perspective, involving young people in research creates a space for reflection and consciousness-building, fostering a context for learning and identity formation at a crucial stage of their lives. Moreover, by viewing participation as a subject-centred process, both the object and the process of research itself are redefined, acquiring distinct ethical and epistemological dimensions.

2.2. Intercultural dialogue and diversity

Intercultural dialogue is grounded in theories that address the encounter between cultures and the management of diversity in democratic societies. Recent research has examined how intercultural dialogue has consolidated itself as a model to follow in European educational policies, particularly following criticism of multiculturalism from certain political sectors. In this context, the Council of Europe has promoted intercultural dialogue as a fundamental tool for citizenship education, emphasising the importance of competencies such as critical cultural awareness and the ability to evaluate both one's own and others' perspectives. Authors such as Lähdesmäki et al. (2020) have analysed how intercultural dialogue has become a central pillar in the educational policies of European transnational organisations, highlighting its role in building inclusive societies within multicultural contexts. Their research underscores that, beyond the encounter between cultures, intercultural dialogue requires an active and critical approach that transcends the mere recognition of diversity to foster an active and participatory citizenship emerging from the most invisibilised spheres.

Cantle (2021) and Modood (2020) have proposed approaches that recognise cultural diversity, promote dialogue, and encourage the participation of all individuals on equal terms. The intercultural citizenship approach (Council of Europe, 2016) offers a model combining the recognition of diversity with the promotion of common values, positioning dialogue as a central tool for social cohesion. Banaji and Mejias (2020) analyse how youth citizenship movements address diversity in their organisational practices, documenting patterns of non-diversity and the tensions between working for diversity and political structures that can disempower young people.

Various authors (Ferbežar et al., 2025; Glotov, 2023) argue that intercultural dialogue cannot be restricted to encounters between ethnic or national cultures, but must instead incorporate an intersectional perspective that addresses the multiple dimensions of diversity (including sexual orientation, gender identity, migrant background, functional diversity, and social class) to build a truly inclusive citizenship.

2.3. Civic education: content, competencies and pedagogical approaches

Civic education constitutes one of the key pillars for empowering young people as citizens. Brodie-McKenzie (2020) argues that Civics and Citizenship Education (CCE) can empower young people, though it can prove to be a complex area of intervention. The author proposes moving beyond the debate between maximalist approaches (which promote participation and empowerment) and minimalist ones (focused on civic knowledge) to recognise that young people are, inevitably, the ones who must decide how to interpret and exercise their citizenship. This perspective, drawing on the work of Biesta (2010), suggests that education should pursue three intertwined purposes: qualification

(acquiring knowledge and skills), socialisation (becoming integrated into social traditions and orders), and subjectification, defined as the process through which students become autonomous subjects capable of thinking and acting for themselves, beyond the roles and moulds predefined by society.

Feitosa (2020) has systematically investigated the effect of civic education (in terms of the civic duty to vote), utilizing data from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS 2016) covering 23 countries. The results show that three key mechanisms of civic education (civic education courses, active learning strategies, and an open classroom climate) exert an influence on civic duty, with civic education courses having the strongest effect. This finding clarifies the school socialisation channels that can help develop a sense of duty in adolescents.

Heggart (2020) proposes a citizenship education framework grounded in activist-oriented civic education to develop active citizenship among young people. His approach builds on the Justice Citizens project (2020), a participatory and filmmaking research initiative that examines young people's ideas about active citizenship and participation in public spaces.

2.4. Pedagogical methods for participation: active learning and transformative pedagogies

Participatory pedagogical methods constitute the fourth pillar of the Youth4Change theoretical framework. Recent European literature has paid increasing attention to how active methodologies can foster youth participation, positioning young people as the protagonists of their own learning and democratic agency.

The CCLAB project (Critical Change Labs), framed within Horizon Europe, has developed a model based on Participatory Action Research across 19 European countries (Malinverni et al., 2025). Structured around four phases (Onboard, Question and Analyze, Envision and Act, and Reflect) the model employs a practical approach involving design, artistic creation, and storytelling to enable young people to explore and act upon democratic issues. The results demonstrate that artistic methods create spaces for critical reflection and agency development, although they can also make it challenging to imagine alternative futures beyond existing paradigms (Malinverni et al., 2025).

The GOTALK project, implemented in Italy and Belgium, has experimented with innovative participatory approaches for youth councils, drawing inspiration from methodologies such as the living wall, pedagogical documentation, and the mosaic approach (Van Der Wildt and Van Roost, 2025). Following two years of piloting across six schools and two youth centres, the findings offer a fresh perspective on how to work towards inclusive, sustainable, and impactful participation by addressing school council organization and

the belief systems that reinforce or undermine student engagement (Van Der Wildt & Van Roost, 2025).

Furthermore, Holsen et al. (2025) analysed the implementation of Youth Participatory Action Research in Norway, finding that while it promotes positive participatory experiences, it also creates tension by breaking away from traditional pedagogical dynamics. This friction can make it difficult for teachers and students to adapt to unstructured methods that grant significant autonomy to the student while limiting teacher intervention. Educators, in particular, noted that their motivation depended heavily on the topics chosen by the students, with their interest waning when topics failed to align with their own pedagogical priorities.

This issue illustrates how schools tend to operate under adult-centric logics, where spaces for participation clash with established hierarchies and routines. The study by Holsen et al. (2025) contributes to the European literature on youth participation by demonstrating that while participatory methods can foster adaptive learning and agency development, their success relies on prior preparation for both teachers and students to manage uncertainty and navigate the topics being addressed.

In the realm of urban governance, Charalambous et al. (2025) have examined the use of Urban Living Labs as pedagogical tools for youth participation across four European cities. The findings demonstrate that while methodological flexibility is essential, clear and consistent structures for learning, participation, and evaluation are crucial for achieving scalability and long-term impact.

The DEMOCREATE project (European Commission, 2026) is currently implementing the Community-Led Research and Action methodology across five European countries. Targeted at young people aged 15 to 29 with a particular focus on disadvantaged groups, it seeks to transform educational environments into spaces where democracy is a lived practice.

These studies and projects demonstrate that the most effective participatory pedagogical methods are those that position young people as active creators, combine critical reflection with practical action, adapt to local contexts while maintaining methodological consistency, and address both individual competencies and institutional structures. However, their success also hinges on the capacity of institutions to foster participatory cultures capable of sustaining these approaches over time.

2.5. Deliberative democracy and structured dialogue: theory and practice in the European context

Deliberative democracy and structured dialogue emphasize the centrality of inclusive, reasoned, and respectful dialogue in democratic decision-making (Dryzek, 2000; Habermas, 1996). Deliberative processes enhance democratic legitimacy by enabling citizens (particularly those traditionally under-represented, such as young people) to engage meaningfully in public deliberation. Caluwaerts and Reuchamps (2015) have analysed the impact of deliberative democracy on polarisation and legitimacy, demonstrating that inclusive deliberative processes tend to depolarise stances and generate decisions that are perceived as more legitimate by those who participate in them.

Nanz et al. (2020) have examined the transformative potential of deliberative democracy in the European context, arguing that participatory processes can foster active citizenship and a more dynamic democratic culture. Their research on the implementation of deliberative processes across various European countries demonstrates that, while institutional designs are fundamental, the surrounding cultural, social, and political conditions are equally critical, suggesting the need to pair institutional design with capacity-building and awareness-raising initiatives to enable citizens to become better informed and participate to a greater extent.

Structured dialogue between young people and decision-makers is recognised as a key mechanism for strengthening youth participation and policy responsiveness (European Youth Portal, 2025). Mobilising over 50,000 young people per cycle, this process led to the adoption of eleven European Youth Goals under the framework of the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 (European Youth Portal, 2025). In its current setup, structured dialogue maintains a framework of 18-month cycles focused on priority themes, with the 11th cycle (2025–2026) currently underway under the trio presidency of Poland, Denmark, and Cyprus (European Youth Portal, 2025). Its capacity to engage young people through national platforms and youth organisations, combined with its local roots, makes it a unique mechanism for youth participation across Europe.

2.6. Media literacy and digital citizenship: competencies for participation in the digital age

In the digital age, media literacy has become an essential component of active citizenship. Livingstone et al. (2020), in a webinar organised by CO:RE (2020), brought together experts from diverse perspectives to debate the theories and concepts underlying digital competencies, media literacy, and digital citizenship, offering an up-to-date overview of the state of the art in this field.

Media literacy is defined as a process of inquiry that enables people to explore how the world is presented to us and how we represent ourselves. It provides a framework for accessing, analysing, evaluating, creating, and engaging with messages in various forms, building an understanding of the role of media in society. Jolls (CO:RE, 2020) proposed five core principles: the awareness that all media messages are constructed; that they use a creative language with its own rules; that different people experience the same message differently; that media have embedded values and points of view; and that most media messages are organised to gain profit or power. Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016) have explored the social and cultural nature of digital learning in depth, arguing that media competencies are not acquired in isolation, but in social contexts where family, school, and peers play a fundamental role.

Digital literacy has been defined by Helsper (CO:RE, 2020) as the ability to use ICTs in ways that allow individuals to "achieve beneficial outcomes and avoid negative outcomes in all domains of everyday life for themselves and others, now and in the future". Furthermore, she argued that the existing literature on digital skills focuses primarily on technical and operational skills, neglecting skills such as interaction, communication, and content creation, which are essential for translating digital engagement into well-being outcomes (Helsper, 2021). From this perspective, Livingstone et al. (2021) have emphasised that young people need more explicit support to navigate the digital ecosystem critically, moving beyond a protection-centred focus towards a model based on empowerment and active participation.

Cortesi (CO:RE, 2020) suggested that the concept of digital citizenship has become central to debates on youth and education, identifying 17 main areas that constitute it. Cortesi proposed the notion of "digital citizenship" as a way to incorporate the skills necessary for young people to participate fully in a rapidly evolving digital world. For his part, Grizzle (CO:RE, 2020) argued that Media and Information Literacy represents UNESCO's effort to encapsulate a broad range of competencies that people need in the 21st century, advocating for the involvement of young people as co-creators and co-leaders in the development of these literacies (UNESCO, 2013).

From a historical perspective, research in Nordic countries has documented how media literacy has been an element in the construction of media welfare states and in the creation of national identities within public education (Nordic Journal of Media Studies, 2020). This tradition positions media literacy as the training of children and young people to become participatory and democratic, responsible, critical, creative, expressive, constructive, and reflective media users.

2.7. Theoretical integration and operationalization for transnational analysis

The six theoretical pillars presented constitute an integrative framework for understanding youth participation within the European context. Active citizenship provides the normative and conceptual foundation upon which the other dimensions rest, recognising youth participation as an exercise of rights and responsibilities. Intercultural dialogue adds the relational and diversity dimension, indispensable in multicultural societies where the intersection of identities, gender, and origin represents a daily reality (Ferbežar et al., 2025; Lähdesmäki et al., 2020). Civic education and pedagogical methods address the how of participation, positioning experiential learning and participatory pedagogies as essential tools for youth empowerment (Biesta, 2010; Heggart, 2020; Malinverni et al., 2025). Deliberative democracy and structured dialogue provide the institutional framework for participation, connecting young people with decision-making processes (European Youth Portal, 2025; Habermas, 1996). Finally, media literacy and digital citizenship contribute to the technological and communicative dimension, crucial for participation in the 21st century (Helsper, 2021; Livingstone et al., 2020).

For the transnational analysis, this theoretical framework is operationalised through a system that allows for the comparison of realities across participating countries within each of these dimensions. The cross-country comparison is based on identifying similarities and differences in: existing institutional and policy frameworks; the barriers and needs expressed by young people; identified good practices; and proposed areas for improvement. Grounded in the literature on youth policy analysis (Hoskins et al., 2012; Sloam, 2014), this comparative approach enables the identification of common patterns and national specificities, generating recommendations that are transferable across different European contexts.

3. OBJECTIVE

3.1. General objective

Conduct an international comparative analysis of the needs of European youth regarding democratic participation, active citizenship, and competences for a democratic culture, integrating the evidence obtained from all participating countries.

3.2. Specific objectives

This report pursues the following specific objectives:

- **Integrate evidence** from all research phases conducted in WP1.
- **Comparatively analyse** the results obtained across the different participating countries.
- **Identify convergences and divergences** between national contexts.
- **Detect shared and context-specific needs** among target groups.
- **Analyse existing differences** across various youth profiles.
- **Identify key enabling factors and barriers** to democratic participation.
- **Identify good practices** with high potential for transferability across European contexts.
- **Prioritise detected needs** based on their level of evidence and strategic relevance.
- **Translate diagnostic findings** into actionable guidelines for the project's curricular design.

4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The methodological design of the assessment is based on the premise that the democratic participation of young people is a multidimensional phenomenon involving individual, educational, social, institutional and cultural factors. Consequently, its analysis requires a research approach capable of integrating different methodological perspectives and different levels of analysis. Rather than viewing the assessment as a mere compilation of information, Youth4Change conceives of it as a process of progressive knowledge-building, in which evidence obtained through various research techniques is combined to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the reality under study. This approach is in line with the principles of evidence-based research, which is widely used in the fields of public policy, educational innovation and the evaluation of social programmes. The project's methodological framework is structured around five fundamental principles that guide all phases of the research process and ensure the scientific quality of the assessment.

4.1. Evidence-based research

The first principle states that all conclusions, recommendations and curricular decisions must be based on evidence obtained through systematic research procedures. This approach enhances the objectivity of the assessment and provides a solid basis for justifying the decisions taken during the design of the curriculum and educational activities.

4.2. Mixed-methods approach (Mixed Methods Research)

The social reality under study is highly complex and cannot be adequately understood using a single research method. For this reason, Youth4Change adopts a mixed methods design that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques with the aim of obtaining a comprehensive view of young people's needs. Qualitative research enables us to understand the experiences, perceptions and expectations of participants, whilst quantitative research facilitates the identification of general trends and comparisons between national profiles and contexts. Combining both perspectives enhances the interpretative richness of the assessment and improves the consistency of the results.

4.3. Methodological triangulation

One of the central elements of the framework is the triangulation of evidence. This procedure involves cross-checking the information obtained through document analysis, focus groups and the survey, with the aim of verifying the consistency of the findings, identifying possible discrepancies and generating more robust interpretations. Triangulation seeks to explain the differences between formal policies and young people's actual experiences, identifying those aspects that require specific educational intervention.

4.4. Cross-national comparability

Given that Youth4Change is being implemented in various European countries, it is essential to ensure that the results obtained are comparable. To this end, all partners will use the same analytical framework, common data collection tools and shared criteria for the analysis and interpretation of data. Methodological standardisation will enable the identification of both the common needs of young people across Europe and the specific characteristics arising from different national contexts, thereby enriching the comparative analysis and facilitating the transfer of good practice between countries.

4.5. Sample composition: focus group by country

This section details the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants in each of the focus groups conducted in each country.

Table 1. Quadrant of focus group participants in Germany (association: JKPeV)

Participant number	Focus group	Gender	Age/Profile
1	1	F (female)	21
2	1	F	16
3	1	M (male)	22
4	1	M	24
5	1	M	15
6	1	F	19
7	1	M	19
8	1	F	25
9	2	M	15
10	2	F	25
11	2	M	24
12	2	F	19
13	2	M	19
14	2	F	21
15	2	F	16
16	2	M	22

Table 2. Quadrant of focus group participants in the Netherlands (association: IDEA)

Participant number	Focus group	Gender	Age/Profile
1	1	F	20
2	1	F	20
3	1	F	21
4	1	F	19
5	1	F	19
6	2	F	18
7	2	M	19
8	2	F	20
9	2	F	20
10	2	F	20

11	2	M	21
12	2	F	22
13	3	F	16
14	3	M	22
15	4	M	21
16	4	X (non-binary/other)	22
17	4	M	22
18	4	M	23
19	4	M	23

Table 3. Quadrant of focus group participants in Lithuania (association: Mano Europa)

Participant number	Focus group	Gender	Age/Profile
1	1	F	17
2	1	F	16
3	1	F	17
4	1	F	17
5	1	F	17
6	1	F	17
7	1	F	16
8	2	M	16
9	2	M	16
10	2	M	16
11	2	M	17
12	2	M	16
13	2	M	16
14	2	F	16
15	2	F	17
16	2	F	17

Table 4. Quadrant of focus group participants in Belgium (association: OBESSU)

Participant number	Focus group	Gender	Age/Profile
1	1	F	17

2	1	F	17
3	1	M	18
4	1	F	18
5	2	F	24
6	2	F	23
7	2	M	24
8	2	F	23

Table 5. Quadrant of focus group participants in Italy (association: InCo Molfetta APS)

Participant number	Focus group	Gender	Age/Profile
1	1	M	17
2	1	M	16
3	1	M	17
4	1	M	18
5	1	F	17
6	1	F	17
7	1	M	18
8	1	F	18
9	1	M	17
10	1	M	17
11	2	F	22
12	2	F	20
13	2	F	21
14	2	M	20
15	2	M	25
16	2	F	25
17	2	M	20

Table 6. Quadrant of focus group participants in Spain (association: Guajira)

Participant number	Focus group	Gender	Age/Profile
1	1	M	21
2	1	F	23

3	1	F	25
4	1	M	18
5	1	F	21
6	1	M	25
7	1	F	21
8	1	F	19

All tables in this chapter are based on the National Report of the respective participating country, as indicated in the captions.

4.6. Sample composition: surveys by country

This section details the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants in each of the questionnaires conducted in each country.

4.6.1 Composition of the survey sample in Germany

Chart 1. Composition of the survey sample in Germany by age

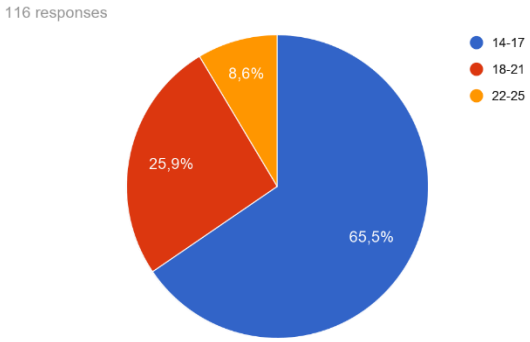


Chart 2. Composition of the survey sample in Germany by gender

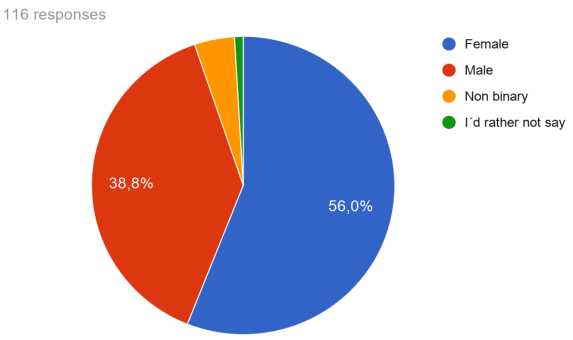


Chart 3. Composition of the survey sample in Germany by educational level

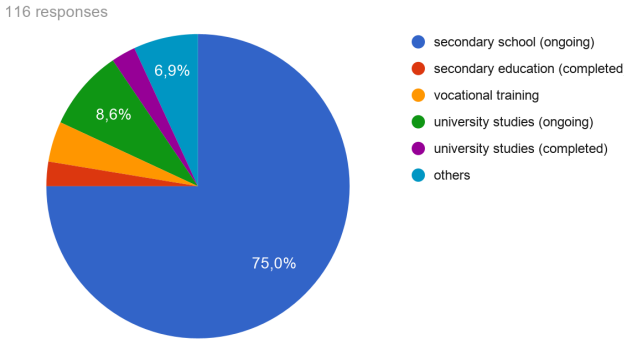
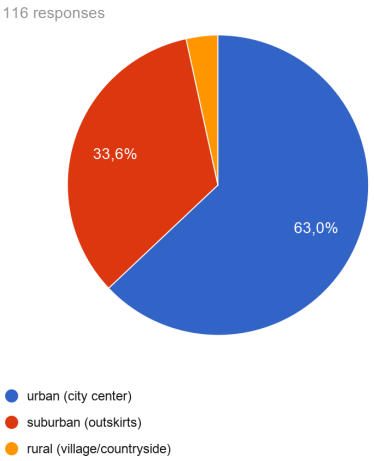


Chart 4. Composition of the survey sample in Germany by context



All charts were prepared by the authors based on Survey Reports from the participating associations.

4.6.2 Composition of the survey sample in the Netherlands.

Chart 5. Composition of the survey sample in the Netherlands by age

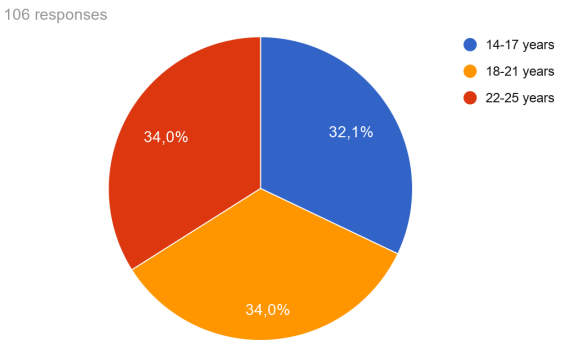


Chart 6. Composition of the survey sample in the Netherlands by gender

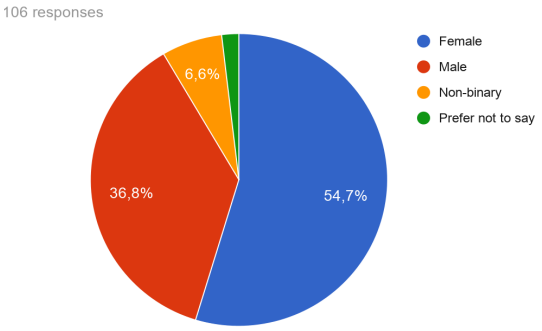
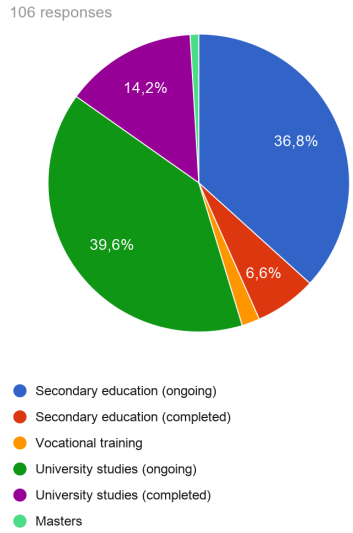
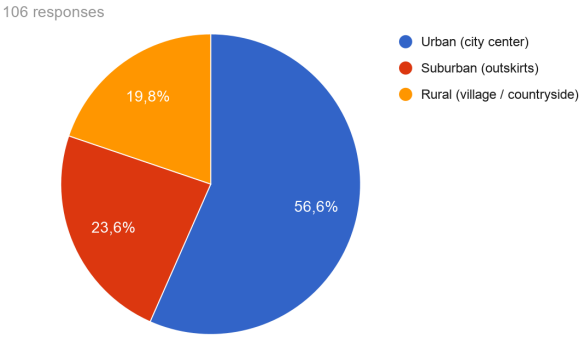


Chart 7. Composition of the survey sample in the Netherlands by educational level

Chart 8. Composition of the survey sample in the Netherlands by context





All charts were prepared by the authors based on Survey Reports from the participating associations.

4.6.3 Composition of the survey sample in Lithuania.

Chart 9. Composition of the survey sample in Lithuania by age

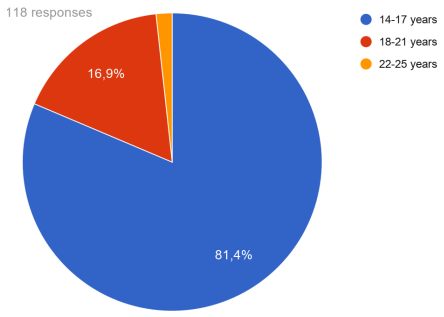


Chart 10. Composition of the survey sample in Lithuania by gender

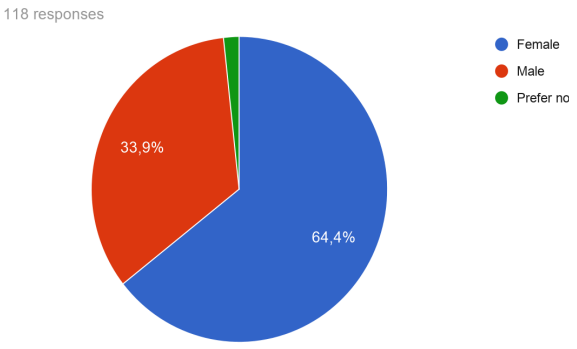
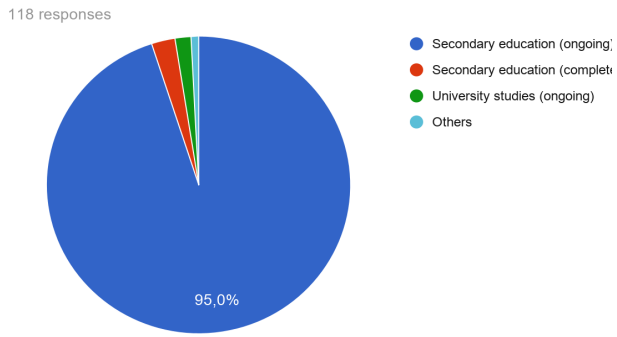
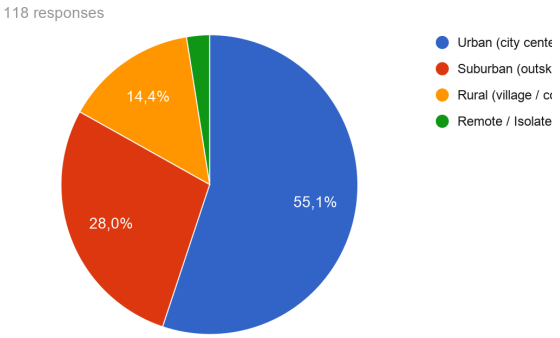


Chart 11. Composition of the survey sample in Lithuania by educational level

Chart 12. Composition of the survey sample in Lithuania by context





All charts were prepared by the authors based on Survey Reports from the participating associations.

4.6.4 Composition of the survey sample in Belgium.

Chart 13. Composition of the survey sample in Belgium by age

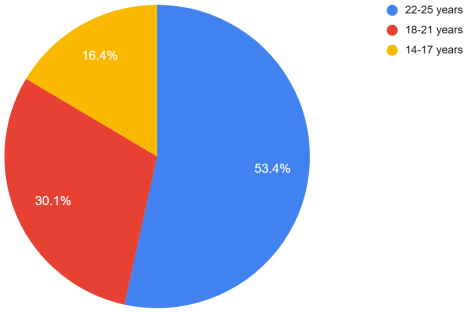


Chart 14. Composition of the survey sample in Belgium by gender

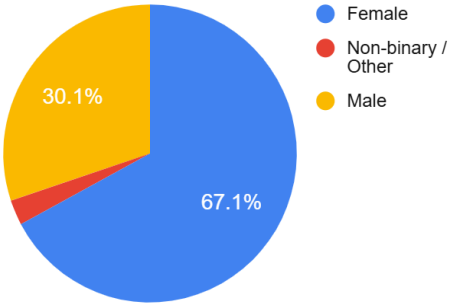


Chart 15. Composition of the survey sample in Belgium by educational level

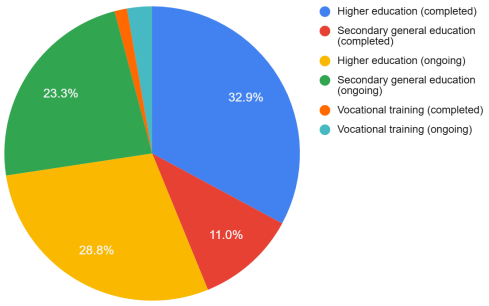
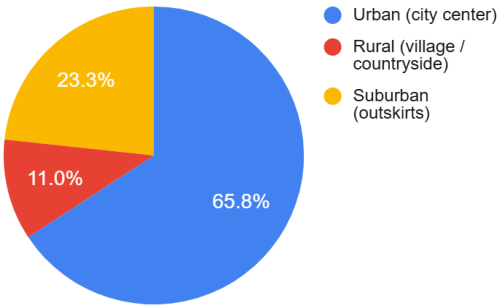


Chart 16. Composition of the survey sample in Belgium by context



All charts were prepared by the authors based on Survey Reports from the participating associations.

4.6.5 Composition of the survey sample in Italy.

Chart 17. Composition of the survey sample in Italy by age

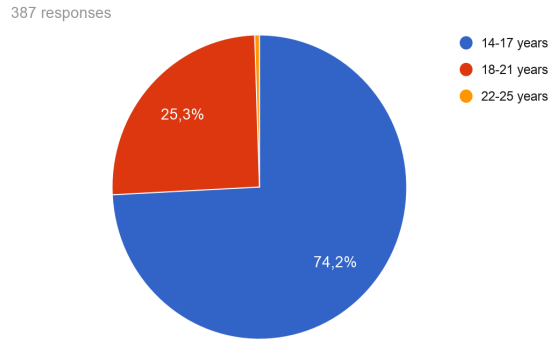


Chart 18. Composition of the survey sample in Italy by gender

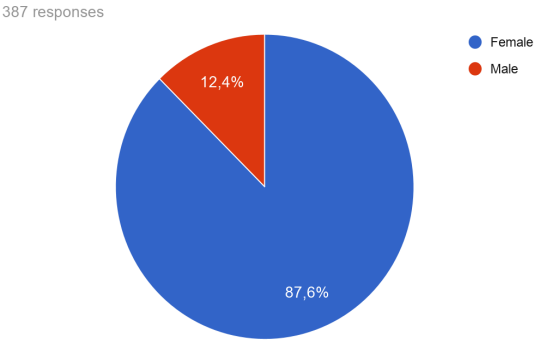


Chart 19. Composition of the survey sample in Italy by educational level

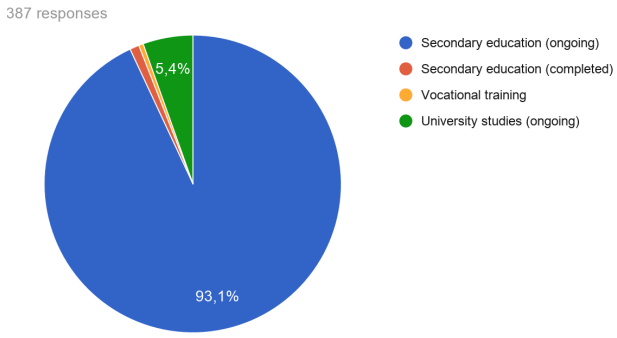
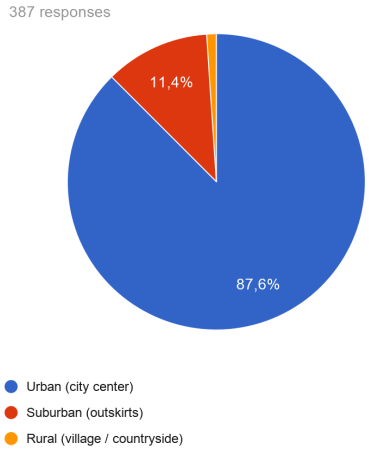


Chart 20. Composition of the survey sample in Italy by context



All charts were prepared by the authors based on Survey Reports from the participating associations.

4.6.6 Composition of the survey sample in Spain.

Chart 21. Composition of the survey sample in Spain by age

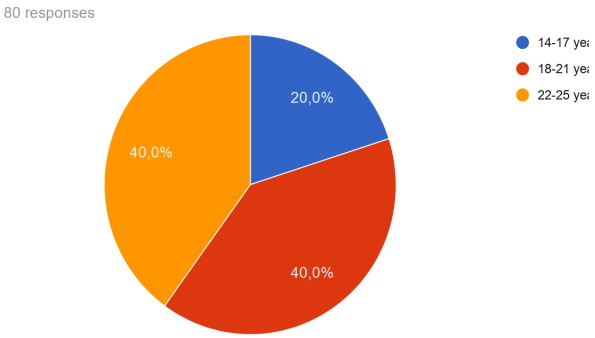


Chart 22. Composition of the survey sample in Spain by gender

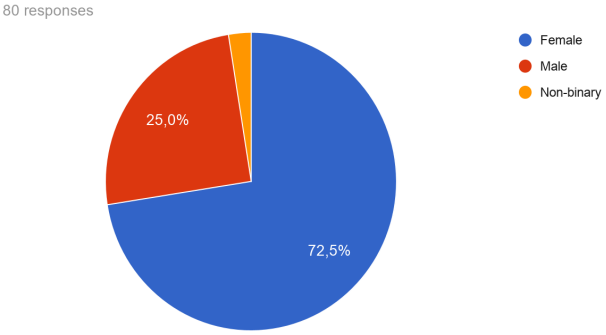


Chart 23. Composition of the survey sample in Spain by educational level

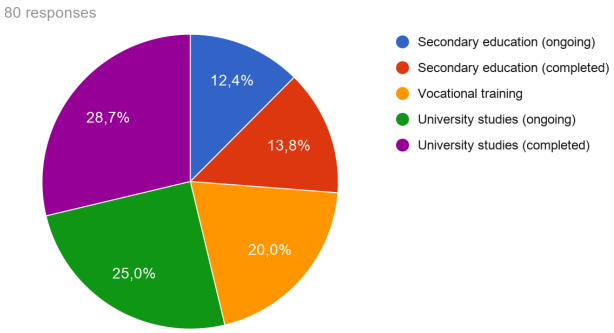
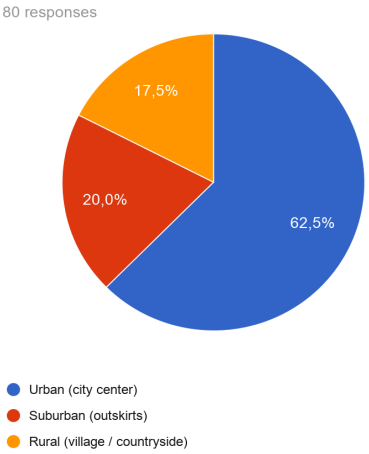


Chart 24. Composition of the survey sample in Spain by context



All charts were prepared by the authors based on Survey Reports from the participating associations.

4.7. Applied approach and curriculum development

The aim of the assessment is to generate useful knowledge to inform curriculum design, guide the development of educational materials and formulate recommendations for youth organisations, educational institutions and policy-makers. This applied approach ensures that the research produces results of practical use and that the evidence obtained contributes directly to improving opportunities for young people's democratic participation.

5. COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

5.1. Introduction

Before addressing the analysis of the various dimensions under study, it is necessary to contextualize the setting in which the research takes place. The objective is to understand the specific demographic, social, educational, and institutional characteristics of each country, which facilitates the interpretation of the results obtained during the research process.

The national context helps explain the differences observed among the various youth participation systems, public policies targeting young people, and opportunities for democratic engagement in each territory. Consequently, the comparative analysis must consider these characteristics as contextual factors that help explain the diversity of situations found within the consortium.

This chapter provides an overview of the key indicators for each country and identifies similarities and differences that will subsequently support the interpretation of the results presented in the analytical chapters.

5.2. Participating countries and associations

The project partnership is appropriate to achieve the project's goals, in which partners have expertise and experience in the relevant fields, access to the target group of disadvantaged youth, and support from relevant public bodies such as municipalities, political representatives, and public welfare organizations.

JKPeV is dedicated to the quality development of youth work and youth policy making. With its long experience in the organisation and management of art and cultural events, JKPeV supports young people and adults' personal and professional development through the organisation of international training, seminars and workshops offering learning opportunities based on art, creative tools, non-formal learning methods and experiential learning. JKPeV will act with the support of the Municipality of Dresden and utilize its experience in community building, active participation and social inclusion.

IDEA, structured dialogue experts and trainers from Utrecht, will share their expertise in delivering workshops and training programs to equip participants with essential skills. IDEA brings extensive expertise in several innovative methodologies that are central to modern civic education and youth empowerment. They use methods like deliberative polling, structured public debates, or adaptations of those approaches to ensure that participants engage in respectful, evidence-based discussions, promoting critical thinking and an informed understanding of civic issues. Their approach also lowers barriers for participation of young people because we design complex policy issues in the most

accessible ways. IDEA will lead the implementation of one transnational online training & event and one f2f training, the implementation of 3 cycles of workshops in each partner's city, workshop evaluation and Transnational Summative Report on the Results of all local workshops implemented by all partners, as well as preliminary activities of the structured dialogue (framework, guidelines), Training of Trainers on structured dialogue. IDEA will co-lead developing a common framework and curriculum of Civic Education Workshops.

MANO Europa with expertise in active citizenship and fostering social cohesion will contribute by implementing innovative and creative methods to engage youth from marginalized communities. MANO has a strong background in implementing activities targeting youth and policy makers (e.g. roundtables, debates, discussions, policy paper writing workshops) with the support of local governments, including Kaunas Municipality. Activities are mainly dedicated to topics such as democratic participation, social inclusion, digital and media literacy, youth policies, sustainable development and youth engagement in environmental actions. MANO will lead the implementation of the f2f training and Local Youth Assemblies & Hackathons.

OBESSU, representing young people aged 14-20 and advocating for school students rights and their meaningful participation in decision-making processes, will involve its members in the project's countries, in the planning of the activities and decision making. For capacity building activities within the project, OBESSU will involve the members from its Pool of Trainers, experienced trainers, educators and facilitators with insight in the world of school student activism and non-formal education methodologies. OBESSU will also build synergies with its already existing advocacy initiatives and EU projects related to the topic of democracy and youth participation.

La Guajira with a focus on artistic creation, will play a crucial role in outreach, dissemination, and ensuring the active participation of young people, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds in the project's activities. They will act locally in cooperation with the Municipality of Almeria. The association La Guajira will contribute significantly to reach the project's objectives by sharing their expertise and resources in artistic creation and working with people living at risk of social exclusion.

InCo Molfetta implements local youth policies and is dedicated to empowering individuals through international experiences and educational initiatives, with a strong emphasis on inclusivity and active participation in European society. In cooperation with the local municipality, InCo Molfetta will contribute to the implementation of local youth policies, design and implement activities for the local youth together with the relevant stakeholders and integrate the webradio and podcasts ANG in Radio FGen into the project.

CEMyRI stands for the Research Center for the Study of Migrations and Intercultural Relations at the University of Almería. CEMyRI serves as a space where national and international researchers can engage in projects, develop research initiatives, and publish scientific studies. In the project CEMyRI will lead research analysis of needs, challenges

and opportunities in youth engagement processes from different perspectives through theoretical and field studies.

5.3. Comparative characterization of national contexts

The comparative characterization of national contexts is a fundamental step toward rigorously interpreting the findings of this research. Presented below is a set of common indicators which, without claiming to be exhaustive explanatory variables, allow the results obtained during fieldwork to be situated within the specific sociodemographic and structural realities of each participating country. To ensure data reliability and comparability, priority has been given to official statistical sources (such as Eurostat, the OECD, the United Nations, national statistical institutes, and equivalent bodies), thereby establishing a robust frame of reference for understanding the divergences and convergences observed in the reality of youth across Europe.

Table 7. Comparative indicators of the participating countries

Indicator	Germany	Netherlands	Lithuania	Belgium	Italy	Spain	Sources
Total population	83,497,147	18.130.000	2,890,664	11,867,634	58.943.000	49.687.120	link link link link link link
Young population (16-25)	8.300.000	(15-24 years): ~2.150.000	(16-24 years): 260,000–290,000	(16-24 years): 1.269.771	~5 990 000	4.860.763	link link link link link link
Youth unemployment	(15-24 years): 6,9%	(15-24 years): 8.7%	(15–24 years): 14.7%	(15–24 years): 17.4 %	15–24 years): 20.6%	(16–24 years): approx. 22%.	link link link link link link
NEET rate	9.5%	5.3% (the lowest in the EU)	14.9%	9.8%	13.3%	11,5%	link link link link link link
Educational level	40% of the population aged 25 to 34 has completed higher education.	56.4% of young adults have successfully completed higher education.	Lithuania ranks among the best-performing EU countries regarding higher education attainment among young people aged 25 to 34.	In 2025, 44.7% of the Belgian population aged 25 to 74 had completed higher education.	Higher education completion rate of 31.6% (among 25- to 34-year-olds).	52.6% of young people aged 24 to 34 hold a higher education degree.	link link link link link link

Youth electoral participation/trust in institutions	79% youth turnout in the 2025 federal elections. 52% of young Germans aged 18 to 30 expressed distrust of the government.	63% of young Dutch people express a high level of generalized social trust.	Only 6 of the 118 young people surveyed (5%) gave the maximum confidence score regarding whether institutions listen to youth, and only 13% fully agreed that institutions listen.	Belgium does not publish a specific official figure for youth voter turnout. Young people aged 16 and 17 were able to vote for the first time in the European elections.	36% in the 2024 elections.	59% of the young people surveyed state that they do not feel represented in the Spanish political system.	link link link link link link
Internet access	92% of young people aged 6 to 18 use the internet regularly.	99.4% of young Dutch people aged 16 to 25 have an active, daily high-speed Internet connection.	71% of young people aged 16 to 19 say they have digital skills beyond basic levels, compared to an average of 57% in the EU-27	In 2025, 100% of the Belgian population aged 16 to 24 reported having Internet access.	Smartphone adoption rate of 99.1%; near-universal access for young people.	94.7% of the population aged 10 to 15 used the Internet in the last three months.	link link link link link link
Participation in associations	Participation in volunteer work or civic activities 39.7%	X	53% of the young people surveyed stated that they currently participate in volunteer work.	X	X	Volunteering mobilizes 10.1% of the Spanish population over the age of 14.	link link link

Source: Own elaboration based on the National Reports from the participating associations.

First, the educational dimension reveals a consolidated trend towards specialization. Although higher education completion rates vary (ranging from 31.6% in Italy to 56.4% in the Netherlands) they place European youth at a high qualification level overall. However, this educational capital does not automatically translate into full labour market integration or reduced vulnerability. Youth unemployment numbers and NEET rates (young people Not in Education, Employment, or Training) reveal striking gaps, which are particularly concerning in countries like Italy, Spain, and Belgium, where entry barriers into the labour market may be constraining broader forms of social and democratic participation.

Second, a clear digital paradox emerges: internet access and basic tech competencies are virtually guaranteed and normalized across all contexts studied, exceeding 90% in most countries. Yet, this "hyperconnectivity" does not appear to act as an automatic catalyst for formal civic engagement. The data suggest that the underlying issue is not a digital divide or lack of information access, but rather an institutional trust gap. Widespread distrust towards public bodies (such as the 52% recorded in Germany or 59% in Spain), coupled with the perception that institutions fail to translate youth consultations into tangible policy actions, poses a shared challenge: formal democratic systems appear to be losing their representational grip on a generation that (despite being highly educated and digitally connected) feels increasingly detached from traditional structures.

Finally, volunteering stands out as an alternative avenue for engagement, albeit with varying levels of uptake across borders. While countries like Lithuania exhibit high active involvement (53%), other contexts show far more modest engagement rates. This indicates that youth participation has not vanished; rather, it is shifting toward less institutionalized, more informal channels centred on volunteering and grassroots activism, mirroring the findings of Banaji and Mejias (2020). Consequently, the core challenge for the Youth4Change curriculum lies in rebuilding trust between young people and public institutions, integrating these emerging expressions of citizenship, and leveraging high digital literacy as a bridge to counter institutional disaffection.

6. DESK RESEARCH COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BY DIMENSIONS

The purpose of this section is to integrate the findings from the desk research to identify shared needs and lay the foundations for the project's European curriculum. The analysis is organized around the six dimensions that structure the research: youth participation, intercultural dialogue, civic education, pedagogical methods, structured dialogue, and media literacy.

6.1. Youth participation

This dimension constitutes the central axis of the evaluation and aims to understand how young people currently participate in democratic life, as well as to identify the factors that facilitate or hinder such participation. The analysis adopts a broad conception of the participatory phenomenon, understood beyond electoral or institutional participation, and also integrates involvement in youth organizations, community initiatives, volunteering, social activism, digital participation, and other forms of civic engagement.

The main aspects analysed include:

- levels of formal and informal participation
- motivations for participation
- personal, social and institutional barriers
- trust in democratic institutions
- perceptions of the effectiveness of participation
- interest in public affairs
- previous experiences of participation.

The aim is to identify the needs relating to the strengthening of active citizenship and democratic engagement, as well as the factors that limit young people's involvement in public life.

Main institutional characteristics

Institutional structures and legal frameworks condition youth democratic participation in diverse ways across different European countries. The existence of national youth strategies, legal frameworks for participation, and institutional bodies dedicated to youth affairs creates a favorable environment for youth engagement. However, the effectiveness of these structures varies considerably depending on available resources, political will, and implementation capacity.

Germany has the Jugendstrategie der Bundesregierung (2019), which covers nine policy areas and includes 163 measures aimed at young people aged 12 to 27, and is linked to the National Action Plan for Child and Youth Participation (2022-2025). The Starke Kinder- und Jugendparlamente initiatives seek to strengthen youth parliaments by granting them real budgets and binding roles, thereby overcoming the merely consultative character that typically characterizes these bodies.

In the Netherlands, youth participation is governed by the Jeugdwet (Youth Act, 2014), which obliges municipalities and ministers to consult youth organizations, although it does not require that young people's contributions be binding. The draft Ontwerp Nationale Jeugdstrategie (2025) proposes moving toward a structural participation model, although it lacks legally binding status. Notable initiatives include the Maatschappelijke Diensttijd (MDT), a voluntary service for young people aged 12 to 30 that

reaches vulnerable groups, and the pilot Jong Utrecht aan Zet, which grants young people a legally recognized role in regional politics.

Lithuania bases its youth policy on the Law on Youth Policy Framework (2003, revised in 2024) and the National Youth Policy Action Plan 2023-2027, which supports municipal youth councils in the country's 60 municipalities. The Lithuanian Youth Council (LiJOT) coordinates the EU Youth Dialogue and leads campaigns such as "Man ne dzin" ("I do care") and the commemorative expedition Mission Siberia. Municipal participatory budgets, implemented in 90% of municipalities, allow citizens to propose and vote on public spending.

Belgium is a federal state, consisting of three communities and three regions. Both entities have their own exclusive competences. The federal 'Belgian' level of government only has limited competence in youth matters (e.g. some aspects of judicial youth protection), but there is no youth policy at the Belgian level. The Communities are competent for youth and youth policy, so it is on this level that most explicit 'youth policy instruments' can be found. The Communities have a minister responsible for Youth, a parliamentary commission and a number of administrative departments with 'youth' in their title and a large number of specific youth-related budget items. Given the fact that every Community has its own Minister for Youth, this means Belgium has three (source: Youth policy in the three communities of Belgium).

Italy adopted its National Youth Strategy in December 2023, aimed at young people aged 14 to 35, with a focus on the transversal integration of youth issues across all public policies. The Consiglio Nazionale dei Giovani (CNG) acts as an advisory body for youth representation, and the Servizio Civile Universale offers young people aged 18 to 28 the opportunity to dedicate a year to projects in assistance, environmental protection, and cultural promotion.

Spain has the INJUVE Youth Strategy 2030 (2022), which places social inclusion as a central pillar and promotes participation through youth councils, volunteering, and structured dialogue. The Spanish Youth Council (CJE) represents more than 60 youth organizations, and the Young Digital Advisory Council (2023) involves young people in debates on digital rights and technological governance.

At the European level, the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and the Council of Europe's Youth Sector Strategy 2030 provide common reference frameworks, although their implementation in Member States remains uneven.

Table 8. Institutional characteristics for Youth Participation by country

Country	National Youth Strategy and mechanisms of participation	Notable aspects
European Level	*EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027*	It promotes young people's participation in decision-making and political life. Ten rounds of the Youth Dialogue have led to concrete policy outcomes. Supported by Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps.
	Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy for 2030	A political roadmap based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It includes an objective to strengthen work with young people as a means of reaching this group.
	Youth Check	A tool that assesses the impact of new policies on young people. It supports the EU Youth Strategy and promotes the integration of young people's needs and perspectives throughout the policy cycle (design, monitoring, evaluation and decision-making).
Germany	*Jugendstrategieder Bundesregierung*	It covers nine policy areas and includes 163 measures, with the aim of enabling young people aged between 12 and 27 to participate directly, visibly and effectively in government work. Linked to the National Action Plan for Child and Youth Participation, which brought together 1,350 young people and 350 experts at 13 events, including dialogues, audits and workshops.
	Starke Kinder- und Jugendparlamente	In Germany, there are youth parliaments and municipal advisory councils, but they only have an advisory role and no final decision-making power. Access to them is unequal and, when there is no effective feedback, trust in them diminishes. This initiative aims to change that dynamic by training young parliament members and advising cities on how to give councils real budgets, with the aim of creating binding roles rather than purely advisory ones.

Netherlands	*Draft National Youth Strategy (Ontwerp Nationale Jeugdstrategie, 2025)*	It proposes moving from occasional, non-binding youth participation to structural and ongoing involvement, in which young people are key partners in the design and monitoring of the policies that affect them. It is not a legally binding text, but a draft.
	Maatschappelijke Diensttijd (MDT)	A voluntary service (for 12–30-year-olds) for personal and social benefit. It reaches out to vulnerable groups, including asylum seekers. It lacks permanent funding and was on the verge of being abolished in 2024.
	Jong Utrecht aan Zet (pilot)	A provincial pilot scheme that establishes a structurally and legally recognised role for young people to influence regional policy on housing and climate. It moves beyond symbolic consultation to formal political participation.
Lithuania	*Action Plan of the National Youth Policy 2023-2027*	Based on the *Law of Youth Policy Framework*. In the area of democratic and civic life, the strategy supports municipal youth councils in the 60 municipalities. It represents more than 200,000 young people through 68 member organisations.
	LiJOT (Lithuanian Youth Council)	He coordinates the EU Youth Dialogue in Lithuania. He leads campaigns such as 'Man ne dzin' ('I do care') to mobilise young voters, and the Mission Siberia expedition (focusing on historical education and civic engagement).
	Municipal participatory budgeting	Platforms in Vilnius, Kaunas and other local authorities (scaled up to 90%) enable citizens to propose, discuss and vote on municipal public spending.
Belgium	*Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2025-2029 (Vlaams Jeugd- en Kinderrechtenbeleidsplan 2025-2029)*	From the 2015-2019 term of office onwards, the efforts for children and young people in all policy areas of the Flemish Government were bundled together into an integrated youth and children's rights policy plan. The Flemish Government's Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (JKP) 2025–2029 has selected the four priorities: ● Well-being and resilience: within this priority, a strong emphasis is placed on the resilience and adaptability of children and young people in a constantly

		changing world. As the social lives of children and young people also take place online, this priority includes attention to the digital living environment. • Space to be young: children and young people should be able to thrive in a safe and healthy environment that they can explore freely. This has a positive impact on their well-being and development. The focus is on sustainable, traffic-safe, and liveable spaces that meet their needs. • The path to adulthood: this priority aims to better support young people through these major transitions, across policy domains. It pays particular attention to young people in socially vulnerable situations, such as young people leaving youth care or with a disability. • Living together in solidarity: children and young people need inclusive leisure opportunities and social connection in our superdiverse society. Every child and young person has the right to fully develop and express their own identity.
	Belgium-French-Community	• The Youth Department, the central public administration for the youth sector, is part of the General Department for Continuous Education for Adults and Young People. The minister is also assisted by the Observatory for Children, Youth and Youth Care. This body is directly placed under the authority of the General Secretary of the Ministry. The observatory informs public authorities and citizens about policies that are aimed at children and young people in the French Community. • The French Community has an International Youth Office (Bureau International Jeunesse, BIJ in short). BIJ manages and promotes a range of exchange programmes and works at European and transcontinental levels. Among other things, BIJ implements the Erasmus+ programme (youth) and European Solidarity Corps. The available funds to support international activities are under the responsibility of both the Minister for Youth and the Minister of International Affairs of the French Community, also called the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. There are three main types of youth structures approved by decree:

		• 1. Youth centres active at local level, • 2. Youth organisations with activities at community-wide level, • 3. the Youth Forum representing the voice of young people aged 16 to 30 in the French Community.
	Belgium German-Speaking-Community *The Strategic Plan for Youth (2023–2027)*	Since 2013, youth policy in the German-speaking Community of Belgium has been guided by a five-year Strategic Plan for Youth, adopted by both the government and parliament. The plan provides a comprehensive framework based on the living conditions, interests, and needs of young people, enabling policymakers to set priorities using a knowledge-based approach. The Strategic Plan includes an action plan that defines specific objectives, measures, and evaluation criteria aimed at improving the well-being and opportunities of young people. To support these objectives, the plan provides funding for projects implemented by a wide range of stakeholders, including youth organisations, municipalities, schools, public authorities, and non-profit organisations. A key feature of the Strategic Plan is its participatory approach. The governing decree requires that publicly funded youth and social institutions, as well as individual young people, are actively involved in the preparation of the plan and in consultations shaping the action plan. In addition, a steering group composed of representatives from the youth sector and political authorities oversees the development process leading to the adoption of the Strategic Plan. The current third Strategic Plan for Youth (2023–2027) builds on the findings of the Youth Report and focuses on four strategic priorities: 1. Civic engagement: encouraging active participation in society and democratic life. 2. Digitalisation: promoting digital skills and addressing opportunities and challenges associated with digital transformation. 3. Emotions and self-image: supporting young people's mental well-being, resilience, and personal development.

		4. Sustainable development of East Belgium as a living space: fostering sustainable communities and improving the quality of life for young people in the region
Italy	*National Youth Strategy 2023*	It sets out principles and activities for young people aged 14 to 35, with a two-pronged approach: the mainstreaming of youth issues across all public policies and specific initiatives funded by an annual Youth Fund, managed by the Department of Youth Policy and the Universal Civil Service.
	Consiglio Nazionale dei Giovani (CNG)	The National Youth Council is the consultative body representing young people before the Government and Parliament; together with the municipal youth councils, it seeks to channel the demands of the younger generations
	Universal Civil Service	A formal scheme for youth engagement, offering young people aged between 18 and 28 the opportunity to spend a year working on projects relating to aid, environmental protection and cultural promotion.
Spain	*INJUVE's Youth Strategy 2030*	Legally recognised platform representing over 60 regional youth organisations and councils. EU Youth Dialogue coordinated by INJUVE and CJE, with youth ambassadors and consultations at local, national and European levels. Digital Youth Advisory Council (2023). Implementation varies significantly across autonomous communities.
	Spanish Youth Council	It represents more than 60 regional youth organisations and councils. Young people can discuss policies directly with decision-makers at local, national and European level. The mechanism explicitly seeks to include young people with fewer opportunities, including rural youth, migrants and socially disadvantaged groups
	Youth Digital Advisory Council	Established in 2023. It engages young people in discussions on digital rights, online safety and technology governance (Ministry for Digital Transformation).

Source: Own elaboration based on the Desk Research of the participating associations.

Main challenges identified in national contexts

The documentary analysis reveals a series of challenges that limit young people's capacity to participate fully in democratic life. In most cases, uneven decentralization generates territorial disparities in youth participation, resulting in very different opportunities depending on place of residence. This reality manifests itself in the north-south divide in Italy, the east-west differences in Germany, rural-urban inequality in Lithuania, and disparities between autonomous communities in Spain.

The absence of real decision-making power and feedback turns participation into an eminently consultative exercise. Young people participate, but rarely see their contributions reflected in binding decisions. This dynamic, referred to as "adultocentrism" in the Italian context, generates disillusionment and institutional distrust. Institutional feedback, when it exists, tends to be slow, opaque, or non-existent. Furthermore, the social divide means that participation mechanisms predominantly attract young people who are already engaged and politicized (high school students, urban residents, and those with high cultural capital), while vulnerable and marginalized young people (NEETs, migrants, ethnic minorities, vocational training students, and rural youth) remain systematically underrepresented. The digital divide excludes young people who lack adequate devices, connectivity, linguistic and technical skills, or digital confidence. This divide again affects rural youth, those on low incomes, and third-country nationals. The absence of a structural legal anchor also means that participation is not perceived as a binding right. Laws regulate consultation but do not make youth contributions binding, resulting in a lack of follow-up and few guarantees of real impact. Volatile funding is another issue that undermines the long-term sustainability of programs. These depend on short funding cycles (Erasmus+, ESF+, CERV), temporary grants, or unstable annual funds.

The absence of mechanisms designed for young people leaves them without effective participation channels beyond student councils, which persist in their consultative character. The failure of the constitutional amendment to lower the municipal voting age to 16 in Lithuania (April 2026) constitutes an example of this barrier.

Table 9. Comparative challenges for Youth Participation

Identified challenge	Countries where it appears	Possible impact on youth participation
Uneven decentralisation	Germany, Netherlands, Lithuania, Italy, Spain	Participation varies according to the capacity of each local council, region or federal state. Chronic regional disparities (e.g. north-south in Italy, east-west in Germany, rural-urban in Lithuania, autonomous communities in Spain).
Lack of real decision-making power and feedback	Netherlands, Germany, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain	Participation is largely consultative (symbolic) and occasional (tokenism), which creates a sense of disillusionment and institutional mistrust. In Italy, this is referred to as 'adult-centrism'. Institutional feedback is slow, opaque or non-existent.
Social divide	Netherlands, Germany, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain	It attracts young people who are already engaged and politically active (secondary school pupils, urban dwellers with a high level of cultural capital) whilst leading to the under-representation of vulnerable and marginalised young people (NEETs, migrants, ethnic minorities, vocational training students, rural youth).
Digital divide	Netherlands, Lithuania, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Spain	This leads to the exclusion of young people who lack devices, internet access, language and technical skills, and digital confidence. In Lithuania, this particularly affects young people in rural areas, those on low incomes, and those from ethnic minority backgrounds. In Germany, ICILS 2023 shows a decline in digital skills.
Lack of a structural legal framework	Netherlands, Lithuania, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain	Participation is not perceived as a right; there is a lack of follow-up, and there are few guarantees of real impact. The laws regulate consultation but do not make young people's contributions binding.

Volatile funding	Netherlands, Germany, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy and Spain	It undermines long-term sustainability. The programmes rely on short funding cycles (Erasmus+, ESF+, CERV), temporary grants or unstable annual funding.
Lack of schemes designed for young people aged 14–17	Lithuania, Spain, Italy and Netherlands	School student councils and youth parliaments are the only formal channels through which those under the age of 18 can have their voices heard, and these remain purely advisory in nature. The failure of the amendment to lower the voting age in Lithuania (2026) is a clear example of this barrier.
Low political interest and disaffection with institutions	Lithuania, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Spain	Low trust in institutions and the perception that participation does not bring about tangible change demotivate young people, reducing their involvement in formal mechanisms and increasing voter abstention. In Italy, trust in political parties has fallen to 31.6%.
Reliance on organised civil society as an intermediary	Belgium, Netherlands, Lithuania	Participation schemes mainly reach young people who are already involved in youth organisations, associations or formal networks. Young people who are disengaged, unorganised or in vulnerable situations are systematically excluded.

Source: Own elaboration based on the Desk Research of the participating associations.

Good practices identified during Desk Research

Despite the structural difficulties, the national reports document various successful initiatives. In Germany, the JugendPolitikTage (JPT) constitutes a federal structured dialogue between young people and ministries, with documented recommendations and government responses. The Starke Kinder- und Jugendparlamente strengthens youth parliaments by promoting quality criteria to ensure youth parliaments are effective such as having their own project budgets, clear voting rights, diversity, and binding rights to speak in municipal council sessions, as well as training young parliament members and advising cities on how to give councils real budgets. In the Netherlands, the pilot project Jong Utrecht aan Zet creates a structural and legally recognized role for young people to influence regional policy, moving from symbolic consultation to binding co-decision. The Maatschappelijke Diensttijd (MDT) offers a structured volunteering model that reaches vulnerable young people. In Lithuania, municipal participatory budgeting platforms, scaled to 90% of municipalities,

demonstrate viability and replicability. The Youth Volunteer Service (JST) and mobile youth work reach young people in localities without youth work infrastructure. The campaigns "Man ne dzin" and Mission Siberia mobilize young people around national identity and civic engagement. In Italy, the Servizio Civile Universale and the Consiglio Nazionale dei Giovani (CNG) offer models of institutionalized youth representation. In Spain, the Spanish Youth Council (CJE) represents more than 60 youth organizations, and the Young Digital Advisory Council integrates young people's perspectives into technological governance.

Table 10. Transferable good practices for Youth Participation

Good practice	Country	Objective	Transfer potential
JugendPolitikTage (JPT)	Germany	Dialogue between young people and ministries, with government recommendations and responses.	High. Consolidated model of large-scale structured dialogue, replicable at national or European level.
Starke Kinder- und Jugendparlamente	Germany	Strengthen youth parliaments by promoting quality standards, training young members and advising municipalities on establishing youth parliaments and improving existing structures for youth participation.	High. 'Capacity building + institutional advice' model for transferring real power to youth councils.
Jong Utrecht aan Zet pilot project	Netherlands	Create a structurally and legally recognised role for young people to influence regional policy, moving from symbolic consultation to binding co-decision-making.	High transfer potential, but requires political will and legal reforms. As Jong Utrecht is not well known among engaged youth (based on declarations from focus groups conducted in The Netherlands), similar initiatives should focus on increasing their visibility. Although a pilot, its logic can be integrated into national youth strategies.

Maatschappelijke Diensttijd (MDT)	Netherlands	Voluntary service (12–30 year-olds) to strengthen society and personal growth, reaching vulnerable young people (including asylum seekers).	High as a model of structured volunteering, but requires stable funding.
Municipal participatory budgeting platforms in cities like Vilnius and Kaunas	Lithuania	Open a direct channel for citizens to propose, debate and vote on municipal public spending.	High transfer potential. The model has been scaled to 90% of Lithuanian municipalities, demonstrating viability and replicability.
Youth Volunteer Service (JST) + mobile youth work	Lithuania	Structured volunteering (14–29 year-olds) and street youth work to reach young people in localities without youth work infrastructure.	High. Volunteering model with monitoring and mentoring, complemented by street work to reach disengaged young people.
"Man ne dzin" campaign + Mission Siberia	Lithuania	Youth voter mobilisation campaign + commemorative expedition on historical education and civic engagement.	High. Models of mobilisation and experiential learning linked to national identity and civic engagement.
Servizio Civile Universale	Italy	Formal youth mobilisation mechanism (18–28 year-olds) offering a year in projects regarding assistance, environmental protection and cultural promotion.	High. Civil service model with a focus on active participation and peace education.
Consiglio Nazionale dei Giovani (CNG)	Italy	Consultative body for youth representation before the Government and Parliament, institutionalised by the National Youth Strategy.	High. Institutionalised youth representation model, replicable in other countries.

Young Digital Advisory Council	Spain	Involve young people in debates on digital rights, online safety and technological governance.	High transfer potential at regional, national or international level to address the generational gap in technological governance, validating regulations on digital rights and cybersecurity directly with their primary users.
Spanish Youth Council	Spain	Legally recognised platform representing over 60 youth organisations and regional councils, acting as a consultative body.	High. Institutionalised youth representation model at national level.
Aljadid 4.0 Project: "Youth: protagonists of change"	Spain	Foster leadership and social responsibility among local young people, mainly in the El Puche neighbourhood.	Replicable in vulnerable urban environments by boosting local mentor networks.

Source: Own elaboration based on the Desk Research of the participating associations.

Synthesis of the comparative European context

A comparative analysis of youth participation across the participating countries shows that Europe has moved beyond the stage of ignoring young people, as all countries have national youth participation strategies, framework legislation or alignment with the objectives of the European Union and the Council of Europe. Germany has the Federal Government's Youth Strategy (2019), comprising 163 measures, and a National Action Plan that involved 1,350 young people. The Netherlands has presented a draft national strategy based on consultations with 12,000 young people, although it remains non-binding. Lithuania has a National Youth Policy Action Plan 2023–2027 which supports municipal councils in all 60 municipalities. Italy adopted its National Youth Strategy in December 2023, although it was drafted without any mechanisms for youth co-design. Spain adopted INJUVE's Youth Strategy 2030 in 2022, with a strong focus on social inclusion. At European level, the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 and the Council of Europe's Youth Sector Strategy for 2030 provide common reference frameworks. However, the current context is defined by a major paradox: there are more formal channels than ever before, but their actual impact is fragmented. The existence of legislation has not guaranteed uniform or binding implementation, leaving participation vulnerable to political and budgetary fluctuations in each region. This paradox is evident in the gap between the formal recognition of participation rights and their effective exercise, particularly for young people in vulnerable situations.

The study identifies a series of systemic challenges that hinder the potential for youth participation, which can be grouped into six main barriers:

- **The 'false listening' syndrome**: present in all six countries analysed. Youth participation is almost exclusively consultative and occasional. As there is no legal obligation to provide feedback or to implement proposals, this creates a boomerang effect: disillusionment amongst young people and increased mistrust of democratic institutions.

- **Decentralisation trap**: in countries with decentralised models, a young person's right to participate depends on their postcode. The technical and budgetary capacity of each local council will have an immediate impact on youth participation.

- **The dual social and digital divide**: current mechanisms suffer from selection bias, as they attract young people who are already politicised, educated and/or involved in political life. At the same time, a lack of digital skills, resources and linguistic accessibility reinforces the under-representation of the most vulnerable groups.

- **Financial and legal vulnerability**: the absence of a structural legal framework and volatile funding condemn youth projects to a temporary existence, preventing their consolidation and real progress.

- **Dependence on organised civil society as an intermediary**: in the Netherlands and Lithuania, participation mechanisms mainly reach young people who are already linked to youth organisations, associations or formal networks. Young people who are unmotivated, unorganised or in vulnerable situations are systematically excluded. This dependence creates a structural paradox: the mechanisms that most explicitly target vulnerable young people are also those that rely most heavily on the capacity for intermediation to which these young people are least likely to have access. The result is that European strategies function more effectively as mechanisms for institutional coordination than as tools for reaching young people beyond organised civil society.

- **Lack of mechanisms for 14–17-year-olds**: in Lithuania, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands, school student councils and youth parliaments are the only formal channels through which those under 18 can have their voices heard, and these remain purely advisory in nature. The failure of the constitutional amendment to lower the voting age for local elections to 16 in Lithuania (April 2026) is a clear example of this barrier, leaving the young people most affected by school and local government policies without effective channels for participation.

However, despite structural weaknesses, the good practices identified set out a clear roadmap, pointing towards possible decentralised solutions with clear monitoring mechanisms. Germany offers the Starke Kinder- und Jugendparlamente model, which trains young parliament members and advises municipalities on creating youth councils with dedicated budgets and stronger, more meaningful roles in local governance, as well as the JugendPolitikTage, a structured federal dialogue with documented government responses that, since 2017, has brought together hundreds of young people to debate with government departments. The Jong Utrecht aan Zet pilot project in the Netherlands offers the opportunity for binding governance, creating a structural and legally recognised role for young people to influence regional policy on housing and climate, thereby avoiding occasional and tokenistic participation. Lithuania stands out for its municipal participatory budgeting schemes (extended to 90% of municipalities), which offer the opportunity to train future democratic leaders by allowing young people to participate directly in the management of public funds, complemented by the Youth Volunteer Service (JST) and mobile youth work that reaches young people in areas lacking youth work infrastructure. Italy has the Consiglio Nazionale dei Giovani (CNG) as an institutionalised consultative body representing young people, and the Servizio Civile Universale as a formal mechanism for mobilising young people for projects relating to social care, environmental protection and cultural promotion. Spain has the Spanish Youth Council (CJE) as a legally recognised platform representing more than 60 youth organisations, and the Youth Digital

Advisory Council for digital governance, which integrates young people's perspectives to validate and co-design regulations on cybersecurity, AI and digital rights. At European level, the Council of Europe's co-management system stands as a unique model of co-decision-making between young people and governments in the youth sector, where the Youth Advisory Council shares decision-making power with the European Steering Committee for Youth, whilst the EU Youth Check assesses the impact of new policies on young people by integrating the youth perspective throughout the policy cycle.

6.2. Intercultural dialogue

Democratic participation requires inclusive social contexts capable of recognizing diversity and guaranteeing equal opportunities. This dimension analyses experiences of intercultural coexistence, perceptions of inclusion, cases of discrimination, and the specific barriers affecting young people with fewer opportunities.

The main variables include:

- respect for diversity
- intercultural coexistence
- equal opportunities
- social inclusion
- discrimination
- participation of vulnerable groups

The incorporation of this dimension ensures that the curriculum adopts an inclusive perspective and responds to the diversity of circumstances across the consortium as a whole.

Main institutional characteristics

Intercultural dialogue is promoted through a combination of European programs, national institutions, and bilateral initiatives.

Germany has a broad infrastructure that includes Erasmus+, the Franco-German Youth Office and the German-Polish Youth Office, the DAAD and kulturweit (international volunteering), the federal initiatives Integration through Sport and Integration through Education, the school network Schule ohne Rassismus, the Jugendsozialarbeit program, and local projects such as Meet a Jew, Each one Teach one, and Zeugen der Flucht.
In the Netherlands, the intercultural dialogue infrastructure is based on projects rather than strategies, and is carried out mainly by NGOs, with little evidence of impact due to the ad-hoc nature of the activities.
Lithuania presents a diversified network that includes Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, the bilateral Lithuanian-Polish and Lithuanian-Ukrainian Youth Exchange Funds, the Department of National Minorities, the Lithuanian Museum of Ethnic Minorities' Folklore and Ethnography Center (LTMFEC), the Lithuanian Children and Youth Center

(LVJC), as well as grassroots initiatives such as Open Youth Centres, the Mano Europa projects, and Eurodesk volunteer networks.
Belgium (at the European level) stands out as the UNIA institution (promoting equality and combating discrimination), and regional equality frameworks.
Italy has the Intercultura Association, the A Regola d'Arte project (ActionAid Italy), the QuestaèRoma association, the CRID project "Educare alle differenze," and the YEP! project of the Catholic University.
Spain promotes intercultural dialogue through Erasmus+/Youth in Action, the Youth Strategy and the EU Youth Dialogue, the Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy, the COSI.ed program, the e-YOUTH and INnetCAMPUS projects, and organizations such as Almería Acoge and Mujeres en Zona de Conflicto.

Table 11. Institutional characteristics for Intercultural Dialogue by country

Country	Platforms and programmes for intercultural dialogue	Notable aspects
European Level	*North-South Centre of the Council of Europe*	Manages a programme on intercultural dialogue covering the following dimensions: migrations, women as agents of change in Mediterranean societies, media as tools for dialogue, and the strengthening of democratic processes and human rights in the Euro-Mediterranean region.
	SALTO Inclusion & Diversity	Resource centre of the European SALTO-YOUTH network that supports and promotes the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities and diversity in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes.
Germany	*Erasmus+*	Organisations such as the Franco-German Youth Office and the German-Polish Youth Office facilitate exchanges between young people of different cultural backgrounds.
	DAAD and *Kulturweit*	Organisations providing long-term international volunteering and exchange opportunities. The former offers scholarships for undergraduate, master's, doctoral studies or research stays in Germany and abroad; the latter enables young people to undertake volunteering placements (6–12 months) collaborating on education, culture, and nature projects.
	Integration through Sport and *Integration through Education*	Federal initiatives designed to facilitate the social, cultural, and community inclusion of immigrants and refugees in the country. The former uses sport as a platform to build bridges between the local population and newcomers; the latter guarantees equal opportunities in the educational sphere and accelerates the incorporation of people with migratory backgrounds into the skilled labour market.

	Schule ohne Rassismus and *Jugendsozialarbeit*	Programmes providing long-term support for disadvantaged young people and those of immigrant origin. The former is the largest school network in Germany, established in the 90s to combat racism, xenophobia, and any form of discrimination; the latter is a state-offered socio-educational intervention and support service for young people aged 12–27 in situations of social disadvantage or vulnerability.
	Meet a Jew, Each one Teach one and *Zeugen der Flucht*	Local-level projects that go beyond passive inclusion, representing a shift towards more active participation. They empower individuals to shape the narrative and the dialogue themselves.
Netherlands	NGOs manage intercultural dialogue	The intercultural dialogue infrastructure in the Netherlands is project-based rather than strategic, carried out primarily by NGOs. Evidence of impact is scarce due to the ad-hoc nature of the activities, making robust measurement difficult.
Lithuania	*Erasmus+* and *European Solidarity Corps*	Administered by the Education Exchanges Support Foundation, which has operated since 2007 and coordinates over 50 funding lines for youth and educational mobility.
	Lithuanian–Polish Youth Exchange Fund and *Lithuanian–Ukrainian Youth Exchange Fund*	Bilateral government cooperation funds managed by the Youth Affairs Agency, aiming to finance meetings, cultural exchanges, educational projects, and volunteering between young people from these countries to strengthen historical, social, and democratic ties. Both operate through annual calls for projects submitted by NGOs, schools, universities, or youth organisations.
	Department of National Minorities under the Government	Organises non-formal education activities for children and youth from national minorities, supports minority NGOs, and directs the Strategic Activity Plan for the protection of minority rights and the strengthening of intercultural cooperation.
	Folklore and Ethnography Centre of Ethnic Minorities (LTMFEC)	A Vilnius-based organisation that directs sustained programmes including the International Folklore Festival and the "Intercultural Dialogue" international programme, working with Polish, Russian, Belarusian, and other minority youth on a long-term basis.

	Lithuanian Children and Youth Centre (LVJC)	The country's largest non-formal education institution, offering activities adapted for children and young people with disabilities.
	Youth Guarantee projects "Discover Yourself" and its successor "Connections" (JUNGTYS, 2024–2028)	Programmes specifically addressing the inclusion of vulnerable groups, focusing on NEETs through early intervention, career guidance, and motivational training delivered by the Lithuanian Public Employment Service and the Youth Affairs Agency with 34 partners.
Belgium	*UNIA*	An independent public institution whose main mission is to promote equality, combat discrimination, and protect the rights of people with disabilities. Furthermore, it promotes preventive measures through education, training, and dialogue with institutions.
	Regional equality frameworks (Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels-Capital)	Regional policies focused on labour inclusion, access to education, and integration policies, adapted to each context.
Italy	*Intercultura Association*	A historical organisation that conducts structured laboratories within the national school network, such as "Citizens of the same planet", combining intercultural dialogue, peace education, and the international dimension of the 2030 Agenda. It is integrated as a continuous and sustained educational policy supported by protocols with the Ministry of Education.
	"A Regola d'Arte" Project	Uses sport (rugby) and performing arts in peripheral contexts to deactivate NEET isolation and promote substantive citizenship among peers.
	QuestaèRoma	An association composed of second-generation youth that ensures sporting and cultural inclusion initiatives are designed and animated directly by those involved, enhancing youth agency and deconstructing welfare practices.
	CRID – "Educare alle differenze"	University of Modena and Reggio Emilia research project on deconstructing stereotypes from early school years, addressing cultural and gender discrimination.

	YEP! project (Catholic University)	University research emphasize the need to study how inequalities multiply (e.g., ethnicity and gender convergence).
Spain	*EU Erasmus+/Youth in Action Programme*	Youth exchanges, volunteering projects, and Euro-Mediterranean initiatives focused on intercultural learning and non-formal education.
	Spanish Youth Strategy and participation in the EU Youth Dialogue	Institutionalise intercultural dialogue through permanent consultation mechanisms and cooperation with youth organisations.
	Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy	Implemented in Spain by the SEPIE explicitly for young people with "fewer opportunities", including those facing social, cultural, economic, disability, or educational barriers. It requires inclusive project design and encourages the participation of beneficiaries in decision-making processes.
	COSI.ed Programme	Programme implemented between 2021 and 2024 with Spanish universities and third-sector organisations. It is based on co-created education in order to reduce power imbalances between educators and vulnerable young people.
	e-YOUTH and INnetCAMPUS projects	Projects focused on disability using intersectional and participatory approaches to improve social inclusion and access to education for young people with disabilities.
	Almería Acoge	Civil society organisation promoting intercultural coexistence through educational mediation, language support, legal assistance, and anti-racism activities.
	Mujeres en Zona de Conflicto	Programme in Andalusia and Almería addressing hate crimes, rights of migrant women, gender violence, and racial discrimination jointly (intersectional approach).

Source: Own elaboration based on the Desk Research of the participating associations.

Main challenges identified in national contexts

Intercultural dialogue is hindered by multiple barriers. Spatial and residential segregation isolates social groups in bubbles, reducing spontaneous contact between cultures. The privilege of the educational elite turns dialogue into a privilege for academic-track students, who have more points of contact with international exchange programs. The lack of "third spaces" (youth clubs and accessible cultural centres) leaves young people from rural environments without infrastructure for sustained intercultural engagement.

The social divide manifests in overlapping disadvantages for young people from rural areas, ethnic minorities, low-income families, and people with disabilities. Linguistic barriers create power imbalances by privileging academic language or English in formal forums, silencing speakers of minority languages.

The loss of funding for democratic NGOs weakens structural protections for the most vulnerable groups. Cultural essentialism forces young people to perform "representative" roles of their culture, preventing individual and flexible interaction. Confusion about responsibilities and inaccessible information undermine institutional trust. The absence of an intersectional approach in practice turns intercultural dialogue into a monologue by the elites of each culture. Educational gaps and the polarization of political discourse hinder everyday contact and mutual understanding.

Table 12. Comparative challenges for Intercultural Dialogue

Identified challenge	Countries where it appears	Possible impact on intercultural dialogue
Spatial and residential segregation	Germany, Netherlands, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain	Urban planning often isolates social groups into bubbles, further reducing spontaneous contact.
Lack of real decision-making power, co-design, and feedback	Germany, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain	Participation is essentially consultative and occasional, which generates a feeling of disillusionment and institutional mistrust.

Privilege of the educational elite	Germany, Netherlands, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain	Vocational training students have fewer points of contact with international exchange programmes, making dialogue a privilege of the educational elite.
Lack of 'third spaces'	Germany, Lithuania, Spain and Italy	The lack of accessible youth clubs and cultural centres leaves young people, especially in rural areas, without the physical infrastructure necessary for sustained intercultural engagement.
Social divide	Germany, Netherlands, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain	Young people in rural areas, ethnic minorities, low-income families, and those with disabilities face overlapping disadvantages. Furthermore, persistent prejudices, particularly towards Roma people, migrants from non-EU countries, and LGBTQ+ youth, pose an additional social obstacle that hinders intercultural dialogue.
Linguistic barriers	Germany, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Netherlands	The focus on academic language or English in formal forums creates a power imbalance, silencing speakers of minority languages and/or those who feel their everyday language is insufficient.
Loss of funding for democratic NGOs	Germany	Sends a 'dangerous signal', weakening structural protections for the most vulnerable groups.
Cultural essentialism	Germany	A rigid and stereotypical view of culture often forces young people to play 'representative' roles rather than allowing for individual and flexible interaction.
Confusion regarding responsibilities and inaccessible information	Netherlands and Belgium	The lack of accessible information and confusion regarding anti-discrimination services breaks down institutional security and trust, transforming the opportunity for dialogue into frustration, civic silence, and social fragmentation.
Absence of an intersectional approach in practice	Germany, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain	Without intersectionality, intercultural dialogue becomes flat. It ceases to be a tool for social justice, where culture intersects with other variables (such as gender, social

		class, age, etc.), and becomes a monologue of the elites of each culture, shielding privileges instead of building real bridges.
Educational gaps	Netherlands, Germany, Lithuania, Italy	The early division of students into different educational paths reproduces sociocultural backgrounds and reinforces the separation between groups, hindering daily contact and intercultural dialogue.
Polarisation of political discourse	Netherlands and Lithuania	The polarisation of political discourse acts as a direct solvent to intercultural dialogue, transforming diversity into a perceived threat.
Inadequate compensation for victims of discrimination	Lithuania	Discriminatory acts are understood as a simple, acceptable 'operating cost', which leads to a breakdown of institutional trust, a power asymmetry, and an identity retreat of minority communities.
Geopolitical tensions	Lithuania, Germany	Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, an additional layer of sensitivity has been added to the dialogue with Russian-speaking minorities (Lithuania) and has affected the teaching of controversial topics (Germany).

Source: Own elaboration based on the Desk Research of the participating associations.

Good practices identified during Desk Research

Among the good practices, local initiatives include Meet a Jew, Each one Teach one, and Zeugen der Flucht in Germany, which replace passive inclusion with direct storytelling by minorities. The DAAD Diversity Agenda 2030 moves from traditional intercultural dialogue toward broader approaches to inclusion and diversity. The Open Youth Centres and the Mano Europa projects in Lithuania offer models of co-management and youth co-design. Bilateral youth cooperation funds demonstrate how government cooperation can finance intercultural encounters. ActionAid Italy's non-formal methodologies (A Regola d'Arte) use rugby and theater in peripheral neighbourhoods to connect with disengaged young people. The Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy in Spain prioritizes young people with fewer opportunities, and UNIA in Belgium offers a model of an independent anti-discrimination institution.

Table 13. Transferable good practices identified during desk research for Intercultural Dialogue

Good practice	Country	Objective	Transfer potential
Local initiatives such as *Meet a Jew* (Berlin), *Each one Teach one* (Berlin) and *Zeugen der Flucht* (Dresden)	Germany	Based on real experiences and the participation of minority communities, they aim to go beyond passive inclusion by empowering individuals to shape the narrative and dialogue themselves.	High transfer potential in any European setting to combat prejudice at its source, especially in cities with emerging cultural diversity or identity tensions. It does not require large infrastructures or high public budgets, but rather the articulation of civil society networks trained to translate first-person experience into educational and community spaces.
DAAD Diversity Agenda 2030	Germany	A strategy that moves from traditional intercultural dialogue to broader approaches of Inclusion and Diversity, directing funding towards participants who face "multiple barriers".	High transfer potential. A model transferable to other scholarship agencies and mobility programmes, integrating intersectionality as a funding criterion.
Open Youth Centres + Mano Europa, etc	Lithuania	Engage young people more directly in shaping programme content, applying principles of open youth work and participatory methodologies.	High transfer potential as a model of co-management and co-design in youth departments, municipal socio-cultural centres and community action NGOs in any region.
Lithuanian-Polish and Lithuanian-Ukrainian Youth Exchange Funds	Lithuania	Bilateral government cooperation funds that finance meetings, cultural exchanges, educational projects and volunteering between young people from these countries.	High transfer potential. A model of bilateral cooperation transferable to other countries with historical and cultural ties, with annual calls for projects and management by youth agencies.

Good practice	Country	Objective	Transfer potential
UNIA (Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities)	Belgium	Independent public institution that promotes equality, combats discrimination and protects the rights of people with disabilities, with a preventive approach through education, training and institutional dialogue.	High. A model of an independent anti-discrimination institution, transferable to other countries with federal or decentralised frameworks.
Non-formal methodologies: rugby and theatre (ActionAid Italy - *A Regola d'Arte*)	Italy	Overcome linguistic barriers, deactivate NEET isolation and foster intercultural dialogue in peripheral neighbourhoods through sport and performing arts.	High potential for replication in vulnerable urban environments with linguistic barriers or social exclusion, using art and sport as vehicles for cohesion to connect with young people disengaged from traditional civic structures.
QuestaèRoma	Italy	Association composed of second-generation youth that designs and leads sports and cultural inclusion initiatives directly by those involved, enhancing youth agency.	High transfer potential. A model of youth leadership in migrant communities, transferable to contexts with second-generation youth.
Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy	Spain	Prioritise young people with "fewer opportunities", including those facing social, cultural, economic, functional diversity and/or educational barriers.	High transfer potential as a model of positive discrimination in any public mobility programme, study scholarships, youth employment plans or cultural policies at regional, national or international level.

Source: Own elaboration based on the Desk Research of the participating associations.

Synthesis of the comparative European context

A comparative analysis of the intercultural dialogue dimension reveals that the European landscape has a well-established formal and international framework, driven primarily by the Erasmus+ programmes and the European Solidarity Corps. The Council of Europe, through its White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (2008), the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995), the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the 'All Different, All Equal' campaign, has developed a robust regulatory framework. The European Union, for its part, has integrated intercultural dialogue into programmes such as Youth in Action (2007–2013), the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008), the key competences for lifelong learning (2006) and the SALTO Diversity network. However, institutional support at national level is highly uneven and is constrained by disparities in resources, a lack of political continuity and the bureaucratisation of official channels. In the Netherlands, for example, the infrastructure for intercultural dialogue is based on one-off projects led by NGOs, with little evidence of impact. In Lithuania, the re-establishment of the Department of National Minorities in 2018 reflects historical discontinuities in the policy framework.

The study identifies a number of systemic challenges that hinder intercultural dialogue, which can be grouped into several main barriers:

- **Spatial and residential segregation**: present in all the countries analysed. Residential polarisation concentrates low-income families or those with a migrant background in outlying areas, resulting in de facto 'ghettoisation' of schools, where the diversity necessary for spontaneous exchange between different cultures is lacking. This segregation limits day-to-day contact and informal opportunities for intercultural exchange.

- **Educational elitism**: in Germany, the early educational tracking system limits vocational students' access to international exchange programmes. In Lithuania, schools for national minorities operate in their mother tongue, which can reduce daily interaction with Lithuanian-speaking peers. In Italy, young people enrolled in technical or vocational colleges face significant barriers to accessing formal channels of intercultural dialogue.

- **Cultural essentialism and tokenism**: in Germany, cultural essentialism forces young people to play roles that are 'representative' of their culture. In several countries, large-scale federal policies are designed 'for' minorities, limiting their participation to advisory roles. In Lithuania, major national programmes tend to be designed 'for' rather than 'with' the target groups. In Italy, national policy interventions tend to take a top-down approach, confining vulnerable groups to the role of mere recipients of assistance. The absence of a practical intersectional approach (where culture is disconnected from other variables such as gender, sexual orientation or social class) is common in Germany, Lithuania, Italy, Spain

and Belgium, where intersectionality is recognised in political discourse but its application continues to be structured around separate categories of disadvantage.

- **Language barriers**: in Germany, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy and Spain, the emphasis on academic language or English in formal forums creates a power imbalance, silencing speakers of minority languages. In Lithuania, linguistic segregation between schools for national minorities and Lithuanian-speaking schools reduces day-to-day interaction. In Italy, the shortage of specialist language facilitators turns linguistic complexity into a tool for self-exclusion from civic debate processes.

- **Polarisation of political discourse and geopolitical tensions**: in the Netherlands, political discourse has become increasingly polarised since the November 2023 elections, hindering intercultural dialogue. In Lithuania, geopolitical tensions since the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 have added a layer of sensitivity to dialogue with Russian-speaking minorities.

- **Legal weaknesses and institutional confusion**: in the Netherlands, there is confusion over who is responsible for anti-discrimination services, which undermines institutional trust. In Belgium, administrative complexity and strict eligibility criteria exclude smaller grassroots organisations working with vulnerable young people.

However, despite these structural weaknesses, the best practices identified provide a clear roadmap, pointing towards possible decentralised solutions with monitoring mechanisms. In Germany, local initiatives such as 'Meet a Jew' (Berlin), 'Each One Teach One' (Berlin) and 'Zeugen der Flucht' (Dresden) offer opportunities for narrative empowerment, tackling prejudice at its source by replacing passive inclusion with direct storytelling by minority groups in educational and community settings. It is a low-cost model that fosters a high degree of empathy, ideal for cities experiencing identity-related tensions. The DAAD Diversity Agenda 2030 moves away from traditional intercultural dialogue towards broader approaches to inclusion and diversity, channeling funding towards participants facing multiple barriers (such as the intersection of migration, socio-economic status or disability). The ifa CrossCulture Programme (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen) enables young professionals to build intercultural networks targeting under-represented groups, whilst IJAB acts as a central hub to promote global partnerships and mutual understanding.

In Lithuania, Open Youth Centres and youth-led projects such as Mano Europa offer opportunities for young people to co-design and co-manage initiatives, moving beyond token consultation and directly involving young people in shaping the programme of activities at local centres. Bilateral youth cooperation funds (the Lithuanian–Polish and Lithuanian–Ukrainian Youth Exchange Funds) demonstrate how bilateral government

cooperation can fund meetings, cultural exchanges and educational projects between young people from countries with historical ties, offering a model that can be replicated in other European contexts. The British Council's 'English Through Media Literacy' programme uses English as a 'neutral bridge' between Lithuanian- and Russian-speaking students in non-Lithuanian-speaking regions, offering a model of a 'third language' as an intercultural bridge.

In Italy, the organisation Intercultura runs structured workshops within the national school network, such as 'Citizens of the Same Planet', combining intercultural dialogue, peace education and the 2030 Agenda. ActionAid Italy's non-formal methodologies (A Regola d'Arte), which use rugby and theatre in outlying neighbourhoods, demonstrate significant potential for replication in vulnerable urban settings characterised by language barriers or social exclusion, using art and sport as vehicles for social cohesion to engage with young people who are disconnected from traditional civic structures. QuestaèRoma, an association made up of second-generation young people, ensures that sporting and cultural inclusion initiatives are designed and run directly by those involved, thereby empowering young people.

In Spain, the Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy implemented by SEPIE prioritises young people with 'fewer opportunities' and requires inclusive project designs that involve the beneficiaries. The COSI.ed programme (Co-created Education through Social Inclusion, 2021–2024) reduces power imbalances between educators and vulnerable young people through 'co-created education'. Organisations such as Almería Acoge promote intercultural coexistence through educational mediation, language support, legal assistance and anti-racism activities, whilst Mujeres en Zona de Conflicto tackles hate crimes, the rights of migrant women, gender-based violence and racial discrimination in a joint manner (an intersectional approach). The Council of Europe's "Intercultural Cities" programme, in which many Spanish local authorities participate, offers a model for local inclusion policies with a community-based and participatory approach.

In Belgium, UNIA provides a model for an independent anti-discrimination body that combines education, training and institutional dialogue. The SALTO Inclusion & Diversity network supports the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities and diversity within the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes. At European level, the Council of Europe's co-management system stands as a unique model of co-decision-making between young people and governments in the youth sector.

These identified best practices offer a viable path towards more inclusive, decentralised and participatory models. The key lies in moving from institutional rhetoric to sustained action, with clear monitoring mechanisms and the active involvement of young people and minority communities in the design and implementation of initiatives.

6.3. Civic education

This dimension analyses the role of education in developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for exercising active democratic citizenship, providing information on how young people evaluate the training they have received.

Key variables analysed include:

- knowledge of democratic institutions
- understanding of citizens' rights and duties
- critical thinking
- peaceful conflict resolution
- responsible participation
- the ability to deliberate and argue
- perception of the value of civic education

The information gathered will enable us to identify the priority competences to be incorporated into the Youth4Change curriculum.

Main institutional characteristics

Germany incorporates civic education through the Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK), which establishes education for democracy as a basic duty and transversal task, and the Ständige Wissenschaftliche Kommission (SWK), which recommends extending civic education into practice through a participatory school culture. The Federal Agency for Civic Education (bpb) organizes seminars, workshops, and publications. The program Demokratie leben! supports local partnerships for democracy, and Zusammenhalt durch Teilhabe reinforces democratic culture in rural areas.

In the Netherlands, formal civic education (burgerschap) is compulsory in primary and secondary education, although the ICCS 2022 shows that students understand democracy but lack practical skills for participation. ProDemos organizes school elections, workshops, and conferences, and debate associations (Debatunie, Debatbond, Oracy Institute) provide training in argumentation.

Lithuania integrates social and civic education as a transversal area in the national curriculum, with an independent compulsory subject of two hours per week in upper secondary education. The Lithuanian Non-Formal Education Center (LMNSC) coordinates more than 400 annual events, and the Lithuanian Youth Council (LiJOT) leads campaigns such as "Man ne dzin" and Mission Siberia.

In Belgium, the French Community has introduced Philosophy and Citizenship Education as a compulsory subject in public schools, focusing on critical thinking, ethics, democratic values, and respect for human rights. In the Flemish Community, citizenship education is delivered through a cross-curricular approach, embedding democratic citizenship, media literacy, intercultural dialogue, and civic responsibility across different subjects rather

than as a standalone course (Council of Europe Report on the State of Citizenship and Human Rights Education in Europe).

Italy has Law 92/2019, which establishes compulsory civic education from kindergarten through the end of upper secondary education, with substantial assessment. The Agente 0011 project (ActionAid Italy) promotes grassroots proposals for the regeneration of spaces, and the European Youth Parliament (EYP) Italy involves students in parliamentary simulations.

Spain is governed by the LOMLOE (2020), which establishes a specific subject in Primary Education and a transversal competence in Primary and Secondary Education. ERACIS+ uses neighbourhood-based interventions to boost civic engagement, the Ítaca Almería Association uses gamification and community workshops, and the Municipal Women's Centers offer training and legal mediation.

At the European level, some of the highlighted initiatives are the EU's 2025 Skills Union, which recognizes citizenship as a "fifth basic competence," the Council of Europe's European Space for Citizenship Education, the European Youth Foundation, and the European Youth Centers.

Table 14. Institutional characteristics for Civic Education by country

Country	Leyes/programas educativos	Notable aspects
European Level	*EU Skills Agenda 2025*	It recognises "citizenship" as the "fifth basic competence" through its Skills Agenda.
	European Space for Citizenship Education	At the Council of Europe level, this is a new initiative aimed at providing a framework to guarantee quality citizenship education across Europe.
	European Youth Foundation and European Youth Centres	At the Council of Europe level, these are the two main instruments for the promotion of civic education through non-formal activities. The European Youth Foundation provides grants to international youth NGOs that carry out non-formal civic education activities. The European Youth Centres hold study sessions and training courses on human rights education, democratic citizenship, and intercultural dialogue aimed at youth workers and youth leaders.
Germany	*Kultusministerkonferenz* (KMK)	Establishes education for democracy as a basic duty and a cross-curricular task in the school curricula of the federal states.
	Ständige Wissenschaftliche Kommission (SWK)	Recommends that civic education is not limited to the classroom but extends to practice through a participatory school culture and whole-school approaches.
	Demokratie leben!	Flagship federal programme (BMBFSFJ) that supports local partnerships for democracy and countering extremism. Promotes democratic values, diversity, and participation at a local level.
	Zusammenhalt durch Teilhabe	Led by the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) and the Federal Agency for Civic Education, it reinforces democratic culture in rural and structurally weak areas through the training of local actors and support for civic organisations.

	Federal Agency for Civic Education	Organises seminars, workshops, study trips, publications, exhibitions, and online tools while also funding other educational providers.
Netherlands	*ProDemos*	School elections, workshops, lectures, and similar programmes.
	Formal civic education (burgerschap)	Compulsory in primary and secondary education. Although students understand democracy, the ICCS 2022 shows they lack practical skills for participation, ranking behind other comparable countries.
	Debate associations (Debatunie, Debatbond, Oracy Institute)	The debate methodology is very popular in the Netherlands, with the International Debate Education Association based in Utrecht.
Lithuania	*National Curriculum for Primary and Lower Secondary Education*	Social and civic education as a cross-curricular area. In upper secondary education, citizenship education is a compulsory independent subject with 2 hours per week.
	Lithuanian Centre of Non-formal Youth Education (LMNSC)	Coordinates over 400 local and international events annually, including civic and ethno-cultural activities for schoolchildren and youth.
	Lithuanian Youth Council (LiJOT)	Leads iconic civic education campaigns, including "Man ne dzin" ("I do care") to mobilise young voters, "Mission Siberia" (annual commemorative expedition since 2005), and structured dialogue consultations. Eurodesk Lithuania, coordinated by LiJOT, operates with about 40 regional representatives.
Belgium	*Belgium-French-Community*	The main institutional framework for civic education in Wallonia is **Education à la Philosophie et à la Citoyenneté (EPC)**, introduced in compulsory education. EPC aims to help students develop: • critical thinking and philosophical reflection; • understanding of democratic principles and institutions;

		• respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; • openness to cultural, social, and ideological diversity; • capacity for dialogue and participation.
	Belgium-Flemish-Community	In the Flemish Community of Belgium, citizenship education (*burgerschapseducatie*) is integrated into the broader framework of **key competences (*sleutelcompetenties*)** that define what students should learn during compulsory education. Rather than being a single subject, citizenship education is considered a **cross-curricular competence** developed through different subjects, school activities, and participation experiences.
	Belgium-German-Community	Its long-term strategy, **Bildungsvision 2040 – Meine Bildung. Meine Zukunft! (**Education Vision 2040 – My Education. My Future!**)**, places emphasis on preparing learners for future social challenges, including democratic participation, digital transformation, and social cohesion.
Italy	*Law 92/2019*	Establishes compulsory civic education from kindergarten to the end of upper secondary school.
	Agent 0011 project	Implemented by ActionAid Italy. Promotes educational paths that push students and local communities to develop bottom-up proposals for the regeneration of spaces and services.
	European Youth Parliament (EYP) Italy	Involves thousands of students in parliamentary simulations at regional, national, and international levels, forming active citizenship based on peer-to-peer methodology and non-competitive debate.
Spain	*LOMLOE (2020)*	Specific subject in Primary and a cross-curricular competence in both Primary and Secondary.

	Andalusian Regional Strategy for Social Cohesion and Inclusion (ERACIS+)	Locally managed by the Almería City Council, this co-financed initiative uses neighbourhood interventions to boost civic engagement, reduce digital and gender gaps, and foster community coexistence in socio-economically vulnerable areas.
	Ítaca Almería Association	The "Barrio Activo Futuro Vivo" project, supported through municipal agreements, focuses on the neighbourhood and uses gamification and community workshops as educational tools. It actively educates young people and families in values such as empathy and collective, peaceful conflict resolution to improve civic participation in the community.
	Municipal Women's Centres in Almería	Offer practical tools to combat domestic vulnerabilities, build support infrastructures, and advocate for gender equality in local socio-political environments. They provide structured training, legal mediation, and psychological assistance. They empower diverse age groups, helping women to build social networks, overcome digital gaps, and exercise full democratic citizenship.

Source: Own elaboration based on the Desk Research of the participating associations.

Main challenges identified in national contexts

Based on the literature review, a number of common challenges have been identified that are shared across different national contexts. These challenges limit young people's ability to participate fully in democratic life and perpetuate inequalities in access to mechanisms for participation.

Civic education in Europe reflects a structural paradox: there is robust regulatory coverage, but its implementation suffers from a profound lack of practical application. Educational systems transmit theoretical concepts about institutions and rights, but do not provide a genuine democratic experience. The limited training of teachers in participatory pedagogies, debate, media literacy, and democratic methods constrains the development of practical skills. The eminently theoretical approach hinders the development of skills such as open debate,

critical thinking, and genuine participation. The social divide disproportionately affects young people from rural areas, ethnic minorities, low-income families, and people with disabilities. Funding cuts reduce activities in vulnerable neighbourhoods. Curricular rigidity and high student-to-teacher ratios turn civic education into rote learning. Political pressure leads teachers to avoid controversy. The disconnection between formal and non-formal education limits the reach of participatory programs. The lack of impact assessment prevents the measurement of practical skills.

Table 15. Comparative challenges for Civic Education

Identified challenge	**Countries where it appears**	**Possible impact on civic education**
Spatial and residential segregation	Germany, Netherlands, Lithuania, Belgium	Depending on the state (in federal configurations) and the area of residence (urban or rural), resources, teacher training, connections, opportunities, etc., vary significantly.
Insufficient teacher training	Germany, Lithuania, Italy	Insufficient teacher training in participatory pedagogies, debate, media literacy, and democratic methods hinders the development of practical skills in civic education. Young people feel politically unskilled and distrust their ability to influence.
Predominantly theoretical approach	Germany, Netherlands, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain	Excessive focus on theoretical content hinders the full development of practical skills, such as open debate, engagement, critical thinking to evaluate sources, judgement, and real participation in democratic life, etc. Despite knowing the facts, young people doubt that their voice matters.
Social divide	Germany, Netherlands, Lithuania, Belgium, Spain	Excessive focus on theoretical content hinders the full development of practical skills, such as open debate, engagement, critical thinking to evaluate sources, judgement, and real participation in democratic life, etc. Despite knowing the facts, young people doubt that their voice matters.

Funding cuts	Germany, Italy	Reduction of activities and outreach programmes in vulnerable neighbourhoods and rural areas, reduction of civic education to a purely theoretical and flat format that benefits educational elites, depletion of the fabric of NGOs and associations, and greater vulnerability to disinformation and polarisation.
Tight curriculum and high class sizes	Germany, Lithuania	Civic education is reduced to purely theoretical and rote learning, with no room for delving into practice and acquiring skills such as debate, participation, and plural dialogue, which are essential for the development of true democratic citizenship.
Insufficient competencies of European institutions to influence teaching practices	All EU Countries	The fact that the main function of European institutions is the drafting of policy frameworks, strategies, and guidelines that serve as recommendations and not binding obligations constitutes a limit to the integration of participatory pedagogies in civic education.
Student representative bodies without real decision-making power	Germany, Italy	The hollowing out of decision-making power turns the democratic experience into a simulation, discouraging proactive political participation by students, who are aware of the practical ineffectiveness of their involvement.
Critical media literacy and algorithmic discernment	Germany, Netherlands, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain	Young people often struggle to verify digital sources, recognise algorithmic biases, or counter polarised narratives, leaving them highly exposed to viral fake news and information manipulation.
Poor political literacy	Germany, Netherlands, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain	Many young people show involvement in social movements but do not know how to interact with local public administrations, draft petitions, or influence formal policy channels, which causes institutional distrust and a gap between activism and institutional participation.

Polarisation of political discourse	Spain	Intense polarisation has diminished young people's capacity for peaceful, face-to-face civil debate, making constructive dialogue and the negotiation of conflicting opinions in educational and community spaces difficult.
Disconnection between formal and non-formal education	Germany, Lithuania, Belgium	There is a gap between formal civic education (theoretical, knowledge-based) and non-formal education (practical, competence-based). Non-formal programmes are more effective in developing participatory competencies, but their reach is limited and they depend on NGOs and project funding.
Lack of impact evaluation on civic competencies	Germany, Belgium	Existing evaluation systems focus on measuring theoretical knowledge (grades, standardised tests) rather than practical competencies, democratic skills, or long-term impact on citizen participation, which hinders the continuous improvement of programmes.
Inequality in implementation between regions / federal states	Germany, Spain	The quality and depth of civic education vary significantly depending on the place of residence, creating inequalities in access to quality civic training and in the development of democratic competencies.
Dependence on intermediary organisations and limited reach of non-formal education	Belgium, Germany, Lithuania	Non-formal civic education, although more effective in developing participatory competencies, primarily reaches young people already linked to youth organisations or with access to associative networks. Disengaged young people or those in vulnerable situations are excluded.

Source: Own elaboration based on the Desk Research of the participating associations.

Good practices identified during Desk Research

Despite the difficulties, national reports have documented a number of successful initiatives that can serve as models for the project. These good practices share common features: flexibility, a participatory approach to their design, and clear mechanisms for monitoring young people's proposals.

Demokratie leben! in Germany offers a model of a federal non-formal civic education program. The Federal Agency for Civic Education (bpb) provides a centralized institutional model. Zusammenhalt durch Teilhabe reinforces democratic culture in rural areas. ProDemos and the debate associations in the Netherlands offer models of non-formal civic education. Debunk.org and Mano Europa in Lithuania offer media literacy courses and active citizenship workshops. The COMPASS manual and the RFCDC framework of the Council of Europe standardize human rights education. Agente 0011 and Service Learning in Italy connect civic education with the SDGs and community action. ERACIS+ and the Ítaca Almería Association in Spain offer models of community intervention.

Table 16. Transferable good practices identified during desk research for Civic Education

Good practice	Country	Objective	Transfer potential
Demokratie leben!	Germany	Federal programme (BMBFSFJ) that supports local partnerships for democracy, pilot projects and competency centres. Promotes democratic values, diversity and participation, and counters extremism.	High. Model of a non-formal civic education federal programme, transferable to other countries with similar funding structures.
Federal Agency for Civic Education (bpb)	Germany	Organises seminars, workshops, study trips, publications, exhibitions and online tools, while also funding other educational providers.	High. Centralised institutional model for civic education, transferable to other countries.

Good practice	Country	Objective	Transfer potential
Zusammenhalt durch Teilhabe	Germany	Initiative that reinforces democratic culture in rural and structurally weak areas through the training of local actors and support for civic organisations.	High. Model for strengthening democratic culture in rural areas, transferable to regions with similar challenges.
ProDemos	Netherlands	Conducts school elections, workshops, lectures and similar programmes to foster democratic participation.	High. Model of non-formal civic education, transferable to other educational contexts.
Debate associations (IDEA, Debatunie, Debatbond, Oracy Institute)	Netherlands	Debate education entities that provide training in schools and youth centres, developing argumentation and critical thinking skills.	High. Debate education model, transferable to other countries with similar associations.
Debunk.org (Civic Resilience Course, InfoShield)	Lithuania	Media literacy and critical thinking courses to evaluate sources, identify biases and resist disinformation.	High. Media literacy education model, transferable to other educational contexts.
Mano Europa (active citizenship workshops)	Lithuania	Active citizenship workshops, European Parliament simulations, gamified digital democracy education, anti-corruption and sustainability initiatives.	High. Non-formal civic education model using participatory methodologies, transferable to other contexts.
COMPASS – Human Rights Education Handbook (European Council)	EU level	Manual designed to guide facilitators of non-formal education in delivering human rights education. Contains ready-to-use activities and methodological guidance.	High. Reference educational resource at European level, transferable to any formal or non-formal education context.

Good practice	Country	Objective	Transfer potential
Global Citizenship and Solidarity Education (GCSE) by CARE Belgium	Belgium	CARE Belgium implements the **Global Citizenship and Solidarity Education (GCSE)** project in Belgian schools, particularly in Brussels. The project raises students' awareness of: • climate change, • human rights, • migration, • global inequality, and • the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It includes classroom activities, workshops, and advocacy initiatives to encourage young people to become active global citizens. Since 2024, the project has reached around 150 students annually.	High. These educational materials can be implemented in other countries.
Agent 0011 (ActionAid Italy)	Italy	Promotes educational paths that encourage students and local communities to develop bottom-up proposals for the regeneration of spaces and services in line with the SDGs.	High. Civic education methodology based on projects with a focus on SDGs and community participation.
Service Learning (Italy)	Italy	Methodology integrated into multiple institutes where students map problems in their area and launch community awareness interventions.	High. Service-learning model, transferable to formal education systems.

Good practice	Country	Objective	Transfer potential
ERACIS+ (Andalusian Regional Strategy for Social Cohesion and Inclusion)	Spain	Co-financed initiative that uses neighbourhood interventions to boost civic engagement, reduce digital and gender gaps, and foster community coexistence in vulnerable areas.	High. Model of community intervention in contexts of social exclusion, transferable to other regions with vulnerable neighbourhoods.
Ítaca Almería association ("Barrio Activo, Futuro Vivo")	Spain	Neighbourhood-focused; uses gamification and community workshops as educational tools.	High potential for transfer of gamification and community workshops as a bridge for civic debate in schools (applying Service-Learning projects), youth areas and local government participation, and in vulnerable neighbourhoods, rural areas or migrant integration centres.

Source: Own elaboration based on the Desk Research of the participating associations.

Synthesis of the comparative European context

Through a comparative analysis of civic education, we observe that the European landscape reflects a structural paradox: there is robust regulatory and institutional coverage in most countries, with specific subjects or cross-curricular integration. However, its actual implementation suffers from a profound lack of practical application. Although education systems manage to convey theoretical concepts about institutions and rights, they fail to provide a genuine democratic experience. Young people's civic experience is stifled by overloaded curricula, high pupil-teacher ratios and a lack of decision-making power within student representative bodies, leading to learned apathy and the perception that formal politics is something alien and useless.

This pedagogical weakness is exacerbated by insufficient training of teachers in participatory methodologies, which limits their ability to facilitate structured debates, democratic simulations or service-learning projects. The result is a disconnect between theoretical knowledge (which young people acquire to a more or less satisfactory degree) and the practical skills needed to participate actively in democratic life.

Young people from rural backgrounds, ethnic minorities, low-income families or with disabilities face overlapping disadvantages that limit their participation and their ability to develop civic skills. This social divide is exacerbated by a reliance on intermediary organisations to access non-formal education, which systematically excludes the most vulnerable young people. Added to this, in some contexts, is the polarisation of political discourse, which reduces young people's capacity for peaceful civic debate and hinders constructive dialogue.

At the institutional level, structural tensions persist that limit the scope of civic education. Fragmentation across educational levels and the lack of a common assessment framework hinder the coherent implementation of education policies. Insufficient funding and reliance on short project cycles condemn many initiatives to a temporary existence, preventing their consolidation and scalability. European institutions, for their part, lack the powers to directly influence teaching practices in Member States, being limited to drawing up non-binding frameworks and recommendations. The result is a civic education programme which, despite its formal recognition, continues to be sidelined in favour of other subjects considered to be priorities.

Compounding this problem is a widespread disconnect between formal and non-formal education. Whilst formal education tends to focus on the transmission of theoretical knowledge, non-formal education develops participatory skills more effectively. However, its reach is limited and depends on intermediary organisations, which perpetuates the same barriers to access for the most vulnerable young people.

In light of this situation, the good practices analysed point the way towards more participatory, practical and inclusive models. In Germany, the federal programme

Demokratie leben! supports local associations promoting democracy and countering extremism, whilst the Federal Agency for Civic Education (bpb) organises seminars, workshops and publications, and the Zusammenhalt durch Teilhabe initiative strengthens democratic culture in rural areas. In the Netherlands, ProDemos organises school elections and workshops, and debating societies provide training in argumentation and critical thinking. In Lithuania, the Lithuanian Youth Council (LiJOT) runs youth mobilisation campaigns such as 'Man ne dzin' and the 'Mission Siberia' expedition, whilst Mano Europa offers workshops on active citizenship and parliamentary simulations, and Debunk.org runs courses on media literacy and critical thinking.

At European level, the COMPASS handbook and the Council of Europe's RFCDC framework provide resources and reference frameworks that can be adapted to any education system, whilst the European Youth Foundation and the European Youth Centres are key instruments for non-formal civic education. In Italy, ActionAid's 'Agente 0011' project links civic education with the SDGs and community action; the European Youth Parliament (EYP) Italy engages students in parliamentary simulations; and service-learning is integrated into numerous secondary schools. In Spain, ERACIS+ uses neighbourhood-based initiatives to boost civic engagement in vulnerable areas; the Ítaca Almería association, through its "Barrio Activo, Futuro Vivo" project, employs gamification and community workshops; Almería Acoge promotes the civic integration of migrants; and the Municipal Women's Centres empower women to exercise full democratic citizenship.

Although civic education in Europe continues to be characterised by a predominantly theoretical approach, inadequate teacher training, social and regional disparities, a disconnect between formal and non-formal education, and, in some cases, political polarisation, the best practices identified offer a viable path towards more participatory, practical and inclusive models. The key lies in moving away from the transmission of theoretical knowledge towards the development of practical skills, with clear monitoring and assessment mechanisms that measure young people's understanding of democracy and their actual ability to participate actively in it.

6.4. Pedagogical methods

As well as identifying which content should be covered, the project aims to understand how young people prefer to learn and which educational methodologies they consider most effective for developing democratic skills.

This aspect analyses the participants' previous learning experiences and methodological preferences.

Key aspects under consideration include:

- project-based learning

- collaborative learning
- simulations and role-play
- structured discussions
- service-learning
- digital tools
- non-formal education methodologies

The evidence gathered will enable the selection of teaching strategies consistent with young people's needs and expectations, promoting a participatory, experiential and learner-centred curriculum.

Main institutional characteristics

Germany employs a hybrid ecosystem that combines Lernen durch Engagement (Service-Learning) in the formal curriculum with extracurricular initiatives such as Model United Nations, local youth councils, and national panels like youpaN. The voluntary service system (FSJ/BFD) allows for intensive civic immersion for one year.

In the Netherlands, the main channels for experiential learning are Erasmus+ and ProDemos, although activities are almost exclusively extracurricular. The MDT constitutes a notable example of project-based education with youth co-design. The NJR's Changemaker Academy develops practical skills through the launch of social projects.

Lithuania combines curricular elements (cognitive-cultural activities, five hours of annual social activity) with a rich extracurricular ecosystem: the Youth Volunteer Service (JST), Erasmus+ exchanges, the European Solidarity Corps, open youth centres, and mobile youth work. The Discover Yourself/Connections project (JUNGTYS) uses experiential learning with NEET youth.

While education in Belgium is administered separately by the Flemish, French, and German-speaking Communities, many schools share a focus on active participation, collaboration, and project-based learning, particularly in the German-speaking community.

Italy has promoted Service Learning, which combines curricular learning with solidarity service, although it faces challenges in scalability and evaluation.

Spain stands out for Service-Learning (ApS), integrated into the formal curriculum through "Learning Situations" under the LOMLOE framework, and for the BE PART project (Erasmus+), eco-civic audits, and integrated ApS networks.

At the European Level, the European Solidarity Corps and the Council of Europe Youth Centre study sessions provide experiential learning opportunities for youth.

Table 17. Experiential Learning initiatives by country

Country	Examples of experiential learning	Notable aspects
European Level	*European Solidarity Corps programme*	At EU level, this is one of the main long-standing tools for experiential learning. It offers young people opportunities for long-term volunteering, solidarity projects and humanitarian aid that integrate them into various communities for extended periods (up to 12 months). Upon arrival in a new country, participants attend mandatory training, which equips them with the skills and competences needed to integrate properly into the designated community; young people then have the opportunity to put these into practice during their volunteering projects.
	Council of Europe Youth Centre study sessions	At the Council of Europe level, these sessions bring young people and youth workers together in face-to-face training programmes based entirely on experiential and participatory methodologies. They offer interactive and cognitive learning, alongside the necessary time and a safe space for reflection on experiences of participation and active citizenship, covering topics such as human rights advocacy, democratic participation and the shrinking civic space.
Germany	*Lernen durch Engagement* (Service-Learning)	Formally incorporates civic action into subjects such as social studies or ethics. Supported by the *Stiftung LdE* and *KMK* frameworks, this model ensures that community service is combined with academic reflection. Research highlights that Service-Learning increases awareness of social issues, develops communication skills and reinforces community engagement.
	Model United Nations, local youth councils and national panels	Examples of experiential learning and extracurricular participation that complement Service-Learning. This creates a complete participation itinerary where young people move from awareness (classroom) to action (Service-Learning), negotiation (*MUN*) and political decision-making (councils and *youpaN*).
Netherlands	*Erasmus+e ProDemos institution*	The main channels for experiential learning. These are almost exclusively extracurricular and granular activities. The most significant challenge they face is sustainability, as in most cases

		they are based on one-off projects. Furthermore, they offer limited opportunities for independent external evaluation.
Lithuania	*Youth Volunteer Service (JST)*	Coordinated by the Youth Affairs Agency, it places 14–29-year-olds in 6-month volunteering programmes. *Erasmus+* youth exchanges and European Solidarity Corps placements expose Lithuanian youth to international civic experiences, while incoming participants enrich local contexts.
	Open youth centres and mobile youth work	Apply the principles of open youth work to engage 14–29-year-olds in civic activities that they help design themselves.
	Discover Yourself / Connections (JUNGTYS)	Project that uses experiential learning – job trials, internships, volunteering periods – as a core methodology for NEETs.
Belgium	*Promoting students' competencies and effective pedagogies for the 21st century in the German-speaking Community of Belgium*	In 2023, the German-speaking Community of Belgium laid out an ambitious vision for its education system, designed to guide policy development until 2040 ("Bildungsvision 2040 – Meine Bildung. Meine Zukunft!"). This policy perspective focuses on promoting learners' future-oriented competencies and to prepare them for a world that increasingly prizes creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, communication and collaboration.
Italy	*Service Learning*	Experiential learning in Italy has gained legitimacy and momentum through the Service-Learning model, a pedagogy that combines curricular learning goals with solidarity service towards the local community. Includes school projects where students collaborate with centres for people with disabilities applying Universal Design for Learning methodologies.
Spain	*Service Learning*	The most prominent experiential learning model in Spain. It combines academic objectives with meaningful community service to address real-world challenges. Under the *LOMLOE* framework, it is integrated into the formal curriculum through "Learning Situations", although there is also an extracurricular pathway (local youth forums, municipal spaces).

Source: Own elaboration based on the Desk Research of the participating associations.

Table 18. Project-based learning initiatives by country

Country	Examples of project-based learning	Notable aspects
Germany	*Juniorwahl*	A school project in Germany to practice democracy and elections. It allows students to simulate elections, acquiring an experiential understanding of democratic procedures.
	youpaN (National Youth Panel for ESD)	Supported by the German National Commission for UNESCO and the *BMBF*. Incorporates youth participation into national governance processes, promoting student-led ESD projects.
Netherlands	*MDT (Maatschappelijke Diensttijd)*	Outstanding national example of project-based education, where projects co-designed by young people are a key feature.
	Changemaker Academy (NJR)	Leadership programme where young people develop practical skills by launching their own projects to address social and environmental challenges.
Lithuania	*LiJOT* – "Participation of young people in decision-making processes"	Combines training workshops for member organisations on effective communication and Lithuanian/EU law, with subsequent committee work on youth policy proposals.
	LiJOT – "Dalinkis Vasara"	Festival that trains and brings together hundreds of young people each summer for debate dynamics.
Spain	Eco-civic audits ("Learning Situations")	Mandated by the *LOMLOE*, students form research teams to act as local environmental or civic auditors, culminating in public results presented to municipal representatives.

	Integrated Service-Learning networks	Widely implemented by institutions such as the University of Almería. Teaching students and youth organisations develop socio-educational projects to combat social exclusion or digital divides in vulnerable neighbourhoods.

Source: Own elaboration based on the Desk Research of the participating associations.

Main challenges identified in national contexts

Participatory pedagogical methods face multiple obstacles. Spatial and residential segregation determines unequal access to resources and opportunities. Limited teacher training restricts the adoption of participatory methodologies. The eminently theoretical approach hinders the development of practical skills. The social divide excludes young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Funding cuts and curricular rigidity reduce civic education to rote learning. Political pressure leads teachers to avoid controversy. Low media literacy makes source verification difficult. The difficulty of assessing civic competencies prevents the measurement of skills such as empathy or critical thinking. Dependence on intermediaries limits the reach of non-formal education.

Table 19. Comparative challenges for Pedagogical Methods

Identified challenge	Countries where it appears	Possible impact on pedagogical methods
Spatial and residential segregation	Germany, Netherlands, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain	Depending on the state (in federal configurations) and the area of residence (urban or rural), resources, teacher training, connections, opportunities, etc., vary significantly.
Insufficient teacher training	Germany, Netherlands, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain	Insufficient teacher training in civic education limits the adoption of experiential learning methodologies that foster young people's civic participation.

Predominantly theoretical approach	Germany, Netherlands, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain	Excessive focus on theoretical content hinders the full development of practical skills, such as open debate, engagement, critical thinking to evaluate sources, judgement, and real participation in democratic life, etc. Despite knowing the facts, young people doubt that their voice matters.
Social divide	Germany, Lithuania, Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Spain	Young people in rural areas, ethnic minorities, low-income families, and those with disabilities face overlapping disadvantages.
Funding cuts	Germany, Lithuania, Italy	Reduction of activities and outreach programmes in vulnerable neighbourhoods and rural areas, reduction of civic education to a purely theoretical and flat format that benefits educational elites, depletion of the fabric of NGOs and associations, and greater vulnerability to disinformation and polarisation.
Curriculum rigidity and high class sizes	Germany, Lithuania, Italy, Spain	Civic education is reduced to purely theoretical and rote learning, with no room for delving into practice and acquiring skills such as debate, participation, and plural dialogue, which are essential for the development of true democratic citizenship.
Political pressure	Germany	Some anti-democratic political parties may exert pressure on educational institutions, which is why many teachers succumb to a fact-based teaching approach focused on knowledge to avoid controversy.
Insufficient media literacy and algorithmic discernment	Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Lithuania, Italy, Spain	Young people often struggle to verify digital sources, recognise algorithmic biases, or counter polarised narratives, leaving them highly exposed to viral fake news.
Insufficient competencies of European institutions	All EU countries	The fact that the main function of European institutions is the drafting of policy frameworks, strategies, and guidelines that serve as recommendations and not binding obligations constitutes a limit to the integration of participatory pedagogies in civic education.

to influence teaching practices		
Difficulty in evaluating civic competencies	Germany, Lithuania, Italy, Spain, Belgium	Existing evaluation systems focus on measuring theoretical knowledge rather than practical competencies. There are no standardised evaluation tools to measure democratic skills, empathy, or critical thinking acquired through experiential means.
Dependence on intermediaries and limited reach of non-formal education	Belgium	The number of places in experiential learning programmes is limited. Activities tend to reach young people already linked to youth organisations, excluding the most vulnerable. Evaluation remains underdeveloped.

Source: Own elaboration based on the Desk Research of the participating associations.

Good practices identified during Desk Research

Despite the difficulties, national reports have documented a number of successful initiatives that can serve as models for the project. These good practices share common features: flexibility, a participatory approach to their design, and clear mechanisms for monitoring young people's proposals.

Lernen durch Engagement in Germany integrates civic action into the formal curriculum. Jugend debattiert offers a model of national debate competition. Microfinancing and mentoring projects (Jugend bewegt, Youth Parliaments) allow young people to launch social projects. The Changemaker Academy in the Netherlands develops youth leadership. The MDT offers structured volunteering with youth co-design. The Youth Volunteer Service (JST) in Lithuania offers volunteering with mentoring. Discover Yourself/Connections uses

experiential learning with NEETs. The European Solidarity Corps and COMPASS offer models of volunteering and human rights education. Service Learning in Italy, BE PART, and eco-civic audits in Spain integrate project-based learning with community service.

Table 20. Transferable good practices identified during desk research for Pedagogical Methods

Good practice	Country	Objective	Transfer potential
Project-based initiatives such as *Juniorwahl*, *Demokratie leben!* and *Project Citizen*	Germany	Provide young people with opportunities to explore democratic processes, design and develop projects, and engage in social issues through practical activities.	High potential for replicability as they are structured methodological frameworks. They facilitate practical connection with democratic processes in any school environment.
Jugend debattiert	Germany	National debate competition under presidential patronage (200,000+ students, 700 schools). Develops linguistic, political, and democratic competencies through structured argumentation and civil discourse.	High. Most consolidated debate programme in Europe. Its curricular integration in several federal states and its competitive format are replicable in other countries.
Mano Europa's *ParticipACTION* methodology	Lithuania	Design of mixed methods combining focus groups, surveys, interviews, interactive seminars, and a national roundtable.	High potential for transfer as it is an inclusive consultation model that explicitly targets TCNs (Third-Country Nationals), young women, and girls.
Discover Yourself/Connections (JUNGTYS) project	Lithuania	Uses experiential learning (job trials, internships, volunteering, etc.) as a core methodology with NEETs.	High potential for transfer as these are methodological frameworks structured within public employment services, youth guarantees, adult education and second-chance

			centres, social entities, and neighbourhood community roundtables.
Service-Learning frameworks	Italy	Students identify local environmental or social problems and carry out community awareness initiatives as part of their formal academic evaluation, in order to combine the curriculum with civic duties.	High potential for transfer by integrating civic competencies v the formal academic curriculum itself. Implementation is natu any educational system, reducing bureaucratic friction increasing participation by granting academic recognition to work.
Decide Madrid JOVEN	Spain	Digital platform for 14-18-year-olds to make neighbourhood proposals, debate municipal options, and vote on participatory budgets.	High potential for transfer in municipal councils and local policies, secondary education centres and universities, associative networks, and the third sector.

Source: *Own elaboration based on the Desk Research of the participating associations.*

Synthesis of the comparative European context

The comparative European map reveals a clear theoretical consensus: civic education is ineffective if it is limited to the rote learning of laws and institutions. There is an explicit demand (both from pupils and from European regulatory frameworks) for active, participatory and student-centred methodologies (Service-Learning, project-based learning, simulations and digital tools).

However, the translation of these principles into practice suffers from marked institutional asymmetry depending on the legal framework of each Member State:

- **Models of Formal Curriculum Integration (Germany, Spain and Italy)**: these countries have taken significant steps towards embedding experiential learning within the official curriculum. Spain stands out for its 'Learning Situations' and eco-civic audits underpinned by the LOMLOE; Germany formally integrates Lernen durch Engagement (LdE) into civic and ethics subjects; and Italy validates Service Learning by linking it to Universal Design for Learning.
- **Extracurricular and Project-Based Models (the Netherlands, Lithuania and Belgium)**: in the Netherlands, initiatives (such as those coordinated by ProDemos or the Changemaker Academy) are granular in nature, extracurricular and fragmented into projects with little independent evaluation. Lithuania compensates for this weakness through a robust non-formal network of Open Youth Centres and the JST (Youth Volunteer Service) programme. The French-Speaking community in Belgium, also relies heavily on youth centres, youth organisations and the infrastructure of European programmes (e.g. the European Solidarity Corps). **The limitations of the EU frameworks**: the actions of European institutions are constrained by the principle of subsidiarity; since they issue only non-binding guidelines, the adoption of active methodologies is contingent upon the political will and budgetary capacity of each national government.

Based on a cross-cutting analysis of the challenges, some barriers have been identified that hinder the widespread adoption of participatory methodologies:

- **Predominance of a theoretical and rote-learning approach**: there is a gulf between 'knowing sociology or the constitution' and 'exercising citizenship'. Traditional teaching of facts breeds scepticism amongst students, who, even whilst familiar with the theoretical content, deeply doubt that their voice has any real impact.
- **Inadequate teacher training in active teaching methods**: teaching staff do not receive specific training in facilitating debates, managing community projects or applying participatory methodologies, thereby perpetuating the use of the lecture-style lesson due to a lack of confidence in alternative methods.
- **Curricular rigidity, high pupil-teacher ratios and heavy teaching workload (DE, LT, IT, ES):** extensive curricula geared towards standardised exams and

overcrowded classrooms leave no teaching time or scope to organise ApS projects, simulations or debates on complex issues.

- **Inadequate assessment culture (DE, LT, BE, IT, ES)**: European education systems lack standardised tools and indicators for assessing non-cognitive cross-curricular skills (empathy, critical thinking, civic resilience, negotiation skills and ethical judgement), prioritising marks in theoretical examinations.
- **Teachers' self-censorship in the face of political pressure and polarisation (notable in Germany)**: pressure exerted by radical parties or groups on the school system drives teachers to take refuge in a false neutrality, limiting themselves to teaching neutral conceptual content and avoiding current debates or controversial topics for fear of sanctions or complaints.
- **Socio-residential divide and unequal access**: the availability of participatory projects depends excessively on place of residence (urban/rural) and the socio-economic capacity of the school. Inadequate funding stifles initiatives in vulnerable areas, turning experiential learning into a privilege reserved for the educational elite and young people who are already politically engaged.
- **Algorithmic opacity and poor media literacy**: students face serious difficulties in detecting algorithmic bias, AI-driven manipulation and fake news on platforms such as TikTok, X and Instagram. Classrooms do not devote sufficient time to fostering critical thinking in the face of the dynamics of digital polarisation.
- **The 'island' effect of non-formal education and a lack of places (BE)**: non-formal education offers high-quality participatory experiences, but its reach is limited. Young people who are not organised or who are in vulnerable situations are left out, and projects tend to peter out due to a lack of ongoing funding.

In light of this assessment, the initiatives documented in the research set out a clear roadmap for moving from an education in theoretical citizenship to a pedagogical model of active empowerment.

The structured frameworks for Action Research (ApS) and civic audits found in Germany (LdE), Italy (Service Learning) and Spain (LOMLOE) link the theoretical content of subjects to the resolution of real-world problems in the community, providing formal academic recognition and assessment for students' social engagement. They are applicable in any formal education system (schools and universities) and eliminate bureaucratic friction by replacing traditional theoretical examinations with action research projects, demonstrating to students the direct impact of their learning.

The Juniorwahl and Demokratie leben! projects (Germany), and Decide Madrid JOVEN (Spain), enable a shift from hypothetical simulations to real-world practice, giving young people the ability to vote on local proposals, simulate full-scale electoral processes or manage genuine participatory budgets through accessible digital platforms. These could be replicated in local councils, youth departments and secondary schools, helping to

develop digital media literacy and giving pupils an immediate sense of participation and real political effectiveness.

The Discover Yourself/JUNGTYS and ParticipACTION (Lithuania) projects use experiential learning (work placements, peer mentoring, tailored volunteering and inclusive consultations) as a gateway to civic and social engagement for young people at risk of exclusion or who are outside traditional channels of participation. They propose a model for the civic inclusion of vulnerable groups and NEETs that can be replicated in Public Employment Services, Second Chance Schools, vocational training centres and community NGOs, transforming participation into a tool for social cohesion and equity.

In conclusion, the European context demonstrates that democratic literacy is not consolidated through the theoretical accumulation of institutional data, but rather through ongoing civic practice. To bridge the gap between young people's aspirations and the reality of the classroom, European education systems must evolve towards a model where service-learning, participatory budgeting and community audits are the norm rather than the exception. This requires decriminalising debate in the classroom, providing formal training for teachers in facilitating discussions, and equipping institutions with tools capable of assessing civic competences through real-world action within the social environment.

6.5. Structured dialogue

The dimension examines the relationship between young people and the public institutions responsible for promoting civic participation. Its aim is to analyse the extent to which effective channels of communication exist between young people and decision-makers, as well as to ascertain the degree of trust that young people place in these mechanisms.

The analysis covers aspects such as:

- awareness of existing participation mechanisms
- perception of accessibility
- institutional transparency
- perceived capacity to influence
- the quality of dialogue between young people and institutions
- feedback on participatory processes

This dimension is particularly relevant for identifying possible discrepancies between formally existing opportunities for participation and young people's perception of their actual usefulness.

Main institutional characteristics

Germany has the EU Youth Dialogue and the JugendPolitikTage (JPT), which bring together hundreds of young people aged 16 to 27 every two years in Berlin to discuss with ministries.

In the Netherlands, the EU Youth Dialogue is the main platform, although it is not permanent, and the pilot Jong Utrecht aan Zet aims to create a permanent structured dialogue platform.

Lithuania coordinates the EU Youth Dialogue through LiJOT and has the Council of Youth Affairs, a parity body of 16 members that offers a permanent consultative forum.

An example of structured dialogue from Belgium is the Forum des Jeunes, which is the official youth council representing young people aged 16–30 in the French Community of Belgium and serves as a bridge between young people and policymakers by ensuring that youth perspectives are reflected in public decision-making.

Italy coordinates the EU Youth Dialogue through the CNG and AIG, and has the ParteciPa.gov.it platform for deliberative processes.

Spain participates in the EU Youth Dialogue through the CJE and regional youth institutes, and has municipal participation councils such as the Municipal Council for Children and Adolescence of Almería.

At the European Level, the EU Youth Dialogue, although not highly known among european youth, constitutes the main platform for structured dialogue.

Table 21. Institutional characteristics for Structured Dialogue by country

Country	Structured Dialogue Platforms	Notable aspects
EU Level	*EU Youth Dialogue*	At the EU level, the main platform connects young people and policy-makers. The mechanism is considered suitable for meaningful participation, but is constantly criticised for its limited inclusiveness: according to Deželan, only 13% of young Europeans know of its existence, and participation is concentrated among young people already actively involved in organised civil society. It follows 18-month cycles. Consultations take place at local, regional, and national levels.
	Council of Europe co-management system	The most substantial example of genuine co-management: young people formally co-decide the priorities, programmes, and budget of the Council of Europe's youth sector with the same institutional weight as government representatives, and these decisions are adopted by the Committee of Ministers. It remains the only mechanism at the European level in which young people participate in defining the agenda; however, the scope of these decisions is limited to the organisation's youth sector.
Germany	*JugendPolitikTage (JPT)*	Federal-level, bringing together hundreds of 16-27-year-olds from all states in Berlin every two years. They debate with the ministries, and their ideas shape the *Youth Strategy* and the *National Action Plan for Child and Youth Participation*. The 2025 JPT evaluation lists significant efforts: free travel, accommodation and meals, accessible venues, sign language support, preparatory workshops, and links with *Netzwerk Perspektivenvielfalt* and youth social work. This reaches discriminated young people, those with disabilities, or those with immigrant backgrounds.
Netherlands	*Jong Utrecht aan Zet*	At a provincial level, it aims to create a permanent structured dialogue platform. It is currently in the early stages of development.
Lithuania	*Council of Youth Affairs*	16-member joint body offering a permanent consultative forum on youth policy. Its structure is composed equally of 8 representatives from public administration and 8 representatives from

		the youth civil society (usually selected through the National Youth Council and youth NGOs). This 50% composition transcends traditional consultation schemes, as it guarantees a permanent and symmetrical dialogue between political decision-makers and the young people themselves.
Belgium	*Forum des Jeunes*	The Forum des Jeunes is the official youth council representing young people aged 16–30 in the French Community of Belgium (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles). It serves as a bridge between young people and policymakers by ensuring that youth perspectives are reflected in public decision-making. Its organization is centred around concrete projects that young people from different backgrounds have decided to carry out collectively. These projects are defined during participatory workshops highlighting the main concerns of young French-speaking Belgians. These discussions allow participants to reflect on current priorities, as well as local, national, and international issues impacting youth.
Italy	*ParteciPa.gov.it*	At a governmental level, a public platform that allows for deliberative processes and the collection of opinions on ministerial agendas through open dialogue. While the logistical framework is solid, inclusiveness represents the Gordian knot. Consultations tend to intercept an elitist audience: young people who already possess strong links to student, university, or party associations. Marginalised subjects (precarious young workers, vocational training students, residents in inland areas, and NEETs) remain on the margins.
Spain	*Municipal Council for Childhood and Adolescence of Almería and other broader municipal participation councils*	Permanent structured dialogue platforms that allow young people to contribute to debates on local policies. They are supported by Almería City Council through forums such as *Tu voz cuenta* and district participation initiatives.
	Programmes linked to ERACIS+ and workshops in disadvantaged Almería neighbourhoods	Initiatives that aim to address the social gap in participation and representation in structured dialogue platforms. They target vulnerable young populations specifically through community participation activities.

Source: Own elaboration based on the Desk Research of the participating associations.

Main challenges identified in national contexts

Structured dialogue in Europe faces a paradox: there are consolidated institutional channels, but their real impact generates scepticism among young people. The absence of real decision-making power and the lack of feedback turn participation into a consultative exercise that generates "consultation fatigue." Social selectivity and civic elitism mean that institutional platforms reach mainly young people with higher education who are already organized, excluding vocational training students, precarious workers, and rural residents.

The lack of legal basis and institutionalization means that dialogue processes depend on the political will of the government in office. Temporality and funding dependency operate through temporary grants rather than as permanent co-decision structures. Spatial and residential segregation concentrates participatory dynamics in capitals and university cities. Bureaucratic confusion and inaccessible information act as a barrier to entry. Widespread lack of awareness of the platforms means that most young people are unaware of their existence.

Table 22. Comparative challenges for Structured Dialogue

Identified challenge	Countries where it appears	Possible impact on structured dialogue
Spatial and residential segregation	Germany, Netherlands, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain	Urban planning often isolates social groups into bubbles, further reducing spontaneous contact.
Lack of real decision-making power, co-design, and feedback	Germany, Netherlands, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain	Participation is essentially consultative and occasional, which generates a feeling of disillusionment. Feedback systems are often scarce, slow, and unsatisfactory, generating mistrust among young people regarding their actual impact.

Social selectivity	Germany, Netherlands, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain	The majority of young people who benefit from structured dialogue processes are active and have higher education, leaving aside vocational training students, rural residents, and those in vulnerable situations.
Temporality and funding shortages	Germany, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain	Structured dialogue processes are often temporary and highly dependent on funding, and are not fixed co-decision roles.
Lack of legal basis and limited institutionalisation	Netherlands, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain	The absence of a legal basis hinders the application of follow-ups for structured dialogue processes and the provision of funds.
Confusion regarding responsibilities and inaccessible information	Germany	The absence of accessible information and confusion regarding services breaks down institutional security and trust, transforming the opportunity for dialogue into frustration.

Source: Own elaboration based on the Desk Research of the participating associations.

Good practices identified during Desk Research

The EU Youth Dialogue and the JugendPolitikTage (JPT) in Germany offer a model for scaling recommendations from the local to the European level. The Mediawijsheid competency model in the Netherlands offers a methodological matrix for assessing and developing digital competencies. The presence of a Council for Youth Affairs in every municipality of Lithuania constitutes a model of decentralized parity governance. Municipal participatory budgets in Italy grant youth assemblies real financial resources to design and execute projects.

Table 23. Transferable good practices identified during desk research for Structured Dialogue

Good practice	Country	Objective	Transfer potential
EU Youth Dialogue and *JugendPolitikTage* (JPT)	Germany	Bring together young people, youth organisations, and public institutions through consultations, workshops, and debates at local, national, and European levels. Both initiatives involve young people in identifying priorities, debating political issues, and drafting recommendations that serve as a basis for youth-related strategies and action plans.	Their ability to scale recommendations from local to European level and their focus on the co-creation of concrete action plans make them highly replicable for institutionalising youth participation in a structured way, going beyond the consultative vision.
Mediawijsheid competency model	Netherlands	Provides clear and structured guidelines and offers educators a solid tool to measure, understand, and safely develop digital skills among students.	Its replicability lies in the ability to adapt this competency model to different educational systems, offering schools a solid and proven tool to measure, understand, and develop digital skills safely.
Presence of a *Council for Youth Affairs* and a *Youth Affairs Coordinator* in all municipalities	Lithuania	Offer a permanent consultative forum on youth policy accessible in all municipalities in the country.	High potential for transfer in structuring civic public policies at local and regional level: local entities and municipal networks, rural networks and districts, and large educational centres and university districts.
Municipal participatory budgets	Italy	Youth assemblies are assigned real financial resources to design, vote on, and execute local infrastructure or cultural projects, constituting a reliable model of binding youth co-decision-making.	By decentralising the management of public funds and granting direct control to youth assemblies over projects in their environment, this model effectively combats 'tokenism' and constitutes a co-decision tool.

Source: Own elaboration based on the Desk Research of the participating associations.

Synthesis of the comparative European context

Analysis of the Structured Dialogue across the six countries reveals a clear paradox: there are well-established institutional and regulatory channels at European and national level, but their actual impact is met with scepticism amongst young people. The EU Youth Dialogue acts as the common backbone across all Member States (coordinated by organisations such as LiJOT in Lithuania, DBJR in Germany, CNG/AIG in Italy and CJE in Spain). However, its architecture, based on 18-month cycles, suffers from a lack of continuity and is frequently perceived as a sporadic exercise in consultation rather than a continuous process of co-management.

In most countries, participation is one-way. The administration consults, but rarely holds itself to account or provides transparent feedback demonstrating how young people's views have influenced legislation. One notable exception is the Council of Europe's Co-management System, where young people decide on the budget and priorities for the youth sector with equal institutional weight to governments.

Based on the comparative analysis, seven common barriers have been identified that generate apathy and institutional mistrust amongst young people in Europe:

- **Lack of real decision-making power and "consultative fatigue"**: participation almost always remains purely consultative. The lack of transparent feedback mechanisms creates the impression that young people's views do not bring about political change, leading to frustration.
- **Social selectivity and civic elitism**: institutional platforms tend to attract young people with higher education who are already organised within associations or political parties. Young people in vocational training, those in precarious employment, residents of rural areas and vulnerable groups (NEETs) are marginalized.
- **Lack of a legal basis and institutionalisation (NL, LT, BE, IT, ES)**: the absence of a national legal framework obliging governments to monitor agreements results in a form of 'soft law', where dialogue processes depend on the political will of the government in power.
- **Temporariness and Dependence on Funding (DE, LT, BE, IT, ES)**: dialogue projects suffer from a very high degree of financial instability, as they operate on the basis of temporary grants rather than as permanent co-decision-making structures with an allocated budget.
- **Spatial and residential segregation**: territorial barriers and urban/rural isolation hinder the creation of accessible spaces for dialogue, concentrating major participatory initiatives in capital cities and university towns.

- **Bureaucratic confusion and inaccessible information (DE)**: the complexity of the structure of youth services and overly technical or administrative language act as a barrier to entry for young people who are new to the system.

- **Widespread lack of awareness of these platforms (BE)**: the lack of communication tailored to the digital ecosystem of young people means that the vast majority of young people are unaware that these channels exist.

To move beyond symbolic participation, the initiatives analysed suggest four main avenues for pedagogical and policy transfer.

Germany's JugendPolitikTage (JPT) offers inclusive national meetings where local proposals can be taken all the way up to ministerial level. It ensures diversity by providing comprehensive travel grants, universal accessibility (sign language) and social support. This model could be adapted for use by regional youth ministries and departments to link youth consultations directly to the review of National Youth Strategies.

The Mediawijsheid competency model from the Netherlands provides a standard methodological framework that enables educators and institutions to safely assess, measure and develop pupils' digital and democratic engagement skills in virtual environments. Its replicability would be of interest in schools, universities and public digital consultation platforms to ensure an open debate free from disinformation.

The existence of a Council for Youth Affairs in every municipality in Lithuania represents a model of decentralised, participatory governance, protected by law and reinforced by the role of the Youth Affairs Coordinator. It ensures a public agenda that is co-designed on an equal footing, without being dependent on the electoral cycle. This model could be replicated in local authorities, rural districts and regional administrations.

Participatory municipal budgeting in Italy enables council budget allocations to be channeled directly to youth assemblies, allowing them to design, vote on and implement infrastructure, cultural or environmental projects in their local area. Its main appeal lies in the potential to eliminate tokenism by granting financial responsibility and providing an immediate sense of political effectiveness. It could be replicated in local councils, urban districts and educational institutions.

In conclusion, Structured Dialogue in Europe is at a turning point. Moving from 'symbolic consultation' to 'democratic co-management' requires replacing isolated surveys with legally established joint bodies, providing youth assemblies with executable budgets, and implementing active inclusion strategies (grants, logistical support and community assistance) that bring institutions closer to vulnerable young people, thereby putting an end to civic elitism once and for all.

6.6. Media literacy

This dimension analyses young people's ability to access, critically evaluate and use the information available in digital environments, paying particular attention to the impact of disinformation on democratic processes.

Key variables include:

- the ability to verify information
- the ability to identify disinformation and fake news
- critical use of social media
- digital participation
- digital security
- responsible consumption of information

The analysis will help to determine the digital skills needed to strengthen democratic participation in digital environments.

Main institutional characteristics

Institutional structures and legal frameworks influence media literacy in different ways across European countries. The existence of national youth strategies, legal frameworks and institutional bodies dedicated to youth issues creates an environment conducive to the implementation of media literacy programmes for young people. However, the effectiveness of these structures varies significantly depending on resources, political will and implementation capacity.

Germany integrates media literacy through the KMK declaration "Media Education in Schools" and the strategy "Education in the Digital World." The initiative Growing up well with media from the BMBFSFJ advises educators and parents. ClaimGuard develops an AI-based system to detect disinformation and deepfakes.

The Netherlands has Netwerk Mediawijsheid, a national association of more than 1,000 organizations, the reactive program Is Dat Echt Zo, and the proactive platform Nationale AI-cursus.

Lithuania integrates media literacy competencies into the formal curriculum through the Information Literacy Framework Programme and Information Technology Framework Programme. The National Safer Internet Centre Lithuania provides awareness-raising services. Debunk.org offers the InfoShield Media Literacy Course and the Civic Resilience Course. The British Council's English through Media Literacy program reaches students from ethnic minorities.

Belgium does not have a single national media literacy policy because education is governed by the Flemish, French (Wallonia–Brussels), and German-speaking Communities. Each community has developed its own strategy, but all aim to strengthen students' critical thinking, digital citizenship, and responsible use of media.

Italy integrates media literacy into the Ministry of Education's Digital Citizenship Framework, with support from Generazioni Connesse, the Italian Centre for a Safer Internet. The European HEY program and the Youth Panel project of Generazioni Connesse train young people as ethical content producers.

Spain incorporates media literacy through the Digital Competence Framework of the LOMLOE, the Andalusian Program for Educational Innovation, the Cibervoluntarios Foundation, the Andalusian Youth Institute, and INCIBE campaigns (Internet Segura for Kids).

At the European level, media literacy is guided by the EU's Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 and the Council of Europe's European Year of Digital Citizenship Education 2025.

Table 24. Institutional characteristics for Media Literacy by country

Country	Examples of media literacy programs	Notable aspects
EU National Level	*Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027*	An EU policy that seeks to promote high-quality, inclusive digital learning. It integrates media literacy into its broader framework of digital competences, with specific actions supporting teacher training and school curricula across all Member States.
	European Year of Digital Citizenship Education 2025	Throughout that year, the Council of Europe set out to incorporate digital citizenship education (including media and information literacy) into formal, non-formal, and informal education simultaneously, coordinating with ministries of education, civil society, and youth organizations.

Germany	*KMK declaration on 'Media Education in Schools' and the 'Education in the Digital World' strategy*	They call for media literacy to be incorporated into the curriculum with the aim of fostering active and self-determined participation in the digital society. The curricula of most states cover media analysis, algorithms and the detection of fake news, with the support of the JFF Institute for Media Education.
	Growing up well with media	An initiative by the BMBFSFJ that provides guidance to education professionals, volunteers and parents through editorial content and digital training programmes, whilst promoting local cooperation between institutions.
	ClaimGuard	A reactive initiative that develops an AI-based dialogue system which scans texts and images for disinformation, including deepfakes, and supports media literacy efforts through automated verification.
Netherlands	*Netwerk Mediawijsheid*	A national association comprising more than 1,000 organisations that promotes digital literacy through the development of tools, research and annual campaigns such as MediaMasters, to help citizens navigate the digital society safely and actively.
	Is Dat Echt Zo	A reactive media literacy program that offers fact-checking and the debunking of relevant information.
	Nationales AI-cursus	A proactive media literacy platform, supported by the government and designed to make AI accessible through basic and advanced online learning paths that cover both the technical mechanics and the ethical implications of AI in everyday life.
Lithuania	*Information Literacy Framework Programme for Primary Education* and *Information Technology Framework Programme for Basic Education*	Prepared by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, they include MIL competencies (identifying disinformation, media bias, and AI-generated content) in all courses.

	National Safer Internet Centre Lithuania	It has been operating since approximately 2012 under the EU Safer Internet program. It is implemented by the National Education Agency and the Window to the Future association. It provides awareness-raising services, a hotline, and a helpline, and promotes youth-led media literacy initiatives.
	Debunk.org	Founded in 2018 in Vilnius, it runs the InfoShield Media Literacy Course, the Civic Resilience Course (aimed at university students since 2021), and adaptations of international tools (such as the "Bad News" game, co-developed with the Dutch company DROG) for Baltic audiences.
	English through Media Literacy	A British Council Lithuania program that reaches ethnic minority students through blended language and MIL learning.
Belgium	Belgium-Flemish-Community	In March 2020, the Flemish Government selected five priorities for the new Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (2020-2024). Media literacy is one of these priorities. For each of the five chosen priorities, the relevant ministers, experts, specific policy officers, youth (work) organizations and local authorities took further concrete action. These expert teams gave concrete substance to the priority. The final Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2020-2024 with a strategy and concrete actions on media literacy was approved in October 2020. The concrete objectives regarding media literacy are: • To stimulate and develop knowledge, skills and attitudes through information, training, guidance and support • Strengthen children and young people in their competencies as recipients, users and creators of printed, audiovisual and digital media • To challenge online mechanisms that affect the physical, mental and/or sexual integrity of children and young people • To be committed to building knowledge in children and young people about their rights so as to empower them in protecting their integrity

	Plan Éducation aux Médias de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles	The plan aims to develop critical thinking and interactivity with media among all citizens. It aims to integrate media education into both compulsory and higher education, adapt existing decrees, enhance communication, and develop new initiatives related to digital and social media. The policy involves the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, the Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation aux Médias (CSEM), and various educational institutions, media organisations, and community groups.
	IMK Leitfaden (Guideline for Information and Media Competence) - Belgium-German-Community	The German-speaking Community developed an IMK Leitfaden (Guideline for Information and Media Competence) to support schools in integrating media literacy into teaching. The framework provides guidance for teachers and schools to develop students' competencies from primary through secondary education.
Italy	Ministry of Education Digital Citizenship Framework	An essential pillar of formal education at all levels. Furthermore, this initiative is supported by "Generazioni Connesse", the Italian Safer Internet Centre. This consortium (which includes the National Cybersecurity Agency, the Postal Police, Save the Children, universities, and cooperatives such as EDI Onlus) coordinates large-scale, free non-formal education programs and provides a comprehensive national portal featuring modular educational kits. These resources explain how technologies alter interpersonal relationships, the individual self, and the attention economy.
	European HEY Programme	Supported by EU networks, it helps young Italians understand freedom of speech laws in order to combat fake news and hate speech. In this way, leaders are trained who are capable of teaching their peers how to debunk disinformation.
	Generazioni Connesse Youth Panel Project	It aims to turn young people under the age of 30 into ethical content creators. It provides interactive virtual tools and workshops to link the ethical drafting of posts or videos with genuine civic engagement and the protection of minorities. The goal is to

		cultivate constructive language and foster intercultural dialogue and inclusion through safe virtual platforms.
Spain	Digital Competence Framework	Mandated by the LOMLOE to increasingly integrate media literacy into the curriculum, schools are expected to foster students' critical understanding of digital communication, online information, and responsible media use across all subjects, rather than treating it as a standalone discipline.
	Andalusian Educational Innovation Program	An initiative by the Regional Government of Andalusia to boost teaching quality, methodological updating, and the holistic development of students through practical school-based projects. It promotes projects focused on digital citizenship, audiovisual literacy, and responsible internet use in primary and secondary schools.
	Cibervoluntarios Foundation and Andalusian Youth Institute	They organize workshops for young people on disinformation, cybersecurity, social media awareness, and digital participation. These activities generally target schools, youth centres, and vulnerable communities, including young people in rural or socially disadvantaged areas.
	National Cybersecurity Strategy and INCIBE initiatives	They promote awareness campaigns such as "Internet Segura for Kids," which offer guidance on detecting fake news, verifying sources, and safe online behaviour.

Source: Own elaboration based on the Desk Research of the participating associations.

Main challenges identified in national contexts

Media literacy in Europe faces five underlying problems. The implementation gap vis-à-vis regulations means that actual application in classrooms remains subject to budgetary capacity and political will. The profound curricular technological lag means that the content taught quickly becomes outdated in the face of advances in AI and disinformation techniques. The asymmetry in teacher training means that many educators lack the tools to teach critical thinking. The excessively reactive approach prioritizes correcting already-circulated

fake news over the continuous development of analytical reasoning. Inequality of access for socioeconomic and territorial reasons places young people from rural areas or vulnerable environments at a disadvantage in developing full digital citizenship.

Table 25. Comparative challenges for Media Literacy

Identified challenge	Countries where it appears	Possible impact on media literacy
Digital divide	Germany, Netherlands, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Spain	Media literacy skills are closely linked to unequal access between the home and school, as well as socio-economic factors. Rural, low-income, and vulnerable communities are lagging behind in terms of devices and connectivity.
Lack of teacher training	Germany, Netherlands, Lithuania, Italy, Spain	The absence of a legal framework requiring media literacy in teacher training leads to educators being poorly prepared in this area.
Rapid technological change outpacing curricula	Germany, Lithuania	Technology, deepfakes, and AI are advancing faster than educational strategies, causing materials to become obsolete quickly.
Curricular rigidity and high ratios	Germany, Lithuania, Italy, Spain	The curriculum emphasizes factual knowledge over critical analysis, and civic education allocates limited time to verification exercises amidst very large classes, assessment pressures, and heavy workloads.
Platform opacity	Germany, Lithuania, Italy, Spain	The algorithmic logic of TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and X is largely inaccessible to teachers and students, making it difficult to teach how exposure to specific content is shaped.
Non-binding nature of media literacy guidance frameworks	All EU Countries	The Digital Education Action Plan, the European Digital Competence Framework, and the Digital Citizenship Education Framework are soft law instruments that Member States are encouraged,

		but not required, to implement. Education and its delivery remain a national competence, and States retain full autonomy in decision-making.
Reactive nature of most programs	Spain	Most media literacy programs are reactive rather than proactive; that is, they focus on detection and correction strategies rather than on integrating habits of critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and source evaluation skills.

Source: Own elaboration based on the Desk Research of the participating associations.

Good practices identified during Desk Research

Despite the difficulties, the national reports have documented various successful initiatives that can serve as references for the project. These good practices share common traits: flexibility, a participatory approach in their design, and clear mechanisms for monitoring youth proposals.

Programs such as klicksafe, #UseTheNews, and Media Scouts in Germany strengthen young people's capacity to critically evaluate information. The Mediawijsheid competency model in the Netherlands offers a roadmap for institutionalizing media literacy in a transversal manner. The disinformation response ecosystem in Lithuania (Debunk.org, "elves," Checked by 15 min) combines AI, volunteering, and digital media. The Generazioni Connesse ecosystem in Italy articulates schools, families, young people, technology companies, and NGOs to create a safe digital environment.

Table 26. Transferable good practices identified during desk research for Media Literacy

Good practice	Country	Objective	Transfer potential
Programs such as klicksafe, Media	Germany	They focus on strengthening young people's ability to critically evaluate information, identify misinformation, understand digital risks, and	High potential for transfer, as it allows for rapid curricular adaptations, facilitating replication in educational

Good practice	Country	Objective	Transfer potential
Scouts, and #UseTheNews		navigate online environments responsibly.	systems that need to update content on AI and disinformation without redesigning the entire curriculum.
The Mediawijsheid competence model	Netherlands	This national framework provides clear, structured guidelines. It gives educators a solid tool to measure, understand, and safely build digital skills among students.	High potential for transferability. As a competency framework rather than a fixed course, it offers a roadmap for other countries to institutionalize media literacy across the curriculum.
Disinformation response ecosystem (*Debunk.org, Elves, Checked by 15 min*)	Lithuania	A comprehensive ecosystem for responding to disinformation, involving collaboration among digital media, AI, and civil society activists.	There is high potential for transferability to countries undergoing elections or conflict, given their significant exposure to polarization and digital interference. The model is easily transferable because it relies on open-source tools, civic volunteers, and media partnerships, accessible requirements that do not necessitate large state budgets.
Generazioni Connesse ecosystem (Safer Internet Centre)	Italy	A public-private network co-funded by the European Commission (through initiatives such as *Better Internet for Kids)* and led by Italy's Ministry of Education and Merit. Its primary purpose is to bring together schools, families, young people, e-policy stakeholders, technology companies, and NGOs to create a safe, responsible, and critical digital environment for children and youth.	High potential for transferability to educational systems and ministries of education. It offers a standardized methodology for structuring school digital safety policies (e-Policies) and linking schools, cyber-police units, universities, and NGOs into a single network, enabling any country to address cyberbullying and digital literacy through prevention and direct support.

Source: Own elaboration based on the Desk Research of the participating associations.

Synthesis of the comparative European context

The analysis of the Media Literacy dimension within the European context studied reflects a clear evolution: there is a shift from a literacy focused on basic technical skills towards a critical capacity building aimed at safeguarding democratic participation. Although all countries share the goal of tackling disinformation, promoting critical thinking, and ensuring a safe digital environment, their institutional architectures and implementation models vary significantly depending on the maturity of their policies and each state's governance structure.

In Germany, the model is decentralised and federal in nature. Its strategy is articulated through the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs' declaration on media education in schools, alongside initiatives from the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. Germany opts for a cross-curricular approach supported by specialised institutes such as the JFF Institute, and stands out for applying cutting-edge tools, such as the ClaimGuard initiative, which uses artificial intelligence to detect disinformation and deepfakes.

In the Netherlands, an associative and national network model prevails. Its cornerstone is *Netwerk Mediawijsheid*, an alliance bringing together over a thousand organisations to promote digital skills through large-scale campaigns such as *MediaMasters*. The Netherlands combines reactive verification programmes with proactive projects like the *Nationale AI-cursus*, designed to make artificial intelligence and its ethical implications accessible to the wider public.

In Lithuania, media literacy is strongly linked to national security and civic resilience against foreign propaganda. The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport integrates media competencies into the formal primary and secondary school curricula. However, its defining feature is a highly dynamic hybrid ecosystem that integrates the Safer Internet Centre, the educational work of Debunk.org, and the activism of the "elves" civic volunteer network, combining mass-analysis technology with civic engagement.

In Belgium, the approach is shaped by supranational frameworks. Key examples include the European Union's Digital Education Action Plan and the Council of Europe's Digital Citizenship Education initiatives. As these are guidance frameworks, the concrete implementation of media literacy depends on the autonomy of its communities, focusing primarily on teacher training and the inclusion of digital competencies within the education system.

In Italy, the model is characterised by a consortium-based effort between the State and civil society. It relies on the Ministry of Education's Digital Citizenship Framework and the work of the Italian Safer Internet Centre, *Generazioni Connesse*. This consortium brings together the Postal Police, Save the Children, universities, and the National Cybersecurity

Agency to implement digital safety policies in schools. Furthermore, Italy stands out for its participatory methodologies, such as the Youth Panel project or the HEY programme, which focus on empowering youth leaders who teach their peers how to debunk disinformation.

In Spain, media literacy is integrated cross-curricularly through the Digital Competence Framework established by the LOMLOE, leaving execution in the hands of the autonomous communities through educational innovation programmes, such as in Andalusia with its communication and digital citizenship initiatives. School training is complemented by direct support from third-sector organisations, such as the *Fundación Cibervoluntarios*, and cybersecurity campaigns by the National Institute of Cybersecurity (*INCIBE*) through *Internet Segura for Kids*.

The comparative analysis reveals five underlying problems that affect the actual impact of media literacy in Europe:

- **Implementation gap versus policy frameworks.** Although EU guidelines and theoretical frameworks on digital skills abound, their non-binding nature means that actual classroom implementation remains subject to the budgetary capacity and political will of each region or school.

- **Profound technological lag in curricula.** Procedures for updating education laws and curricula are slow, whereas recommendation algorithms, generative AI, and disinformation techniques evolve at a rapid pace. As a result, classroom content quickly becomes outdated and fails to address the issues young people face on platforms like TikTok or X.

- **Asymmetry in teacher training.** The absence of mandatory, systematic training on media literacy in initial teacher education leaves many educators lacking the necessary tools to teach critical thinking, whilst being overwhelmed by high class sizes and the demands of the traditional curriculum.

- **Excessively reactive approach.** The majority of national projects are designed to correct or debunk fake news that has already spread, rather than prioritising proactive strategies focused on the continuous development of analytical reasoning and prior training against manipulation techniques.

- **Unequal access due to socio-economic and geographical factors.** Critical analysis skills in digital environments are closely linked to connectivity levels, the availability of devices, and support at home. Consequently, young people in rural areas or vulnerable environments are left at a disadvantage in developing full digital citizenship.

Based on the good practices analysed, four major opportunities emerge to improve and scale up public policy in media education.

On the one hand, projects such as Italy's Youth Panel or Germany's *Media Scouts* offer the opportunity of peer-to-peer educational methodologies. They demonstrate that young people respond with greater empathy and effectiveness when it is their peers teaching them to identify digital risks and dismantle hate speech, bridging the gap often created by adult or institutional messaging.

On the other hand, the Italian *Generazioni Connesse* model provides a very clear methodological guide for each school to draw up its own internal digital safety policy, leading to the institutionalisation of school digital governance. This allows classroom rules, cyberbullying prevention, and critical thinking to be articulated within a single protocol agreed upon by families, teaching staff, and students.

The third opportunity lies in the adoption of modular and adaptable competence frameworks. Rather than altering curricula through complex legal reforms, initiatives such as the Dutch *Netwerk Mediawijsheid* framework make it possible to provide teachers with flexible guidelines and modular tools that can be updated at the pace of technology to address recent phenomena such as deepfakes or AI.

Finally, Lithuania's experience with its disinformation response ecosystem demonstrates the power of connecting data technology, civic volunteering, and independent journalism to build a multi-stakeholder civic defence ecosystem. This triangular approach is highly transferable to countries exposed to polarised electoral processes or information crises, enabling an agile and collaborative response that does not rely solely on state infrastructure.

7. FIELD RESEARCH COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BY DIMENSIONS

During the field research, each participating organisation conducted both qualitative and quantitative analyses, employing focus groups and questionnaires, in order to study the same 5 dimensions: Youth Participation, Intercultural Dialogue, Civic Education, Pedagogical Methods, Structured Dialogue and Media Literacy.

This section summarises the findings from each national field study and presents a comparative analysis aimed at identifying shared European trends and cross-national differences across these domains. By triangulating the qualitative and quantitative evidence, it provides an integrated overview of the main challenges and needs identified by young people in the participating countries.

7.1. Youth participation

Table 27. Summary of Field Research findings for Youth Participation by country

Country	Key findings	Barriers identified	Needs detected	Illustrative quotes
Germany	Young people expressed great interest in having a voice in the issues that affect them and indicated that they participated most frequently in volunteering activities (31%), youth organizations (36.2%), and social movements (29.3%). There is comparatively low use of formal participation channels. Germany has established a series of participation structures, but the influence of young people within these mechanisms often remains limited.	Participation mechanisms remain primarily consultative, contributing to frustration and lower trust in the value of participation. There is a lack of awareness regarding participation opportunities and difficulties in accessing information. Access to participation is unequal based on socioeconomic background and geographical location. Participation spaces are often perceived as exclusive, with complex or too formal language. Although respondents frequently cited a lack of time due to studies or work (63.8%), structural barriers related to a lack of information (43.1% in the surveys), influence, access, and representation play a more significant role in participation. The belief that participation will not lead to change (49.1%) and the lack of information (43.1%) were identified as the most common barriers.	Clear, understandable, and easily accessible information about participation opportunities, greater support for navigating participation pathways, and participation processes that go beyond consultation. 74.1% of respondents identified seeing real changes implemented as the most important factor for increasing trust in structured dialogue processes, followed by clear feedback on what had been done with their ideas (50.0%) and more transparent processes (38.8%). It is necessary to address unequal patterns of participation among different groups of young people and create participation opportunities integrated into everyday environments that are not based on formal structures or dependent on prior experience, specialized knowledge, or personal connections.	"Many young people want to have a say, but often have limited real influence on final decisions." "I'd actually like to get involved, but I often don't know where to start." "At school, I never really learned about opportunities to get involved." (Focus Group, Germany)

Netherlands	Young people often feel they are used solely to improve an image rather than for the quality of their opinions. Research shows that authorities welcome young people's ideas until these ideas challenge real political power or demand major changes. When that happens, their opinions are ignored. This dynamic generates deep civic exhaustion and distrust.	Consultative processes lacking feedback that generate civic exhaustion and distrust among young people. Young people are very afraid of their digital footprint, severe online hate, cyberbullying, and negative reactions from future employers or teachers, preferring to maintain their online privacy. Lack of time. Language barriers and the lack of local networks for international youth.	Need for safe digital and physical spaces. Need for inclusive and accessible formats, and spaces that do not require perfect command of Dutch or deep pre-existing connections with civic networks. Need for institutions to provide feedback to young people and for their actions to have a real impact.	"If I made a TikTok about politics I could be opening myself up to so much hate. They could find your employer if you have a bigger social media presence, they can contact your employer. It could absolutely impact your life." (Focus Group, Netherlands)
Lithuania	The survey revealed that, while 58% agree that participation is important, only 13% fully agree that institutions listen to youth, with volunteering (53%) being by far the most accessible entry point compared to youth councils or public consultations (8% each). Focus groups participants confirmed that civic engagement is mediated almost entirely by school, with little knowledge of municipal or community	Lack of time due to studies or work is the dominant barrier (cited by approximately 90% of respondents), followed by schedule conflicts (57%) and lack of information (54%). Focus groups highlighted that pathways for civic engagement outside of school are simply unknown to many young people, which points to an information and dissemination gap rather than a motivation gap.	Clearer and more accessible information on how and where to participate beyond school structures; flexible formats that require less time commitment, compatible with study/work schedules; genuine co-decision mechanisms instead of purely consultative processes, and visible follow-up. Expand outreach to young people from rural environments, vocational training, and centres not belonging to general secondary education institutes, who are structurally underrepresented in current mechanisms.	"We want to get involved but sometimes we don't really know where to start or who to contact." "Most of us only participate in things the school organises – outside of that, we don't know what exists." "I'd like to do something that actually matters, but I don't know how." (Focus Group, Lithuania)

	channels.			
Belgium	Young people are more engaged in informal and community activities, particularly volunteering (52.1%), than in formal political participation, such as youth councils (15.1%) or public consultations (16.4%). Many participants describe participation as symbolic, without real influence on decisions. Despite the obstacles detected, young people, in general, remain willing to participate in civic and student life.	Between 17.8% and 32.9% of respondents wanted to participate but were unable to do so, indicating an unmet demand for participation opportunities. Although the majority (57.1%) believe that participation can make a difference, far fewer feel that institutions listen to young people (18.6%) or that participation opportunities are equally accessible (25.7%). Lack of time, insufficient information, and incompatible schedules hinder participation, while bureaucratic red tape, the perception of reduced impact, and the feeling of a lack of representation further reduce the motivation to participate.	More accessible, transparent, and effective participation systems, with clearer communication, fewer administrative hurdles, and stronger links between young people's contributions and real-life decision-making.	"Tokenism is reinforced by the fact that students have no voting rights in higher committees, which means they cannot really have a direct impact." "It's exhausting man, I hate feeling like a child at conferences or looking like I'm some token in politicians schemes. It's tiring but also inspiring knowing that many other young people are fighting for similar causes around the world." (Focus Group, Belgium)
Italy	There is a great latent willingness to participate, but disillusionment with the system is widespread. Formal institutional channels show social selectivity. Volunteering remains the preferred form of participation	Lack of time due to intense academic or work commitments (38.8%), incompatible schedules (33.9%), and a profound deficit of clear and accessible information on where and how to participate (23%). The majority of respondents (83.7%) explicitly cited "I do not feel represented" as a major	Physical, free, and very nearby local spaces for horizontal self-organization and mutual skill exchange. They need institutions to adopt simplified and accessible communication strategies, and to offer transparent and viable pathways where their contributions	“Also from the municipal administration there has always been a lot of disinterest in young people, that is, in general everything that young

	compared to formal political structures.	barrier, while 15.8% believe that their participation will not lead to any tangible change. The bureaucratic and outdated language of institutions and systemic adultism.	are directly translated into binding community decisions.	people do or ask for is not listened to." (Focus Group, Italy)
Spain	The results show a gap between the institutional policy objectives for youth participation (Injuve Strategy 2030) and their real influence on youth participation. Survey results show low overall participation, with the highest involvement recorded in social movements (24%) and volunteering (20%).	The survey results identified lack of time (37%), limited information about participation opportunities (24%), and scepticism about the impact (13%) as the most significant obstacles.	Significant opportunities to influence decisions, greater transparency and accountability from public institutions, and inclusive participation processes. There is a need for clearer and more accessible information on participation opportunities.	"However, they later turn into empty promises, you know? Because we've been like this for years." (Focus Group, Spain)

Table 28. International comparison of field research findings for Youth Participation

Shared European Trends	Cross-National Differences	Remarks
Predominance of informal participation: A consistent prevalence of voluntary participation	The mediation of participation differs: greater centrality of the school environment (Lithuania)	Young people show a high willingness to engage, but choose spaces perceived as more

and autonomous activism over institutional mechanisms.	versus a significant role of autonomous social movements (Germany, Spain).	accessible, flexible, and with a greater capacity for action than institutional channels.
Perception of institutional ineffectiveness: Shared distrust of participation mechanisms, perceived as merely consultative and without binding impact, frequently described as processes of "tokenism", and lacking feedback on how their decisions influence decision-making.	The focus of criticism varies: concerns about stigma and digital privacy (Netherlands) or structural criticism of adultism and bureaucratic opacity (Italy, Belgium).	The shared demand is to expand opportunities for participation and also to ensure that these generate real influence, transparency, and accountability.
Lack of visibility of participation channels: Lack of clear information about participation channels, identified as a cross-cutting structural barrier.	The fragmentation of information presents different nuances: from exclusive dependence on the school network (Lithuania) to the complexity of institutional language (Italy, Spain).	Improving institutional communication requires strategies adapted to different national contexts and to the information channels used by young people from different educational and socioeconomic backgrounds.
Structural and time constraints: The imbalance between academic/work demands and the availability for civic activities is a shared factor.	Germany points out that although lack of time is a widespread difficulty among young people, structural barriers play a more significant role in participation.	The evidence suggests that reducing time constraints alone will not be sufficient without addressing structural barriers related to accessibility, information, and the capacity to influence.
Barriers to access and inclusiveness: Identification of current mechanisms as environments that are not very permeable to vulnerable groups (rural areas, vocational education and training, migrant background).	The nature of exclusion is multifactorial, ranging from geographical gaps and connectivity (rural areas) to limitations in social capital and language proficiency (for example, in the case of ethnic minorities in Lithuania or international students in the Netherlands).	Youth participation requires inclusive and differentiated approaches that reduce inequalities in access and promote the effective representation of underrepresented groups.

All tables represent the researchers own elaboration based on the National Reports from the participating associations.

Regarding the different main barriers preventing youth participation across the participating countries (Figures 1–6), these follow similar trends, with the lack of time consolidating as the most frequently reported barrier in all countries (for example, receiving 63.8% of the votes from participants in Germany and 73.6% in the Netherlands), followed by the lack of information. Other identified barriers refer to scheduling incompatibility with studies, not feeling represented, difficulties arising from complicated/very formal language, and the feeling that nothing is going to change.

Chart 25. Barriers to Youth Participation in Germany "What are the most important obstacles" preventing you from participating more?

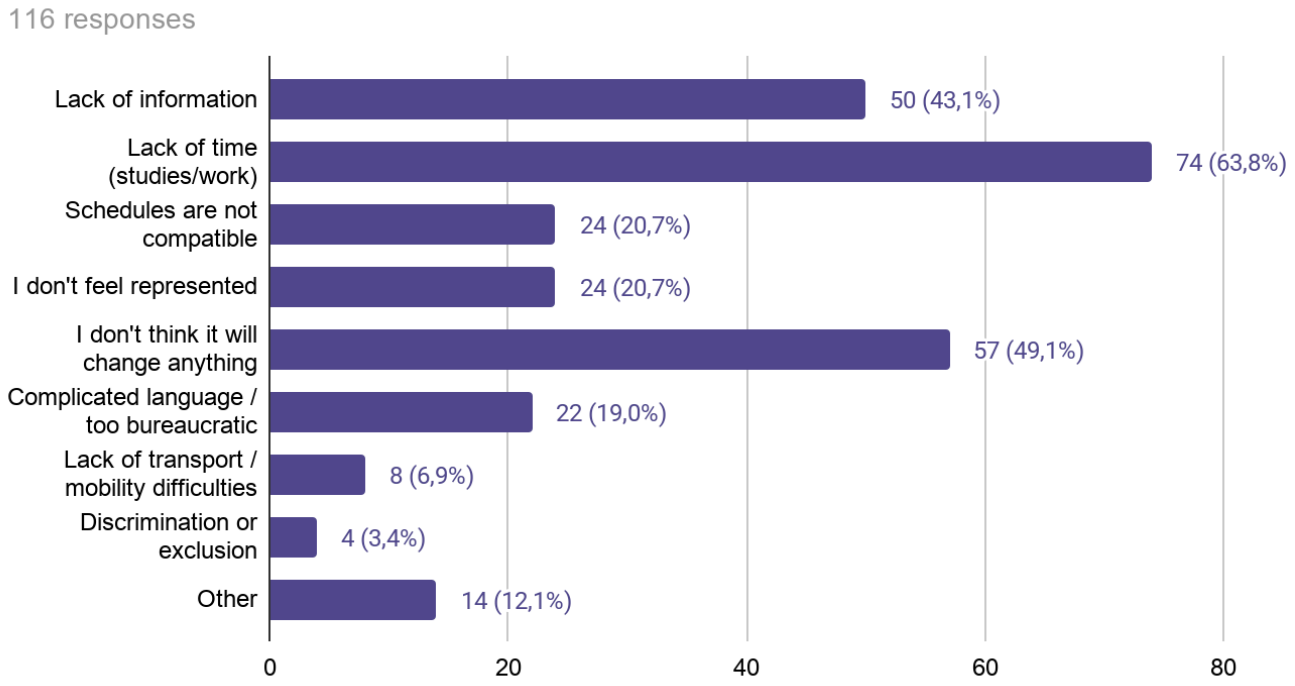


Chart 26. Barriers to Youth Participation in the Netherlands "What are the most important obstacles" preventing you from participating more?

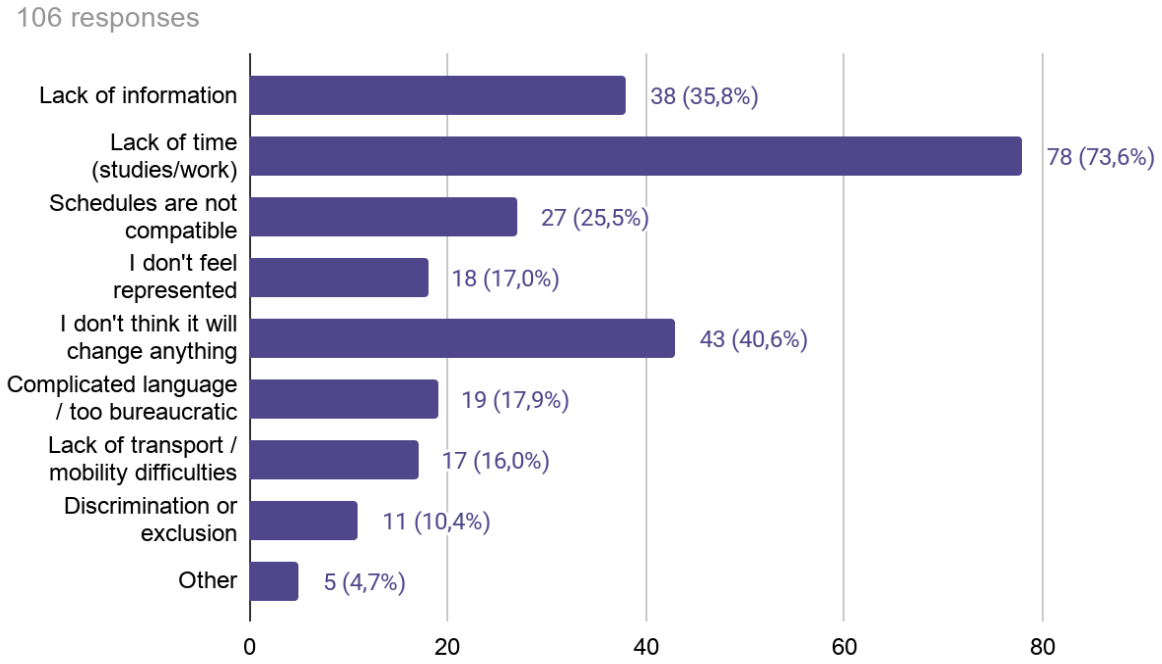


Chart 27. Barriers to Youth Participation in Lithuania "What are the most important obstacles" preventing you from participating more?

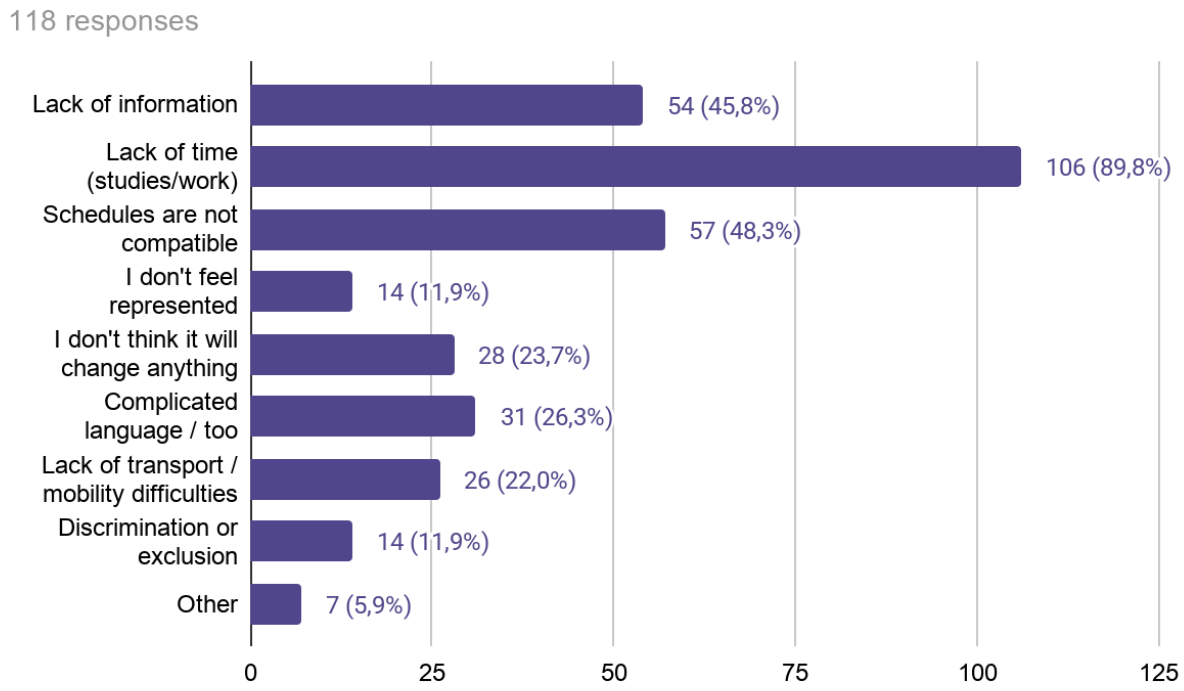


Chart 28. Barriers to Youth Participation in Belgium "What are the most important obstacles" preventing you from participating more?

95 responses

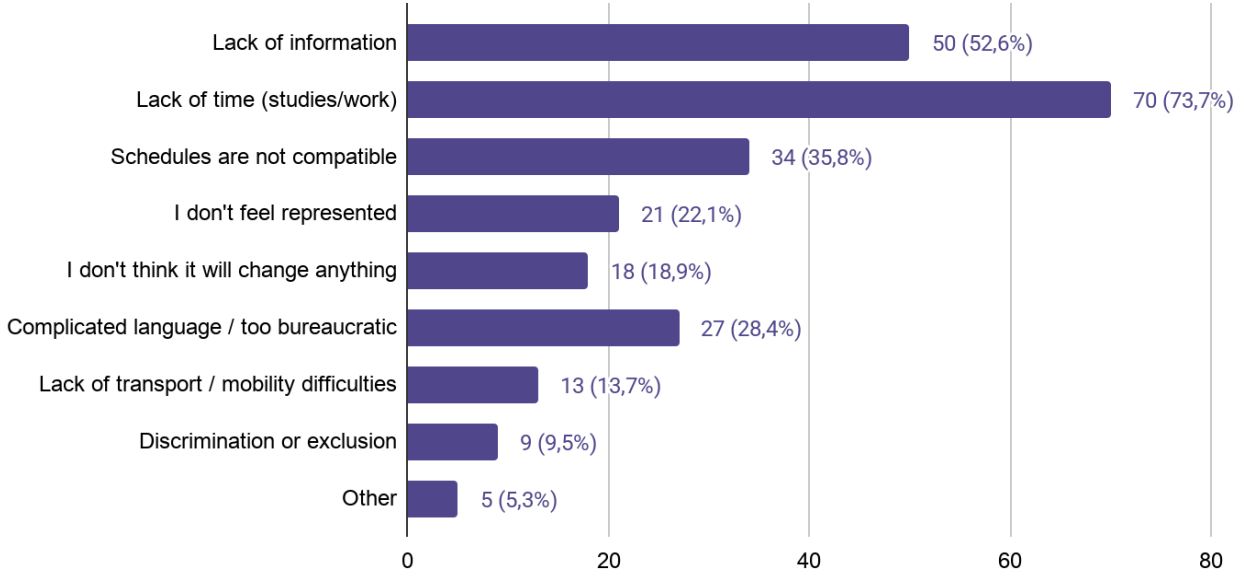


Chart 29. Barriers to Youth Participation in Italy "What are the most important obstacles" preventing you from participating more?

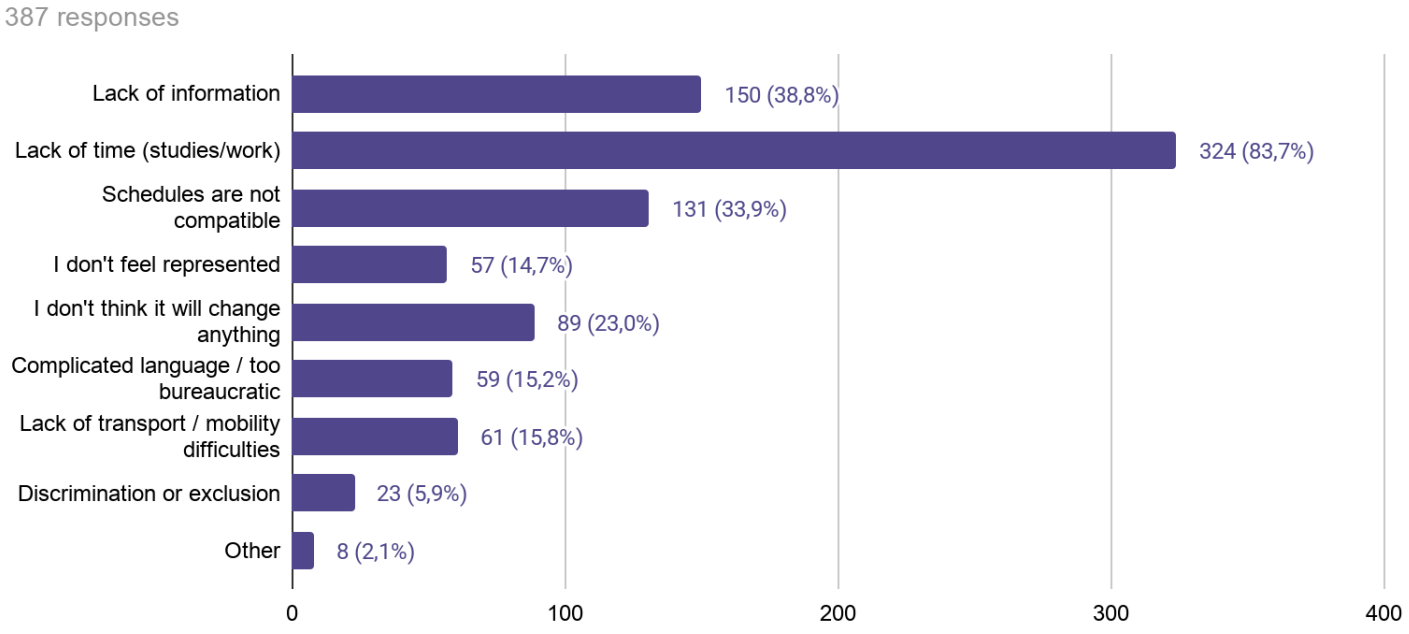
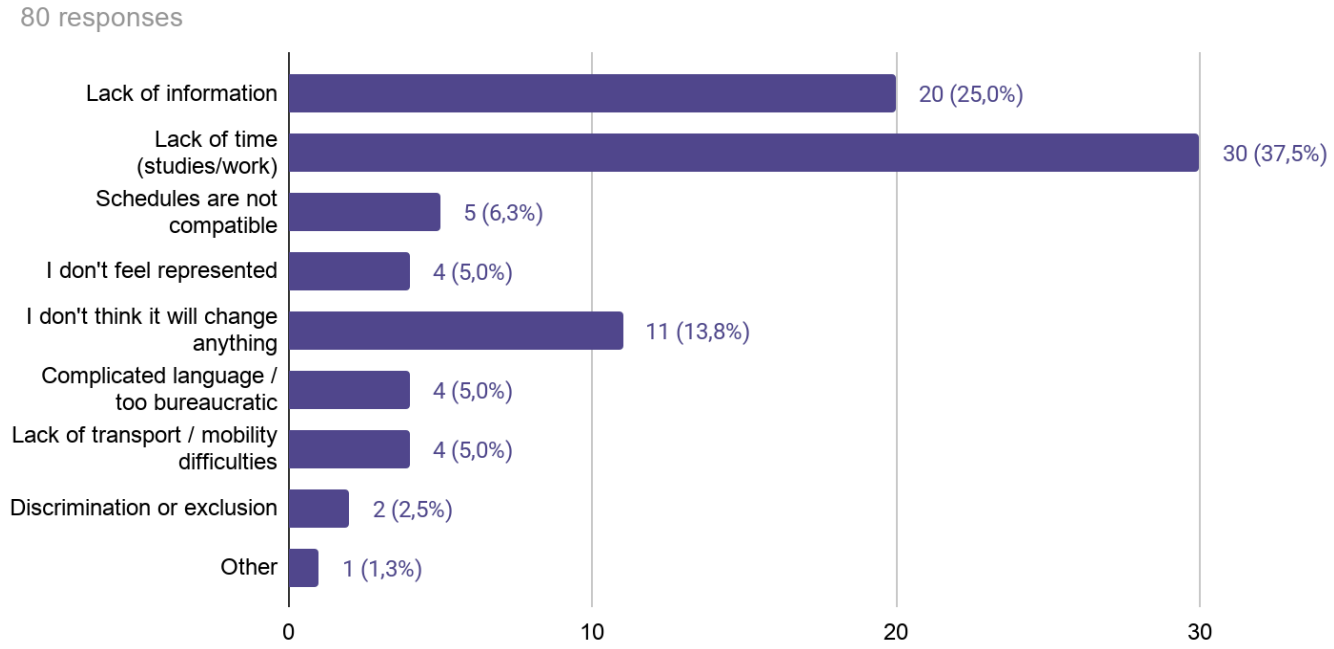


Chart 30. Barriers to Youth Participation in Spain "What are the most important obstacles" preventing you from participating more?



All charts in this chapter are based on the Survey Reports of the respective participating countries, as indicated in the captions.

7.2. Intercultural dialogue

Table 29. Summary of Field Research findings for Intercultural Dialogue by country

Country	Key findings	Barriers identified	Needs detected	Illustrative quotes
Germany	Shared activities and common interests were identified as important drivers of connection. Respondents identified exchange programmes with other countries (62.1%), educational programmes in schools (57.8%), and a wider range of activities, such as sports, cultural and leisure activities (56.9%), as the measures most likely to strengthen intercultural dialogue. The research highlights that intercultural dialogue is constrained less by young people's willingness to participate and more by the accessibility, inclusiveness, and sustainability of the structures that facilitate meaningful interaction.	Unequal access to opportunities for intercultural dialogue, with disparities according to socioeconomic background, educational pathways, geographical location, and migration experiences. Persistent social, educational, and spatial divisions may limit interaction. Although diverse environments exist, meaningful contact is not always guaranteed. Experiences and observations of discrimination, prejudice, and exclusion undermine trust, sense of belonging, and willingness to participate. Intercultural dialogue is not always systematically integrated into educational, community, or institutional settings and often depends on specific projects, activities, or organisations.	Accessible, inclusive, regular, and meaningful opportunities for inter-cultural interaction in everyday settings. Spaces and activities that bring together young people from different social, cultural, and educational backgrounds, especially where existing patterns of separation may limit interaction.	"Shared activities make it easier to overcome stereotypes, because people connect through what they do rather than where they come from." "A lot of my contact with different cultures comes through everyday friendships at school or through shared activities, not only through formal programmes." (Focus Group, Germany)

Netherlands	The research reveals that young people have very positive personal attitudes towards cultural diversity, with a high score of 4.17 out of 5 for feeling comfortable talking about it. They consider that their everyday environments do not provide sufficient structural support for genuine intercultural integration, which received the lowest institutional score of 3.37. 54% of young people have witnessed discriminatory acts and 26% have personally experienced them because of their origin or culture. Although international students experience natural and easy integration within university "bubbles", where "everyone is equally foreign", they face sudden social exclusion and segregation outside these spaces.	Separation by educational pathways causes groups to remain separated, reducing everyday intercultural contact. Spontaneous interaction is uncommon. Linguistic and bureaucratic exclusion conceals opportunities and excludes non-native speakers from basic rights. Most intercultural initiatives are funded as temporary, short-term projects, making them unable to maintain continuous engagement with young people of migrant background. The political climate since the 2023 elections has become highly polarised, making open intercultural communication more difficult.	Informal, interest-driven activities and culturally rooted events, such as cultural dinners, to go beyond superficial coexistence. Non-native young people need spaces and information available in English. Co-designed initiatives. Safe discussion spaces against stereotypes.	"Inside the university bubble, integration is very easy, but once you step outside into the broader Dutch society, the social segregation becomes very obvious and difficult to cross." "Everything from the government, the housing platforms, and the local neighbourhood information is only in Dutch. If you don't speak it, you are automatically cut off from knowing your basic rights." (Focus Group, Netherlands)

Lithuania	Meaningful intercultural contact among Lithuanian young people is limited and largely incidental. In the survey, 47% rated their interaction with peers from other cultures as low (1–2/5), despite 61% feeling comfortable talking about cultural diversity. Participants described that their most frequent intercultural contact occurs through everyday, transactional interactions (e.g., food delivery apps) rather than through structured dialogue, and noted that sustained intercultural exchange takes place mainly during international events or exchange programmes.	64% of respondents had witnessed or personally experienced discrimination based on origin or culture, which was identified as a serious and recurring concern. Focus group participants pointed to a structural lack of everyday spaces for genuine intercultural exchange beyond occasional school-organised events.	Leisure activities, intercultural events/festivals, and exchange programmes were each cited by approximately 2 thirds of respondents as the most useful measures. A clear need for everyday, accessible "safe spaces" to discuss discrimination, for schools to take a more active role in promoting intercultural encounters, and for efforts against stereotypes beyond one-off events.	"I think I've only really spoken with someone from another country at a school exchange event." "We don't really have places where we can meet and talk with young people from different backgrounds." (Focus Group, Lithuania)

Belgium	The findings confirm this gap between legal protections and lived experience: although young people generally report positive attitudes towards diversity and frequent intercultural contact, almost 72.6% have witnessed or experienced discrimination. Participants also noted that, although racist incidents in educational settings are often acknowledged, they are not followed by meaningful or systematic action by teaching staff or the administration. Overall, the findings point to the need for a more consistent and proactive implementation of anti-discrimination measures, combined with stronger educational and community initiatives.	Participation mechanisms are often too formal and not fully inclusive, with complex administrative requirements and eligibility criteria that may be exclusionary. Social barriers include discrimination, prejudice, and low levels of trust between groups, reinforced by socioeconomic inequalities that limit access to mobility programmes and intercultural opportunities. Language barriers further restrict participation. Spatial segregation reduces everyday contact between young people from different backgrounds, particularly in urban areas.	More inclusive and accessible participation frameworks, simpler procedures, reduced barriers to access, and greater support for organisations that are closer to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. There is a need to address social inequalities and discrimination, and to create initiatives that foster trust and reduce prejudice between different social groups through sustained rather than one-off participation. Improving linguistic accessibility and providing more everyday, locally rooted opportunities for interaction between diverse groups of young people.	"I heard racial slurs at school, especially when I was younger. Teachers reacted but nothing serious happened, neglecting the implementation of any change." "Maybe there is one event, you go, then you forget in a couple of days. It would be really nice to have a permanent space where you can spontaneously meet and exchange with other students on a daily basis." (Focus Group, Belgium)

Italy	Intercultural dialogue develops naturally among young people when it is fostered through shared and informal activities. Although young people feel very comfortable talking about diversity, exposure to discrimination remains alarmingly high, with a large majority having witnessed or experienced prejudice in their everyday lives.	Institutional barriers, such as delays in citizenship reforms for the children of immigrants. Spatial segregation in urban outskirts limits spontaneous interaction. Everyday racism remains deeply normalised in everyday language and social interactions. The survey highlighted that almost 88% of respondents had personally experienced or witnessed discrimination based on origin or culture.	Safe and informal spaces specifically dedicated to dismantling systemic prejudice and everyday racism. More accessible mobility programmes with more comprehensive funding and equal access.	"Unfortunately, even the way we all dialogue with each other hides the racism inherent in our very way of thinking." (Focus Group, Italy)
Spain	Young people highlighted the rise of racist movements. The survey findings reflect both openness and concern: although 48% felt comfortable talking about cultural diversity, 62% had witnessed acts of discrimination and 14% had personally experienced them.	Persistent prejudice, xenophobia, language barriers, unequal institutional support, and misinformation. Socio-economic inequalities, residential and school segregation, and regional disparities limit opportunities for interaction. Political polarisation, the influence of social media, and the emergence of racist movements exacerbate social divisions and reinforce discrimination.	Reducing segregation in residential and educational settings and generating stronger responses to cases of discrimination. Intercultural initiatives that better address the influence of social media and political polarisation on social relationships.	“The thing is, with what you mentioned about the political change of... it's an open secret that lately, in terms of social media, in terms of political campaigns again... we are seeing a trend of racist movements with a fascist edge and similar.” (Focus Group, Spain)

Table 30. International comparison of field research findings for Intercultural Dialogue

Shared European Trends	Cross-National Differences	Remarks
Dissonance between attitudes and reality: A cross-cutting gap is observed between positive personal attitudes towards cultural diversity and the high prevalence of experiences of discrimination. There is a common pattern of exposure to prejudice that contradicts the declared openness.	The nature of exclusion shows different nuances: in the focus groups in Spain and Netherlands, concerns about political polarisation and racist movements are identified. In Germany and Italy, discrimination emerged as a commonly perceived issue among participants, while the use of overly academic or complex language was also identified as a barrier that can make civic participation feel elitist and less accessible, as well as adultism, identified by participants in Italy.	Openness towards diversity does not automatically translate into inclusive environments; the persistence of discrimination reveals the need for structural interventions that combine prevention, education, and institutional response.
Incidental nature of contact: Intercultural dialogue is predominantly incidental (limited to the school environment or specific events) or transactional, without becoming established as an integrated practice in everyday life.	Lithuania shows significantly lower levels of intercultural contact, mainly confined to school or international events. Likewise, segregation acts as a shared structural barrier that manifests across educational, residential, or geographical dynamics, which, although presenting particularities in each national context, reflect a common challenge of social fragmentation.	The European challenge is not only to promote more intercultural encounters, but to ensure continuous, meaningful, and sustainable interactions that become part of young people's everyday lives.
Demand for sustainability and safe spaces: There is a unanimous demand for genuinely inclusive, informal, and safe environments that go beyond temporary projects, removing linguistic and bureaucratic barriers.	The required intervention approaches are specific: from the urgent need for accessible multilingual information (Netherlands) and the fight against systemic prejudice (Germany, Italy), to the need to create everyday meeting spaces outside the school setting (Lithuania).	There is broad consensus that one-off projects are insufficient. Policies should be oriented towards permanent, accessible, and inclusive structures for intercultural encounters that build trust and reduce prejudice in the long term.

All tables represent the researchers own elaboration based on the National Reports from the participating associations.

Participants identified different aspects that could improve intercultural dialogue. Overall, they agreed that the main ways to foster intercultural dialogue would be cultural events and festivals, sports and cultural activities, educational programmes in educational institutions, and exchange programmes. They also highlighted the need for anti-prejudice campaigns and safe spaces where discrimination can be discussed. In Belgium, the highest-ranked need was educational programmes in educational institutions (64.2% of the votes), followed by mixed cultural and sports activities (61.1% each). In Spain, Netherlands, and Lithuania, the highest-ranked need was intercultural activities and festivals. In Italy, it was mixed cultural activities (68%), and in Germany, exchange programmes (62.1%). However, the identified needs are broadly consistent: more mixed activities are needed (whether cultural activities, international events, or exchange programmes). Aspects such as educational programmes in educational institutions and anti-prejudice campaigns, although receiving fewer votes in some countries, also emerged as relevant across all the countries analysed (Charts 7–12).

Chart 31. Actions to Improve Intercultural Dialogue in Germany "What would contribute to improving intercultural dialogue? (Mark maximum 3)"

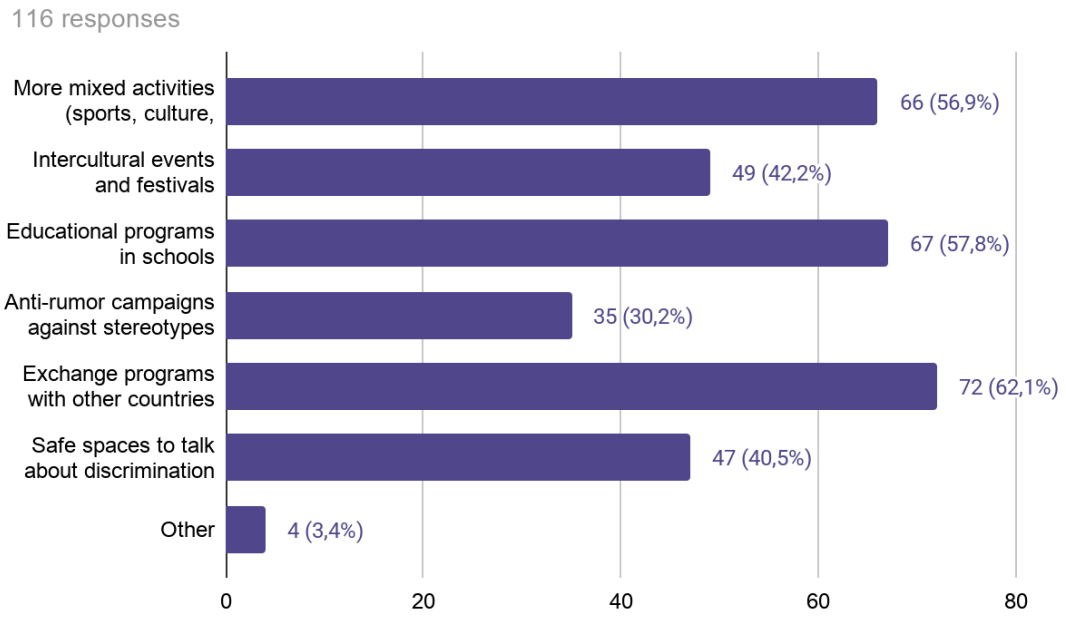


Chart 32. Actions to Improve Intercultural Dialogue in the Netherlands "What would contribute to improving intercultural dialogue? (Mark maximum 3)"

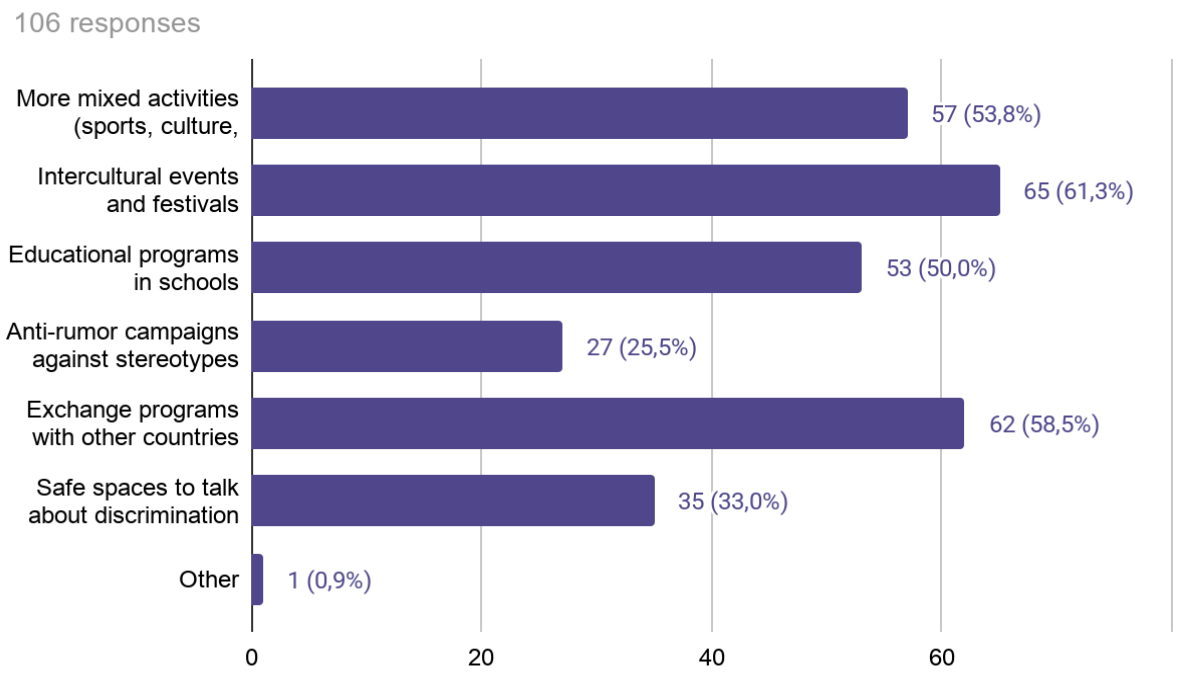


Chart 33. Actions to Improve Intercultural Dialogue in Lithuania "What would contribute to improving intercultural dialogue? (Mark maximum 3)"

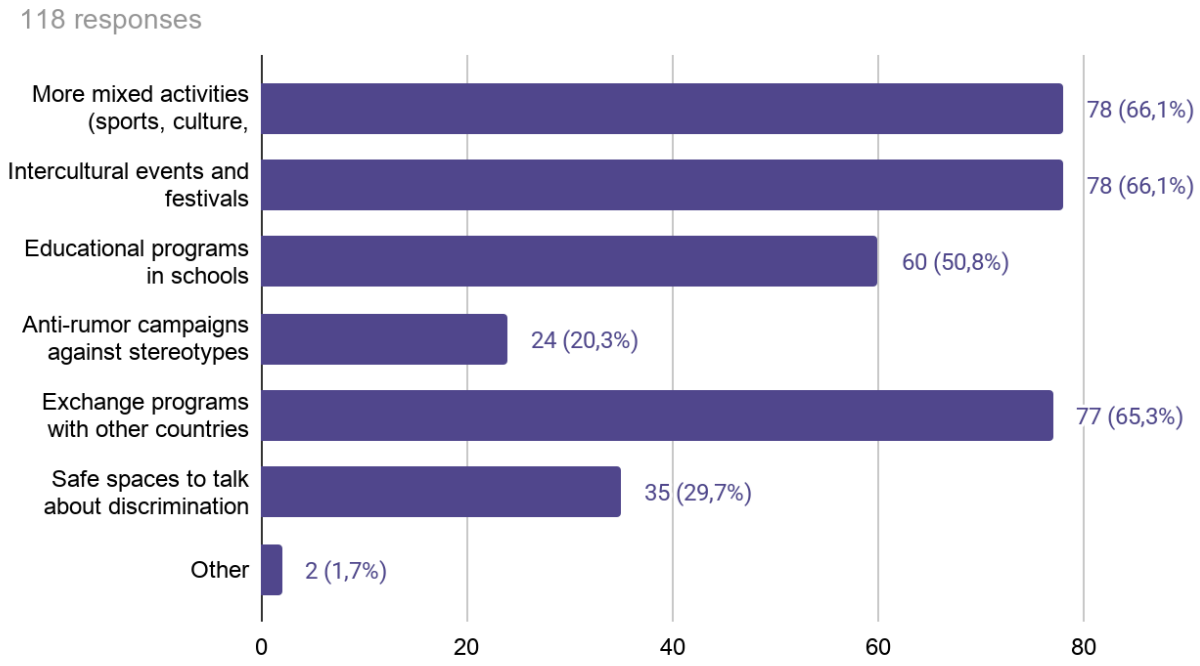


Chart 34. Actions to Improve Intercultural Dialogue in Belgium "What would contribute to improving intercultural dialogue? (Mark maximum 3)"

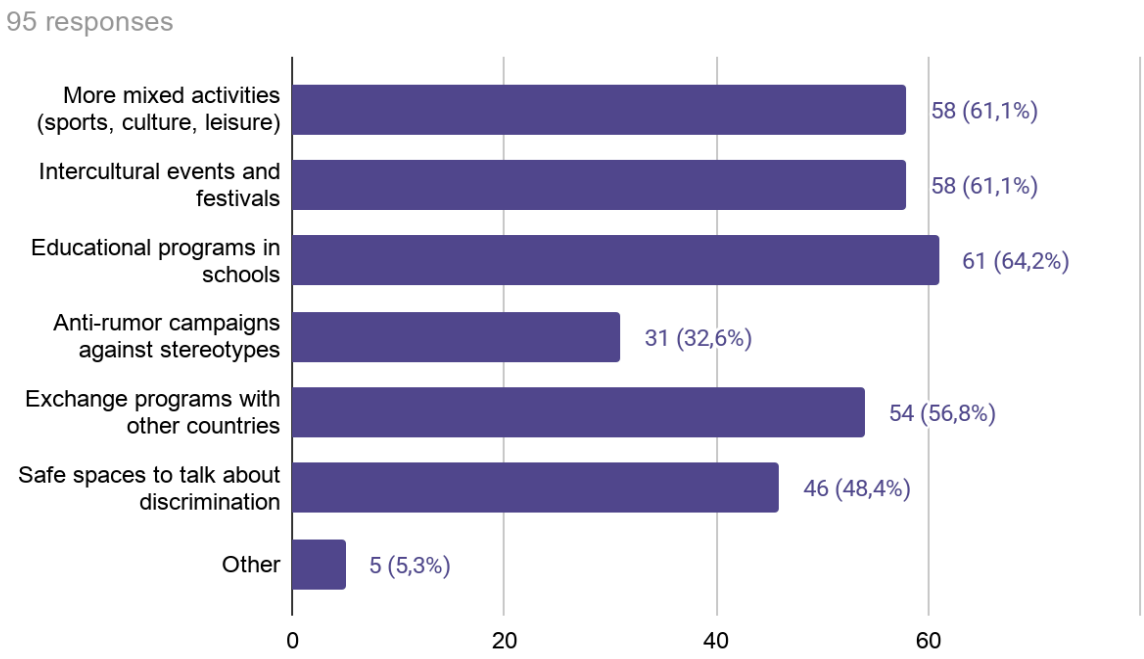


Chart 35. Actions to Improve Intercultural Dialogue in Italy "What would contribute to improving intercultural dialogue? (Mark maximum 3)"

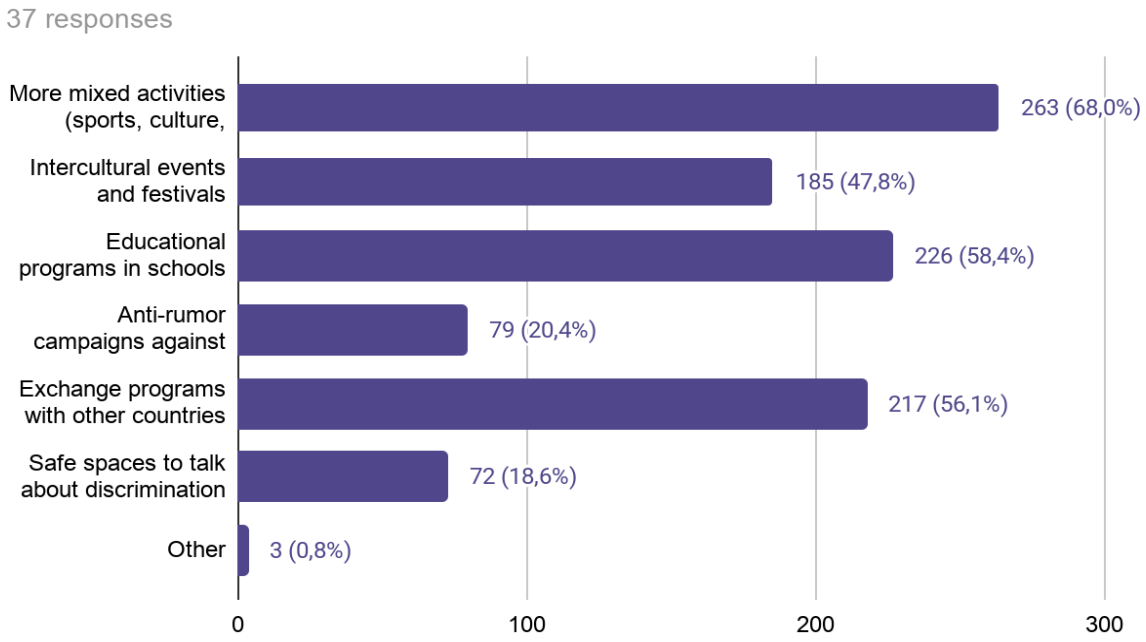
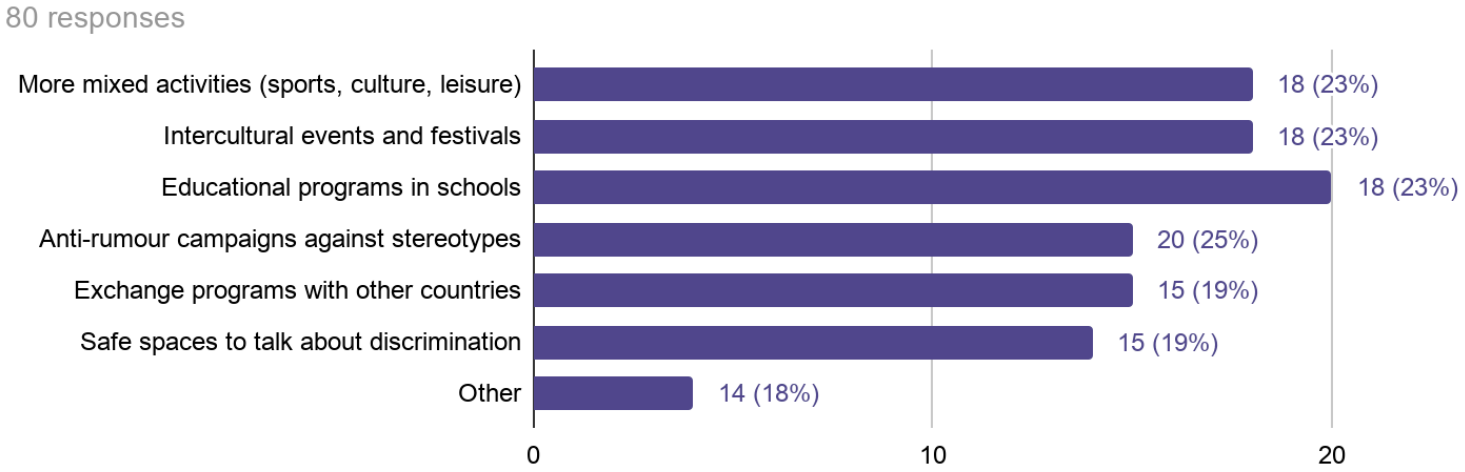


Chart 36. Actions to Improve Intercultural Dialogue in Spain "What would contribute to improving intercultural dialogue? (Mark maximum 3)"



All charts in this chapter are based on the Survey Reports of the respective participating countries, as indicated in the captions.

7.3. Civic education

Table 31. Summary of Field Research findings for Civic Education by country

Country	Key findings	Barriers identified	Needs detected	Illustrative quotes
Germany	Most young people reported having received some form of civic education. Young people stated that they felt more confident about their general rights than about how to influence decision-making, interact with local government, or use participation mechanisms. Only 66 of the 116 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they knew their rights as citizens, and 78 of the 116 reported that they did not know to whom they could submit a proposal or complaint.	Unequal implementation across schools, educational pathways, and regions. The quality, depth, and practical application of learning often depend on individual schools, teachers, and available resources, resulting in unequal opportunities for young people, especially in rural and under-resourced areas. Persistent emphasis on theoretical knowledge (political systems, institutions, and democratic processes) over practical participation (debate, decision-making, and community participation). Civic education is often perceived as a secondary subject, with limited time allocation and varying levels of institutional support.	Young people express the need to better understand how participation works in practice, how to exercise their rights, interact with institutions, influence decision-making processes, and contribute to their communities. Need for more equal access to high-quality civic education. Respondents identified human rights (57.8%), gender equality (48.3%), media literacy and fake news (46.6%), and sustainability and climate change (44.8%) as the highest-priority topics. Need for opportunities that strengthen critical thinking, democratic dialogue, self-efficacy, and confidence in their own ability to influence society. 91 of the 116 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that civic education should be practical rather than purely theoretical.	"Civic education in school was always very theoretical, mostly about how political systems work, but not really how you can actively participate yourself." (Focus Group, Germany) "We learned about things like elections and parliament, but it often felt like memorising structures rather than understanding real participation." (Focus Group, Germany)

Netherlands	Young people show strong support for active teaching methods, but educational institutions rarely use them. Overall, the research highlights a system that teaches democracy as a system but does not teach young people how to actively practise democracy or how to deal with diverse opinions.	The lack of a standard national curriculum creates significant regional and institutional inequalities. Teachers often avoid addressing current and sensitive political debates for fear of polarisation or tensions arising in the classroom. Most educational institutions rely on traditional learning, and active and experiential methods are uncommon, resulting in low student engagement. Students following vocational education pathways (after educational tracking at the age of 12) generally receive lower-quality and less active civic education.	Need for a clear and consistent national standard for civic education to ensure high-quality education regardless of the educational institution or educational pathway. Need for active and practical learning (structured debates, interactive role-play simulations). Specific training, guidelines, and administrative support for educators when moderating open discussions on sensitive political issues. Young people need strong and continuous media literacy education to help them recognise misinformation, "echo chambers", and online manipulation.	"One or two years of civics classes, it is only about how does the government work, not how can you participate." (Focus Group, Netherlands)
Lithuania	71% of respondents recalled having received civic education at school, but only 16% rated it as "very useful", while 60% considered it "somewhat useful". Only a minority of respondents felt confident submitting proposals or complaints (48 of 118 rated this 1–2/5).	80% of respondents want civic education to be practical rather than theoretical; however, classroom practice remains predominantly theoretical and teacher-dependent. Focus groups identified specific knowledge gaps regarding how the national Parliament, EU institutions, and civic engagement pathways function. Structural barriers include the absence of civic education as a standalone subject at certain	Practical and action-oriented civic education, with explicit content on how local and national decision-making actually works and how to interact with it (for example, by submitting proposals or petitions). The priority topics identified are human rights (91 mentions), gender equality (71), European democracy and elections (56), and non-discrimination (55). Need for systematic teacher training in participatory, competency-based	"I know the EU exists but I couldn't tell you what the European Parliament actually does or how the decision-making process is happening." "We care about what happens around us, but the system feels closed off to us."

		levels, teacher training in participatory pedagogies being optional rather than compulsory, and unequal implementation across schools.	civic pedagogy.	(Focus Group, Lithuania)
Belgium	Civic education is present in educational institutions, but is often limited in depth and effectiveness. Many young people report acquiring most of their civic knowledge outside formal education through activism, volunteering, and participation in youth organisations. Although they generally feel informed about rights and institutions, they feel less confident when participating in decision-making processes. Overall, civic education is widely available but only partially effective. It tends to raise awareness rather than foster sustained participation.	Limited depth and uneven quality of civic education in formal curricula. Civic education often has a marginal role and depends heavily on the motivation and expertise of individual teachers, while being concentrated in the final years of compulsory education. Participation in school settings tends to benefit a small group of already informed or well-connected students, while others remain excluded. Young people consistently express a preference for more practical, participatory, and issue-based learning.	Participants express the need to establish stronger links between civic education and real political systems at local and national levels, together with more opportunities to practise participation rather than simply learn about it. Some also perceive an excessive emphasis on European identity in education, with insufficient attention to national and local civic contexts. Survey results indicate that human rights were the highest priority (74.3%), followed by combating discrimination (50.0%), gender equality (44.3%), media literacy and tackling fake news (40.0%), sustainability and climate (35.7%), European democracy (30.0%), and practical tools on how to participate (28.6%). Local history and institutions (25.7%) were also considered important, while digital participation (8.6%) was selected less frequently.	“Students do not learn anything about their local context, not even the possibilities and opportunities they have to get involved in politics. No one is engaged at the local level, which is a shame because they could bring a very particular perspective, representing a specific community.” (Focus Group, Belgium)
Italy	The youth survey confirms almost universal exposure to civic education (97.9%), but	Lack of dedicated funding and specialised teacher training, resulting in a fragmented and	A radical shift towards applied and experience-based civic education. Students need practical training on	"When I held the electoral ballot in my

	its implementation is largely theoretical. Students understand abstract constitutional concepts but critically lack the practical and operational knowledge needed to actively engage with local administration, propose legislation, or understand how the electoral process works.	transmission-based teaching style. Overloaded curricula prioritise standardised testing over practical democratic simulations. Focus group participants were highly critical of the current system, noting that civic education in schools is often treated as a "free period" or merely as a superficial exercise to fulfil administrative requirements. Young people are forced into a state of "self-taught citizenship", relying on independent online research, personal networks, or youth organisations to understand geopolitical issues and the basic functioning of the electoral system.	how public administration works, how to submit complaints to local authorities, and how to organise advocacy campaigns for specific causes. They call for curricula to move beyond historical abstraction towards applied politics, prioritising urgent topics such as human rights, gender equality, and climate sustainability, and delivering these through immersive and experiential methodologies.	hand for the first time, I didn't know anything and so I did my own research. It was an entirely autonomous process." (Focus Group, Italy)
Spain	Although most respondents stated that they had received civic education and considered it useful, focus group participants often described it as insufficient or non-existent. 76% of respondents preferred applied approaches over theory.	Young people perceive the available civic education as being of poor quality or non-existent, point out that practical learning is insufficient, and believe that their preparation to influence political and administrative processes is limited.	Greater knowledge of human rights, gender equality, and combating discrimination, together with stronger critical media literacy and the ability to engage constructively with different points of view.	"If I want to bring an opinion to that town hall, something like that, how do I navigate it? How can I—who do I need to talk to? To the janitor, or do I go straight to the councilman? For example, a class on labour rights would be interesting"

				(Focus Group, Spain)

Table 32. International comparison of field research for Civic Education

Shared European Trends	Cross-National Differences	Remarks
Predominance of a theoretical approach: Cross-cutting consensus on the disconnect between curricular content, focused on the abstract transmission of concepts about political systems, and the need for practical competences for the real exercise of citizenship.	The extent of this gap varies across countries: Italy and Germany emphasize the lack of operational knowledge needed to interact with institutions; in Netherlands and Lithuania, the absence of active methodologies is highlighted; in Belgium and Spain, young people consider that civic education exists, but is insufficient to foster effective participation.	There is a consensus among European participants that civic education should evolve from a knowledge-based approach towards a competency-based model that enables young people to actively exercise their citizenship.
Structural disparity in implementation: There is widespread heterogeneity in how civic education is delivered, marked by disparities according to geographical location, educational pathway, available resources, teacher training, and the lack of common national standards, this being a recurring pattern across all participating countries.	Division into different educational pathways intensifies these disparities in the quality of civic education received, which is reflected mainly in the Netherlands and Germany. In Lithuania, teacher training in participatory pedagogies remains optional, while in Italy and Belgium participants point out that quality depends largely on teachers' initiative and the available resources.	The absence of common standards and homogeneous implementation generates unequal learning opportunities, limiting the development of civic competences among different groups of young people.

Perception of insufficiency and irrelevance: Young people agree that current civic education is insufficient, has little impact on their everyday reality, and is limited to theoretical instruction disconnected from democratic practice.	In Italy, focus groups point to a greater reliance on self-directed learning to understand how institutions function. In Belgium, many participants stated that they acquire much of their civic knowledge outside formal education, particularly through volunteering and youth organisations. In Spain, focus groups described the civic education received as insufficient or, in some cases, virtually non-existent. In Germany, a significant proportion of participants expressed uncertainty about how to use participation mechanisms and interact with institutions.	Participants generally call for a stronger connection between school-based learning and real opportunities for participation in their communities.
Consensus on priority topics: There is common alignment regarding cross-cutting educational needs, particularly human rights, gender equality, media literacy to address misinformation, and sustainability.	Alongside these shared priorities, some countries emphasise additional needs. In Lithuania and Belgium there is a demand for greater knowledge about how national and European institutions function; in the Netherlands, particular importance is given to media literacy and managing debate on controversial issues; in Spain, participants highlight the need to better understand how to interact with public administrations and exercise their rights in practice.	The broad convergence on educational priorities suggests the existence of a common foundation that could be useful for the development of European civic education initiatives, complemented by adaptations to the needs identified in each national context.

All tables represent the researchers own elaboration based on the National Reports from the participating associations.

Although the majority of participants in all countries indicated that they had received civic education, the percentages of people who had received this education vary across countries, as does the setting in which they received it (at school, university, or through non-formal education). While in countries such as Italy, Germany, Lithuania, and Spain, the percentage of participants who had received civic education at school is the majority (97.9%, 85.3%, 71.2%, and 67.5%, respectively), in Netherlands and Belgium it is lower (53.8% and 51.6%),

with a higher number of participants reporting that they had received civic education in non-formal settings, did not remember having received it, or had never received it (Charts 13–18).

Chart 37. Participants Who Have Received Civic Education and the Setting in Which They Received It in Germany "Did you receive any political education during your school years?"

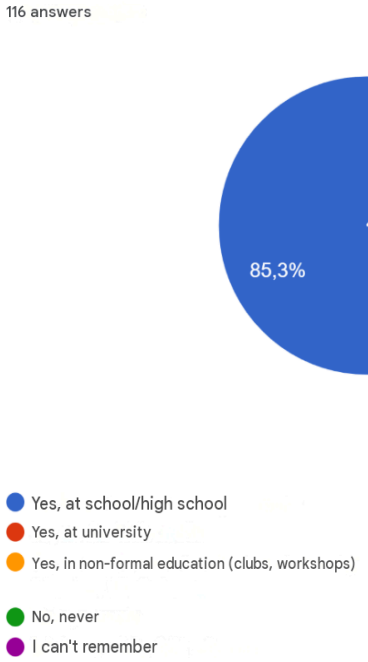


Chart 38. Participants Who Have Received Civic Education and the Setting in Which They Received It in Netherlands "During your education, did you receive civic education?"

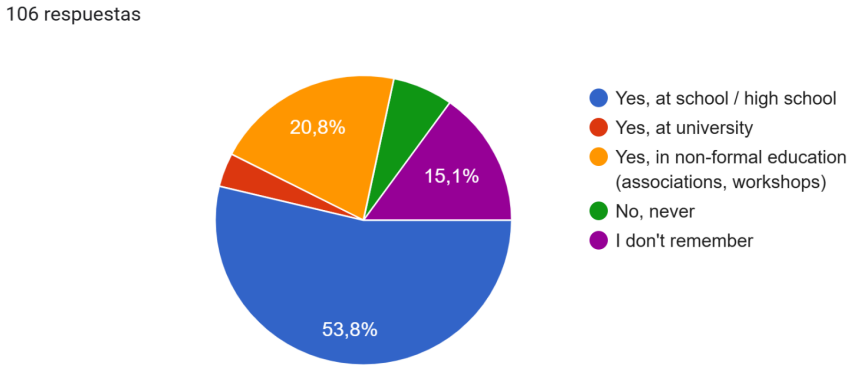


Chart 39. Participants Who Have Received Civic Education and the Setting in Which They Received It in Lithuania "Did you receive any political education during your school years?

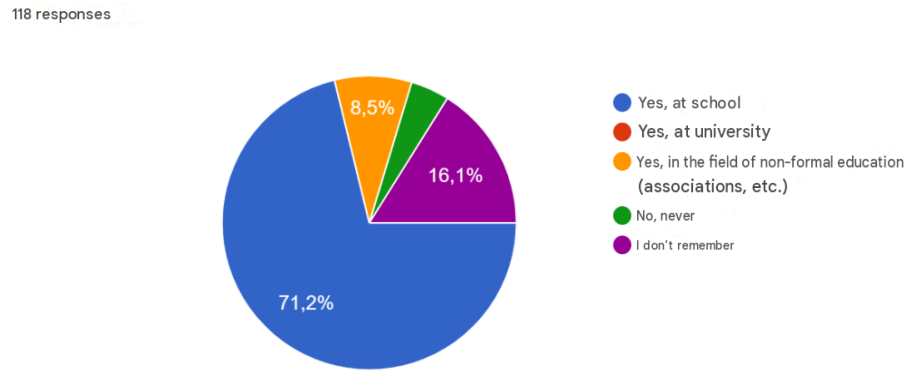


Chart 40. Participants Who Have Received Civic Education and the Setting in Which They Received It in Belgium "Did you receive any political education during your school years?"

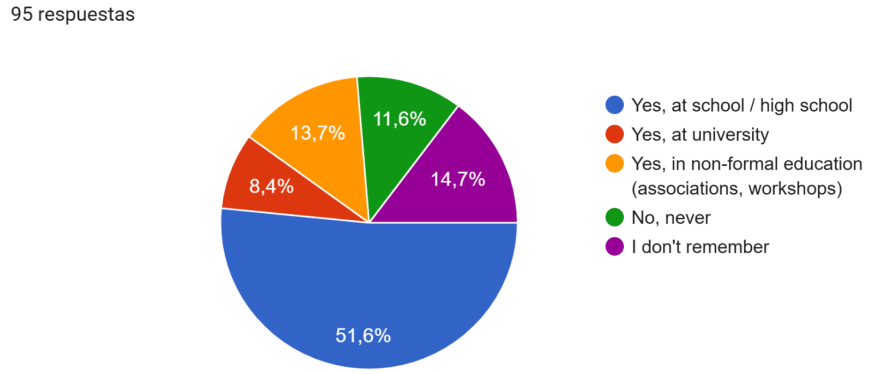
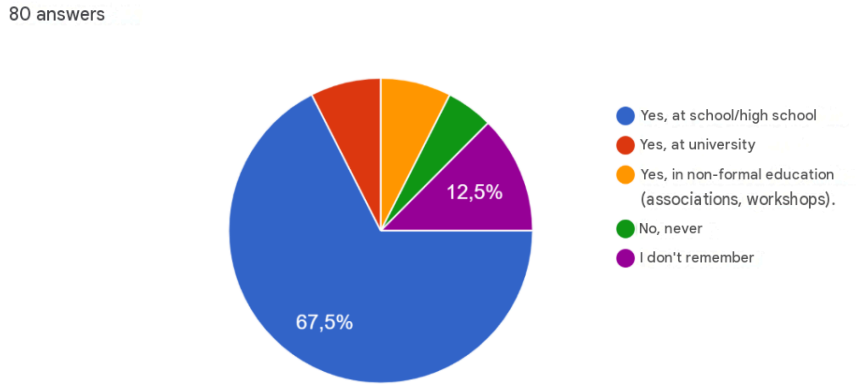
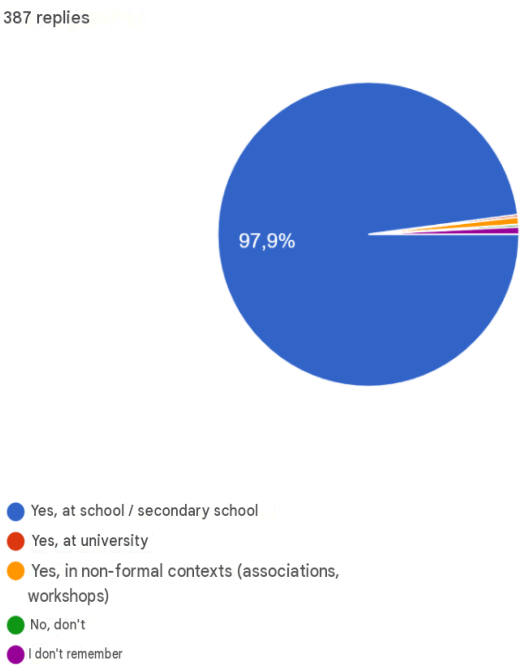


Chart 41. Participants Who Have Received Civic Education and the Setting in Which They Received It in Italy "Did you receive any political education during your school years?"

Chart 42. Participants Who Have Received Civic Education and the Setting in Which They Received It in Spain "Did you receive any political education during your school years?"





All charts in this chapter are based on the Survey Reports of the respective participating countries, as indicated in the captions.

Among the participants who indicated that they had received civic education, the majority of participants in all countries rated the education received as "somewhat useful". The highest percentage of participants who rated it as "somewhat useful" was found in Lithuania and Germany (61.2% and 60.9%, respectively). Participants who indicated that the education was "very useful" ranged between

approximately 10% and 25%, with the highest percentage found among Belgian participants (25.7% indicated that the education they received was "very useful"). The country with the highest percentage of participants who rated civic education as "not very useful" was Spain (32.4%) (Charts 19–24).

Chart 43. Perceived Usefulness of Civic Education in Germany "If so, how useful was it?"

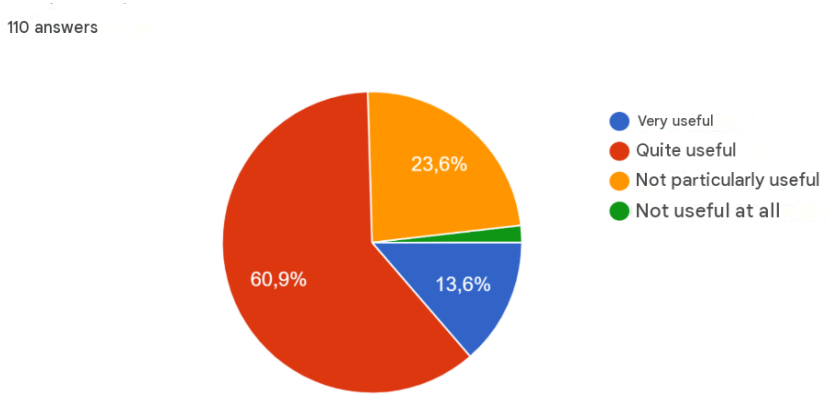


Chart 44. Perceived Usefulness of Civic Education in the Netherlands "If so, how useful was it?"

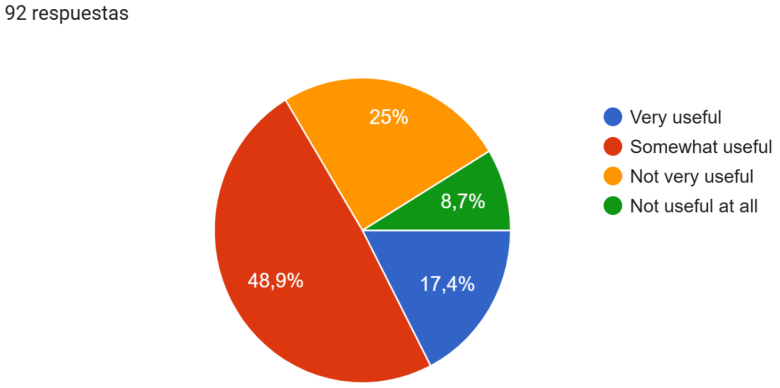


Chart 45. Perceived Usefulness of Civic Education in Lithuania "If so, how useful was it?"

Chart 46. Perceived Usefulness of Civic Education in Belgium "If so, how useful was it?"

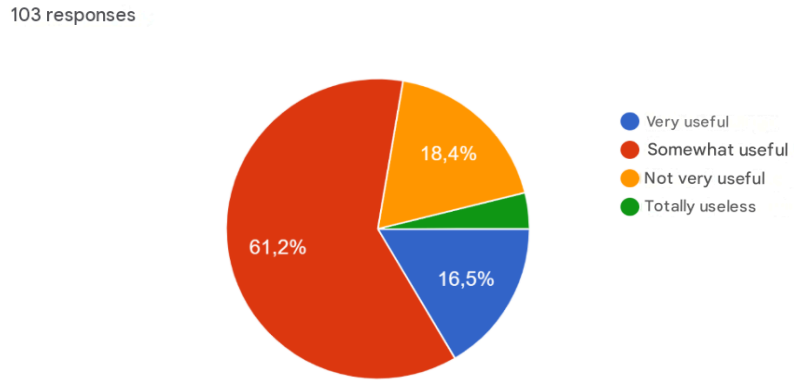


Chart 47. Perceived Usefulness of Civic Education in Italy "If so, how useful was it?"

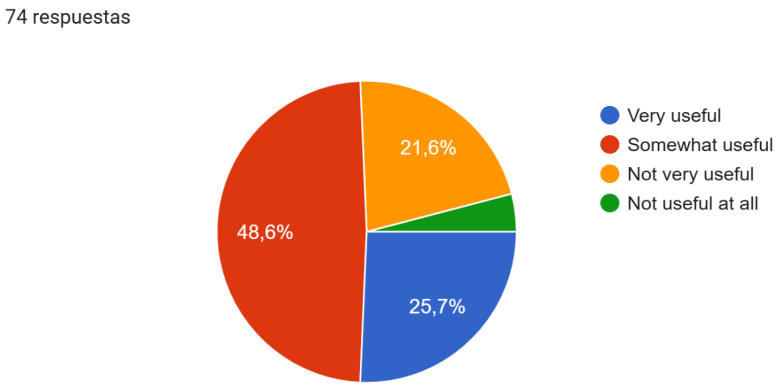
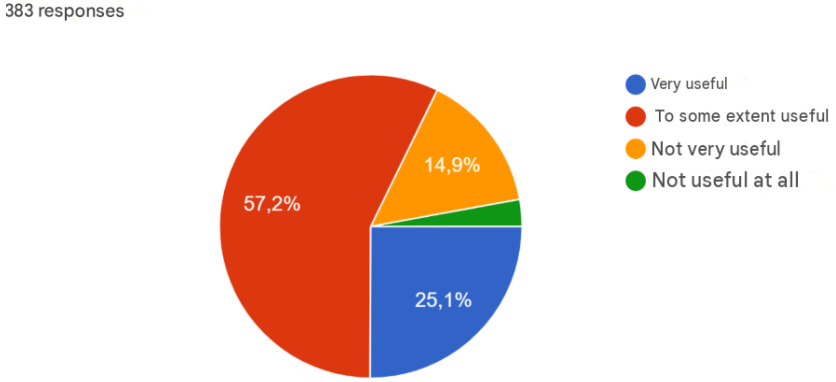
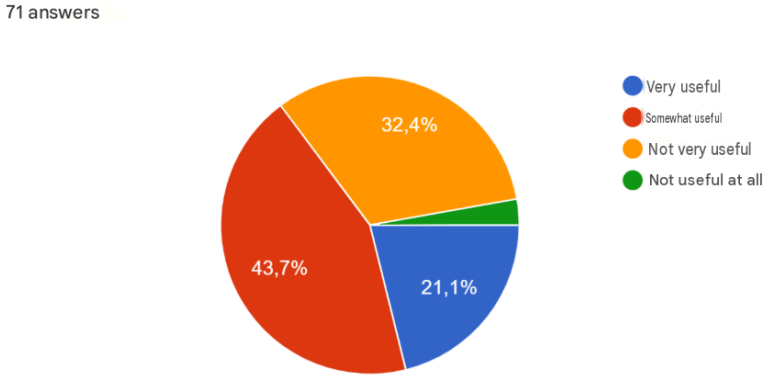


Chart 48. Perceived Usefulness of Civic Education in Spain "If so, how useful was it?"





All charts in this chapter are based on the Survey Reports of the respective participating countries, as indicated in the captions.

7.4. Pedagogical methods

Table 33. Summary of Field Research Findings for Pedagogical Methods by country

Country	Key findings	Barriers identified	Needs detected	Illustrative quotes
Germany	Young people value opportunities to exchange perspectives, test ideas, and apply knowledge in meaningful contexts, while also recognising the importance of guidance and foundational information. Overall, the findings point to the importance of student-centred approaches that connect knowledge with experience, foster active participation, and create inclusive environments for dialogue and learning.	Content-heavy curricula, limited time allocation, assessment requirements, and the emphasis on factual knowledge may reduce opportunities for experiential and participatory learning approaches. Differences in implementation exist across schools, programmes, and educational settings. Access to participatory methods often depends on individual teachers, available resources, or local initiatives. Unequal access to participatory methods across different educational pathways. Teachers are not always trained in participatory methodologies. Larger class sizes may make it more difficult for everyone to contribute.	Content-heavy curricula, limited time allocation, assessment requirements, and the emphasis on factual knowledge may reduce opportunities for experiential and participatory learning approaches. Differences in implementation exist across schools, programmes, and educational settings. Access to participatory methods often depends on individual teachers, available resources, or local initiatives. Unequal access to participatory methods across different educational pathways. Teachers are not always trained in participatory methodologies. Larger class sizes may make it more difficult for everyone to contribute.	"I learn much better when we do something actively, not just sit and listen to theory." "For me, it works best when there is some guidance first, and then we can actively work with the content in groups or discussions." (Focus Group, Germany)
Netherlands	The data confirms that schools rarely use interactive methods. The overall pattern reveals that, although the education system understands the theory of	Educators do not have sufficient time or specialised training to manage active learning formats, such as classroom debates. Teachers often avoid active	Need for active learning formats that regularly include structured debates, public speaking, and interactive simulations. Need for practical media literacy training to learn how	"...it's a lot about theory. It's a lot about, OK, how do these different ways of thinking influence

	active learning, the daily reality in classrooms remains unengaging and strictly traditional. Students show a clear preference for active methodologies, especially structured classroom debates, interactive role-play simulations, and media literacy workshops.	dialogue or open debates because they are concerned about political conflicts or emotional discussions arising among students. High-quality active pedagogical methods are mostly limited to elite academic pathways (VWO), leaving students in vocational education pathways (VMBO) with passive and highly simplified learning activities.	to actively analyse social media algorithms, detect fake news, and identify online political manipulation. Need for professional support for teachers. Need for inclusive teaching styles that adapt to different learning styles and needs.	politics? But it's never about the reality or those kind of things." (Focus Group, Netherlands)
Lithuania	In the survey, practical activities were the most preferred format (81 mentions out of 118), and 63% agreed that they learn best through practice. Focus group participants recalled that projects, simulations, and workshops were much more memorable than classroom teaching, although they noted that these methods remain occasional rather than integrated into everyday teaching. Young people use digital tools daily, but rarely in a structured way for civic learning.	45 respondents (out of 118) agreed and 37 disagreed that teachers encourage active participation. Focus group participants pointed out that they did not always feel free to express honest opinions on sensitive or political issues for fear of being judged by their peers.	There is a need to integrate experiential and project-based learning into routine teaching, rather than treating it as occasional, together with systematic teacher training to facilitate debate and discussion on sensitive topics. Young people want digital tools to be used more intentionally for civic learning rather than purely for entertainment.	"When we did the simulation activity, I actually remembered what I learned – unlike most regular classes." "I don't always say what I really think in debates because I'm worried about what others will say." (Focus Group, Lithuania)

Belgium	Student-centred and participatory methods are encouraged, but their implementation is uneven across the different Member States. By contrast, non-formal education integrates experiential learning, peer education, dialogue, and co-creation more systematically, although its quality still depends on educators' capacities, project design, and the available resources. Young people showed a strong preference for active and practical learning approaches. The most popular format is "learning by doing" through real projects (75.7%), followed by practical workshops (62.9%) and structured discussions/debates (55.7%). Traditional classroom teaching (25.7%) and online formats (7.1%) are the least preferred.	Opportunities to participate in participatory and experiential methods remain unequal. Participatory activities, such as structured debates, are concentrated mainly in educational institutions, leaving fewer opportunities for young people outside formal education. Access depends on the resources and priorities of each educational institution. Overall, the data indicate that the limited availability of experiential civic education, especially outside the school environment, remains the main barrier to developing practical democratic competences.	Integrate student-centred practical approaches much more systematically throughout formal education. Strengthen the quality and consistency of participatory methods in non-formal education by investing in educator training and organisational capacity. Provide more accessible opportunities to practise democratic participation both inside and outside schools. Survey results show that, while 52.9% of respondents feel that they know their rights as citizens, their confidence decreases when it comes to understanding how local government works (31.4%) and, especially, how to submit a proposal or complaint (22.9%). Nearly half (48.6%) stated that they do not know how to use these formal participation mechanisms. 84.3% agree that civic education should focus on developing practical skills rather than only providing theoretical knowledge.	"It is important to learn how to debate as a general skill, so (in debates) I like advocating for the opinion I do not agree with" (Focus Group, Belgium)
Italy	Young people show a very strong preference for interactive, experiential, and project-based learning. Traditional lecture-based	The systemic rigidities of the Italian education system (overcrowded classrooms, an inflexible approach focused on completing extensive ministerial curricula, and strong	Teachers need specific training to effectively facilitate structured debates and manage complex and conflictual classroom discussions. Educational institutions should	"Getting our hands on it, doing it practically, making something practical... you

	teaching is considered unmotivating and highly ineffective for developing civic competences. Interactive digital tools increase equitable participation in group settings.	pressure from standardised testing) severely limit the time and physical space available for participatory and circular learning methods.	integrate practical learning projects (Learning by doing) that directly connect academic theory with solving concrete community problems. 77.3% of surveyed young people prefer practical workshops, and almost half prefer "learning by doing".	manage to learn a bit more." (Focus Group, Italy)
Spain	Young people particularly value practical experiences and express a clear preference for workshops, simulations, and structured debates over traditional teaching methods. However, the implementation of these approaches remains uneven.	Insufficient teacher training, rigid curricula, assessment systems that prioritise measurable academic outcomes over participatory learning, and a lack of resources, time, and institutional support. The implementation of participatory programmes often depends on teachers' motivation, short-term funding, and the available resources.	Young people need consistent access to experiential and participatory learning opportunities. They need learning environments that develop practical civic competences through active participation rather than predominantly theoretical teaching.	"...we always get together a day before Christmas and we make a paella, a couscous, and we're just there, people from different cultures, sharing a really nice time together, playing games with the kids, we do a domino tournament" (Focus Group, Spain)

Table 34. International comparison of Field Research Findings for Pedagogical Methods

Shared European Trends	Cross-National Differences	Remarks
Consensus towards active methodologies: In all six countries, participants express a consistent preference for active and participatory learning methodologies over traditional lecture-based teaching. Workshops, projects, simulations, debates, and experiential activities are repeatedly identified as formats that promote greater learning and engagement.	Although this preference is shared, some countries emphasise specific aspects. In Netherlands and Belgium, structured debates and simulations are particularly highlighted; in Italy and Germany, there is a strong emphasis on combining practice with a theoretical foundation and teacher guidance; in Lithuania, the value of practical activities and the more intentional use of digital tools is underlined; in Spain, participants highlight workshops, simulations, and debates as alternatives to traditional teaching.	The gap between young people's preference for active learning methods and the reality in the classroom is a constant across all the contexts analysed.
Structural integration deficit: Participatory methods (simulations, debates) often depend on individual teachers' initiative or isolated projects, rather than being systematically and compulsorily integrated into the national curriculum.	Teacher training repeatedly emerges as one of the main challenges for facilitating the implementation of participatory methodologies. In some countries, limitations related to curriculum rigidity, lack of time, available resources, or differences between educational pathways are also highlighted.	The findings suggest that expanding participatory methodologies requires changes both in curriculum organisation and in teacher support and training.
Priority given to practical formats: There is agreement in the positive assessment of simulations (role-playing, games), workshops, and structured debates as the most effective tools for developing civic and critical competences.	The thematic emphases are similar, and national differences are limited.	The implementation of innovative methods remains, to a large extent, dependent on the individual motivation of teachers rather than on a clear institutional policy. Participants tend to call for a better balance between the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and

		opportunities to apply it in real learning situations.

All tables represent the researchers own elaboration based on the National Reports from the participating associations.

The learning formats preferred by participants are notably practical formats, especially learning by doing/experiential learning and practical workshops. Formats such as online learning and hybrid learning receive a lower percentage of votes in all countries. Regarding traditional learning methods, participants' evaluations vary. While 44.1% and 39.7% of Lithuanian and German participants, respectively, selected traditional methods as one of their three favourite learning methods, only 22.2% of Italian participants selected them (Charts 25–30).

Chart 49. Learning Method Preferences in Germany “Which learning formats do you prefer?” (Mark maximum 3)

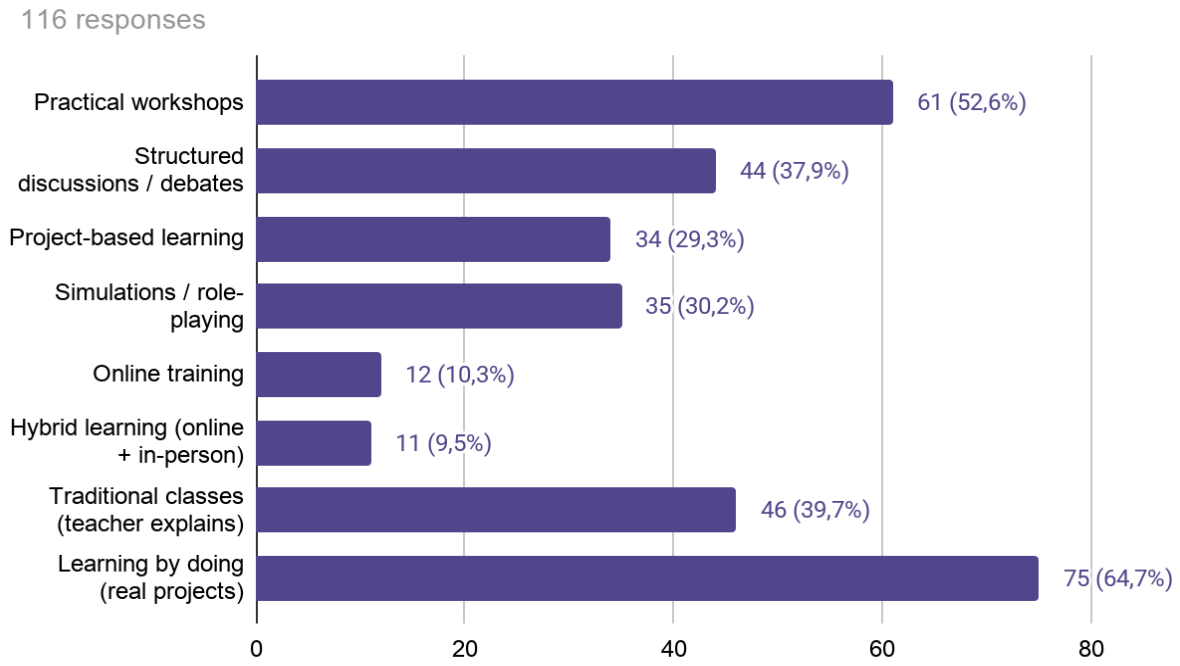


Chart 50. Learning Method Preferences in the Netherlands "Which learning formats do you prefer?" (Mark maximum 3)

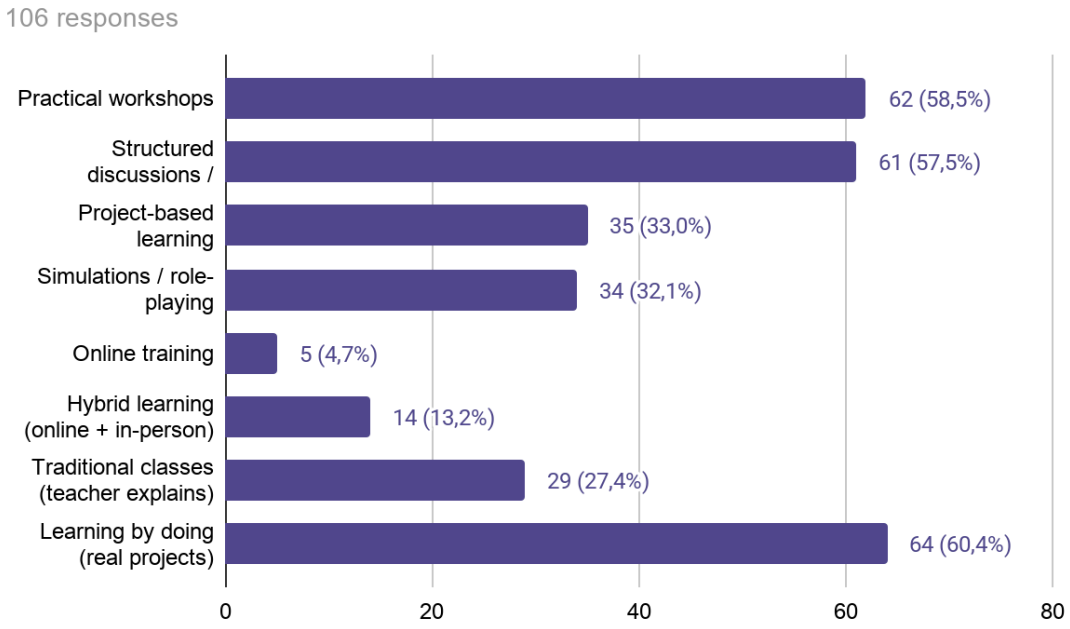


Chart 51. Learning Method Preferences in Lithuania "Which learning formats do you prefer?" (Mark maximum 3)

118 responses

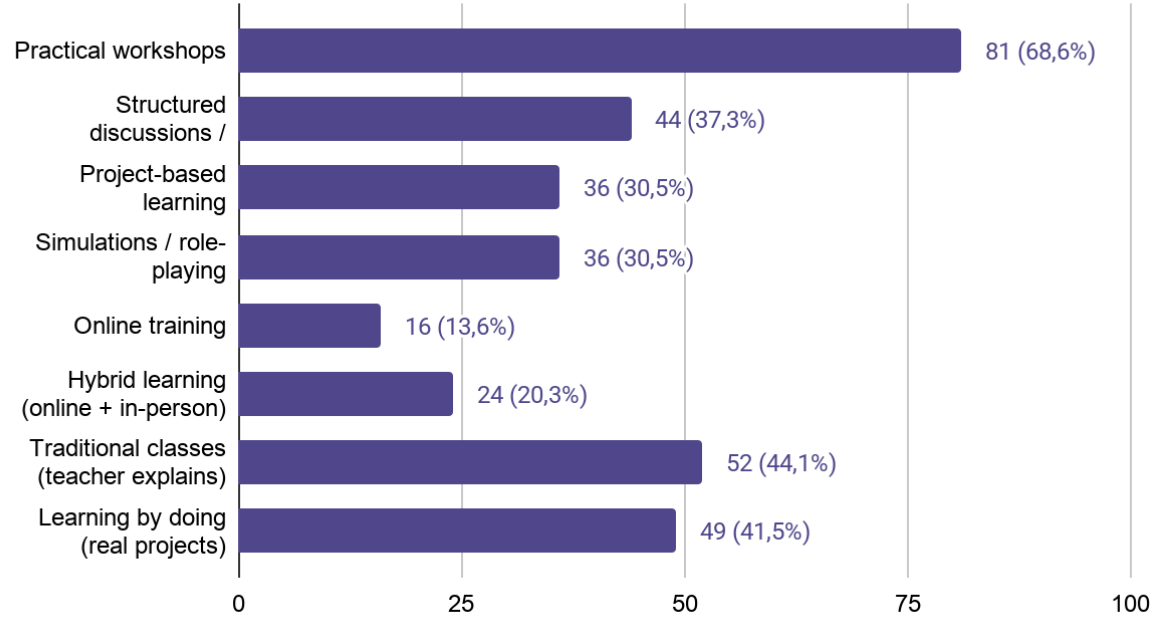


Chart 52. Learning Method Preferences in Belgium "Which learning formats do you prefer?" (Mark maximum 3)

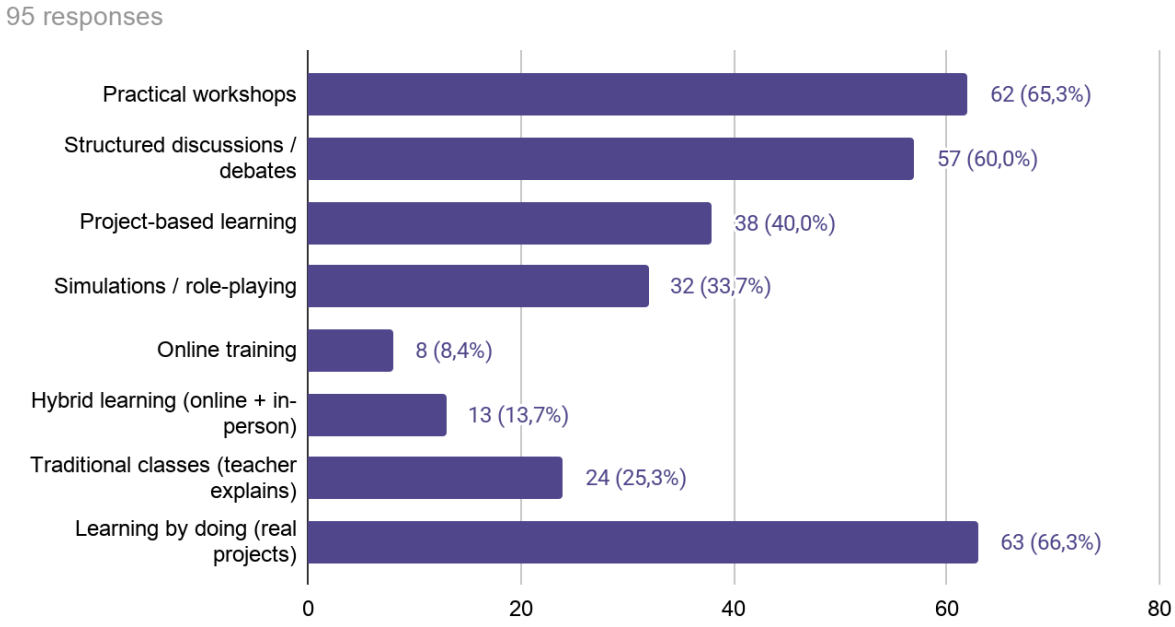


Chart 53. Learning Method Preferences in Italy "Which learning formats do you prefer?" (Mark maximum 3)

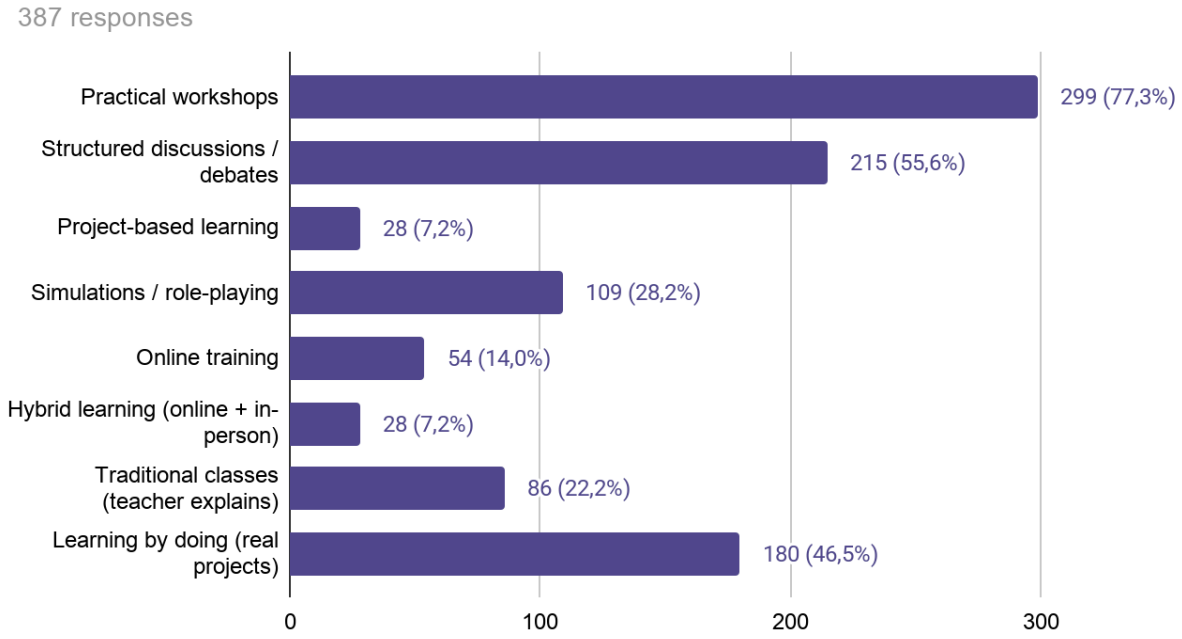
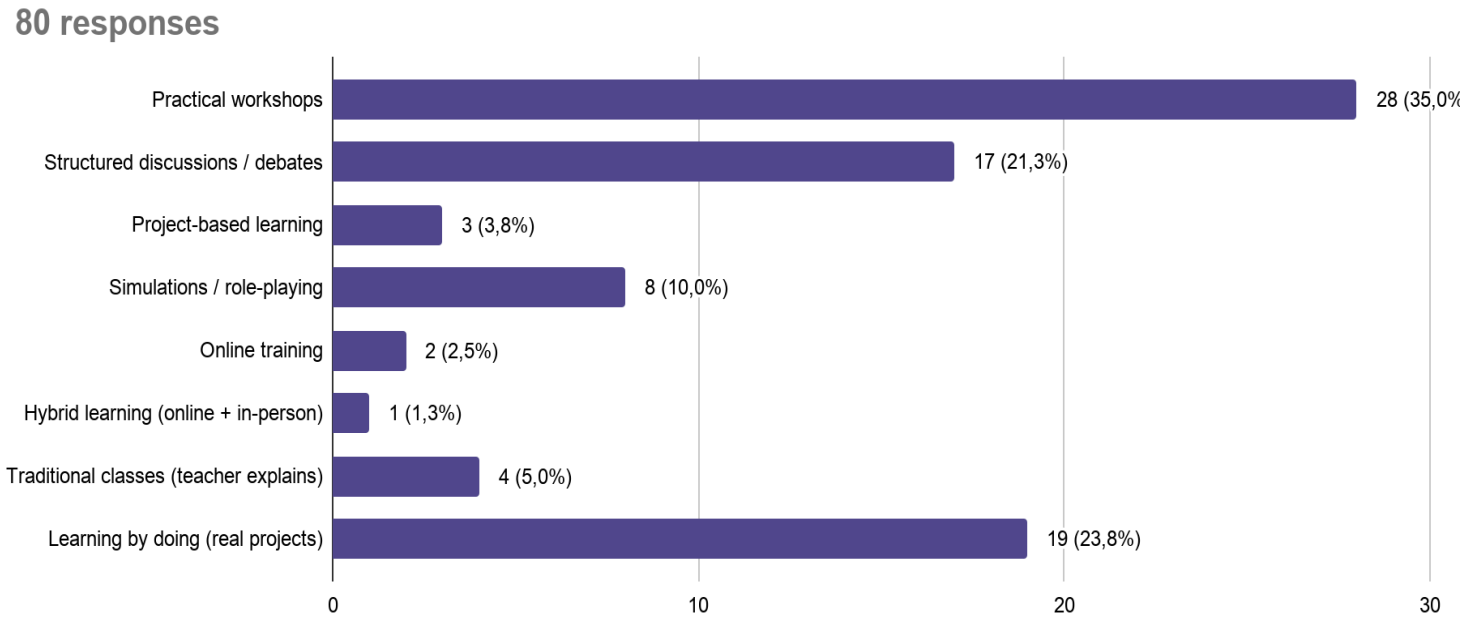


Chart 54. Learning Method Preferences in Spain "Which learning formats do you prefer?" (Mark maximum 3)



All charts in this chapter are based on the Survey Reports of the respective participating countries, as indicated in the captions.

7.5. Structured dialogue

Table 35. Summary of Field Research Findings for Structured Dialogue by country

Country	Key findings	Barriers identified	Needs detected	Illustrative quotes
Germany	Although Germany has a variety of consultation and participation mechanisms, awareness of these opportunities remains limited among many young people. Familiarity with the concept of structured dialogue is generally low, although some participants had encountered similar formats, such as panel discussions, school events with politicians, or other consultation activities. Meaningful dialogue was associated with genuine exchange, active participation, mutual respect, and opportunities for young people to contribute throughout the entire process. Trust in structured dialogue appears to be closely connected to transparency, responsiveness, and the perception that participation can make a difference.	Lack of accessibility, limited awareness of opportunities to access structured dialogue platforms. Young people have little experience interacting directly with decision-makers. Unequal representation of young people in vocational education, from rural areas, with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups. Participants frequently described the processes as excessively formal, highly structured, or limited to one-off events. Insufficient preparation, unclear expectations, and large group settings were also identified as factors that may discourage active participation and limit the quality of dialogue. Many dialogue processes are described as consultative spaces. Young people frequently reported uncertainty about how their contributions are used. Evaluations of existing dialogue mechanisms highlight challenges in their implementation, follow-up, and visible	The ability to influence decisions, rather than participating only in consultative processes with limited impact. Greater transparency regarding how contributions are considered and used. More inclusive and representative participation processes for different groups, with continuous and accessible opportunities. Regular exchange and genuine interaction with decision-makers, and opportunities to engage throughout a process rather than through isolated or one-off consultation activities.	"I've actually never heard of the term 'structured dialogue' before, but I have been in similar formats like panel discussions." "In school we had events with politicians, but it felt quite surface-level and not very deep." (Focus Group, Germany)

		outcomes.		
Netherlands	The overall pattern confirms that, while the Dutch political system excels at inviting young people to the table for public relations purposes, genuine empowerment requires moving from tokenistic consultations to skill-based co-decision partnerships.	The Youth Act requires local authorities to consult young people, but does not legally oblige them to implement or respond to this feedback. Lack of accountability and feedback loops. Formal dialogue spaces are highly elitist, dominated by highly educated and well-connected young people, excluding vulnerable, vocational education, or migrant young people. Dialogue formats use rigid and highly formal political structures that are boring and difficult for the average young person to navigate.	Need for mandatory feedback loops. Shared decision-making power, ensuring that young people's votes carry weight. There is a strong need to move dialogues out of formal government buildings and into young people's natural spaces, such as schools, sports clubs, and community centres. Policymakers and facilitators need specific training to conduct inclusive dialogues.	"...it felt only slightly removed from tokenism... while participants had freedom to shape their participation, the institutional impact of their participation felt doubtful." "They told us what you could do. You can go protest, you can go vote, but they didn't really explain to us how you should organize a protest that actually has an impact... They didn't explain how nor why." (Focus Group, Netherlands)
Lithuania	Awareness and direct experience of structured dialogue are extremely low. Only 2.5% of respondents had ever participated in structured dialogue, and more than 80% had never heard of it or were unsure what it was; 65% rated their knowledge of formal youth	Strong institutional scepticism. 63 of the 118 respondents rated their belief that young people's opinions are taken seriously as low (1–2/5), and focus group participants described consultations as symbolic, "more of a formality than a meaningful process", with very little visible follow-up. The National Evaluation of Mano Europa	Visible and tangible evidence that their contributions lead to real change: in the survey, seeing real changes implemented (76 mentions) and receiving clear feedback on how their ideas were used (71)	"Politicians or decision-makers ask for our opinion, but nothing ever changes, so it is normal that we lose motivation." "If they showed us that something actually

	consultation mechanisms as low (1–2/5). Most focus group participants had little or no knowledge of structured dialogue as a concept, and those with some previous exposure described it as "more presentational than genuinely consultative".	(2025) found an average score of only 2.56/5 regarding whether there are equal opportunities for youth participation in democratic life.	were the main requests for building trust. They need transparent processes, earlier involvement (from the beginning rather than only at the end), and less bureaucratic language. 52% of respondents stated that they would participate if they knew that their voice would be heard.	changed because of what we said, maybe we'd believe that our voice and opinions really matter." (Focus Group, Lithuania)
Belgium	The findings from the field research conducted in Belgium confirm that participation in structured dialogue remains low, as many respondents are unaware of these opportunities or are unclear about how they work. Although trust in these mechanisms is only moderate, young people express a clear willingness to participate if they believe that their contributions will genuinely influence decisions.	Focus group participants were sceptical that consultations lead to real change. Survey findings indicate low awareness and limited participation in structured dialogue, together with moderate trust in the effectiveness of formal consultation processes. Young people rarely receive clear information about how their recommendations influence political decisions, weakening trust and reducing long-term engagement. Unequal access to participation. Structured dialogue mechanisms still depend heavily on organised youth structures and require resources, institutional contacts, language skills, or digital competences to which not everyone has equal access. Participation tends to favour young people who are already engaged,	Transparency and meaningful follow-up emerged as essential conditions for fostering trust in youth participation. Young people highlighted the importance of receiving clear feedback on how their contributions are used, seeing tangible outcomes from their participation, and being informed when proposals cannot be implemented. They also emphasised the value of participating from the earliest stages of decision-making and having transparent and accessible processes.	"Unfortunately, these are useful until a certain point, because what is said in those occasions risks getting lost and remaining mainly symbolic." (Focus Group Belgium) "In reality, it often seems like it is done by politicians or officials only to "show" that they are taking the issues of young people seriously without actually changing/doing

		while those from disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds remain less likely to be included.		anything" (Focus Group Belgium)
Italy	Structured dialogue mechanisms are generally perceived as "performative tokenism" (superficial symbolic participa-tion with little or no impact). Awareness of formal consultation channels is extremely low, and trust in their effectiveness is virtually non-existent. However, young people show a strong conditional willingness to participate if real impact can be guaranteed.	The main obstacle is institutional opacity and the monopolisation of the power to set the political agenda/the issues that are discussed. Complex bureaucratic procedures, extremely slow legislative cycles, and the complete absence of formalised feedback mechanisms convince young people that their participation is merely symbolic.	Institutions must reform opinion-gathering mechanisms to ensure transparency. Young people demand direct representation and insist on participating in the design of projects, rather than being limited to consultation on already predetermined outcomes.	"They don't ask for young people's opinions. I think I would have to see the Madonna with my own eyes to believe that participation can lead to real changes because for now they are not letting us participate." (Focus Group, Italy)
Spain	Structured dialogue and participatory education are widely institutionalised, but remain largely consultative rather than based on co-decision. Mechanisms such as youth councils and project-based learning integrate civic participation into curricula, but they often depend on educational institutions and motivated teachers, limiting their consistency and scalability.	Limited feedback and transparency regarding how young people's contributions influence decision-making reduce their trust and engagement. Their participation is usually consultative, and institutions set the agendas. Bureaucratic complexity and formal language reduce accessibility, especially for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.	Genuine co-decision, in which young people participate in setting the agenda and designing policies. Institutions must have systematic and transparent feedback mechanisms explaining how proposals are used.	“I would say it’s helplessness, but it’s not even helplessness anymore, you know? It’s more like sadness, saying, why do you come here? Why do you paint this picture for me if in the end you don't give it to me? And in the end, as a person, you get angry at yourself because you say, in the end I am—I'm still a

				person, you know? And they have played with the feelings of children, of teenagers, and of people who fight day in and day out to be given certain opportunities and rights that belong to us because we are still people, and yet, we don't—we don't have those rights" (Focus Group, Spain)

Table 36. International comparison of Field Research findings for Structured Dialogue

Shared European Trends	Cross-National Differences	Remarks
Disconnect between consultation and impact: A cross-cutting perception of participation as "tokenism" (superficial symbolic participation), where opinions are requested but no binding influence or genuine feedback is provided.	Germany has a greater diversity of formal participation structures, although participants describe them as rigid and excessively structured. In the Netherlands, there is a call to move dialogue processes into everyday spaces frequented by young people, such as schools, sports clubs, or community centres.	The gap between being consulted and being able to visibly influence decisions emerges as one of the main factors associated with distrust towards these mechanisms.
Low awareness and scepticism: Widespread lack of awareness of the technical term	Lithuania presents the lowest level of technical awareness (only 2.5% participation). Italy	The findings suggest that the lack of information and evidence regarding the impact

Shared European Trends	Cross-National Differences	Remarks
"Structured Dialogue" and low confidence in the effectiveness of institutional channels.	describes a high level of opacity in consultation processes.	of participation contributes to reducing motivation to engage in these processes.
Access barriers and opacity: Difficulties in accessing mechanisms due to bureaucratic language, complex procedures, closed agendas, and a lack of transparency regarding how proposals are used generate the exclusion or underrepresentation of young people from certain backgrounds.	The barriers take different forms depending on the context: Germany highlights the underrepresentation of young people from rural areas and young people with disabilities within vocational education; Netherlands emphasises the elitist nature of dialogue spaces; Spain points to bureaucratic complexity and the limited ability of young people to influence the definition of political agendas.	There is broad consensus on the need for more transparent, accessible, and inclusive processes, accompanied by clear feedback mechanisms and earlier involvement of young people in policy design.

All tables in this chapter are based on the National Reports of the participating countries.

There are differences in participants' awareness of structured dialogue processes across countries. In countries such as Germany, Lithuania, Italy, and Spain, a considerable majority either reported that they do not know what structured dialogue is (42.2%, 30.5%, 33.9%, and 40%, respectively), or that they are not sure what the term refers to (37.1%, 50.8%, 40.1%, and 40%, respectively, in the same countries). In Netherlands and Belgium, a higher percentage of the sample indicated that they had heard of structured dialogue, and these two countries also have a higher percentage of participants who reported having participated in structured dialogue processes (37.7% and 22.1%, respectively) (Charts 31–36).

Chart 55. Awareness of Structured Dialogue or Similar Youth Consultation Processes in Germany "Have you heard of "structured dialogue" or similar youth consultation processes"

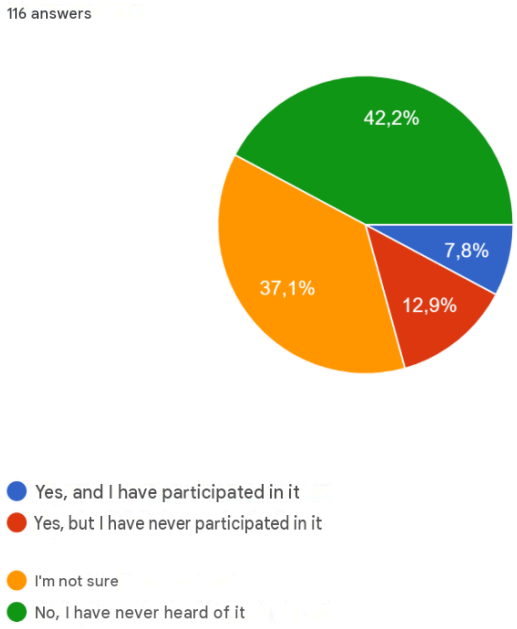


Chart 56. Awareness of Structured Dialogue or Similar Youth Consultation Processes in the Netherlands "Have you heard of "structured dialogue" or similar youth consultation processes"

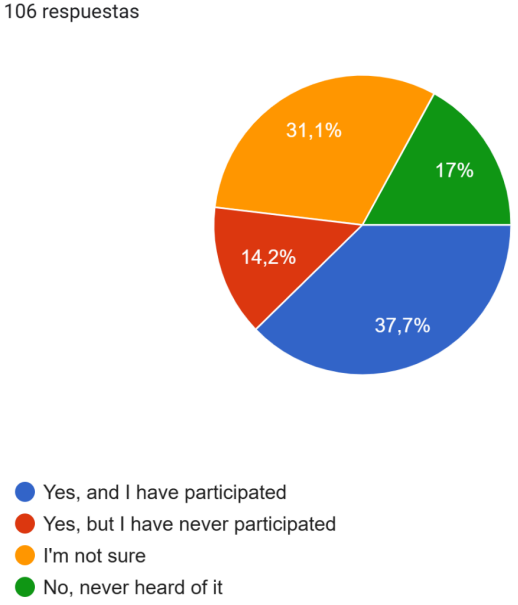


Chart 57. Awareness of Structured Dialogue or Similar Youth Consultation Processes in Lithuania "Have you heard of "structured dialogue" or similar youth consultation processes"

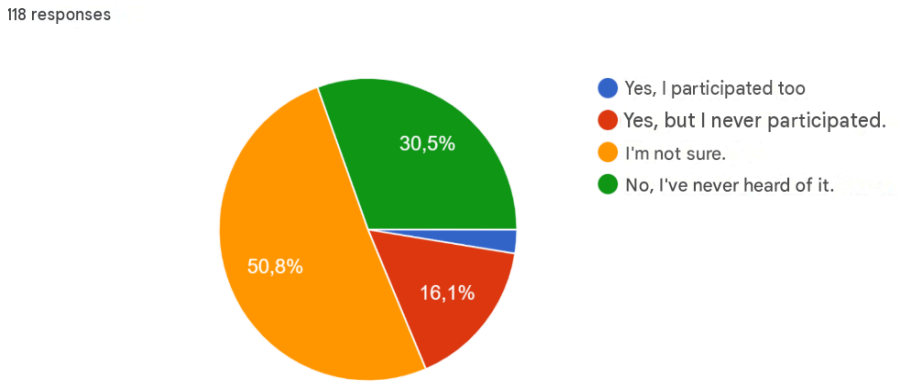


Chart 58. Awareness of Structured Dialogue or Similar Youth Consultation Processes in Belgium "Have you heard of "structured dialogue" or similar youth consultation processes"

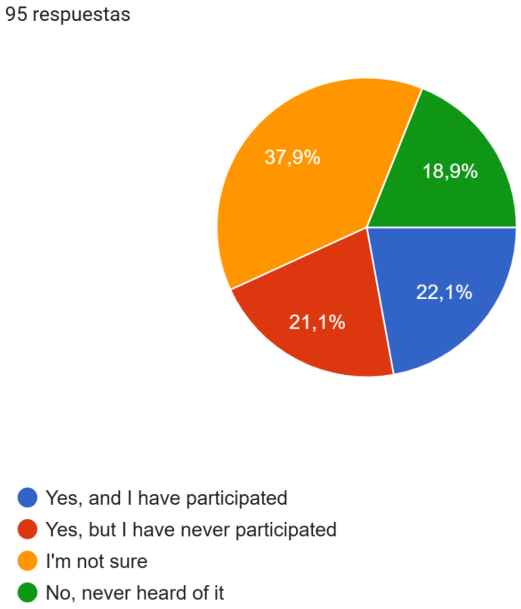
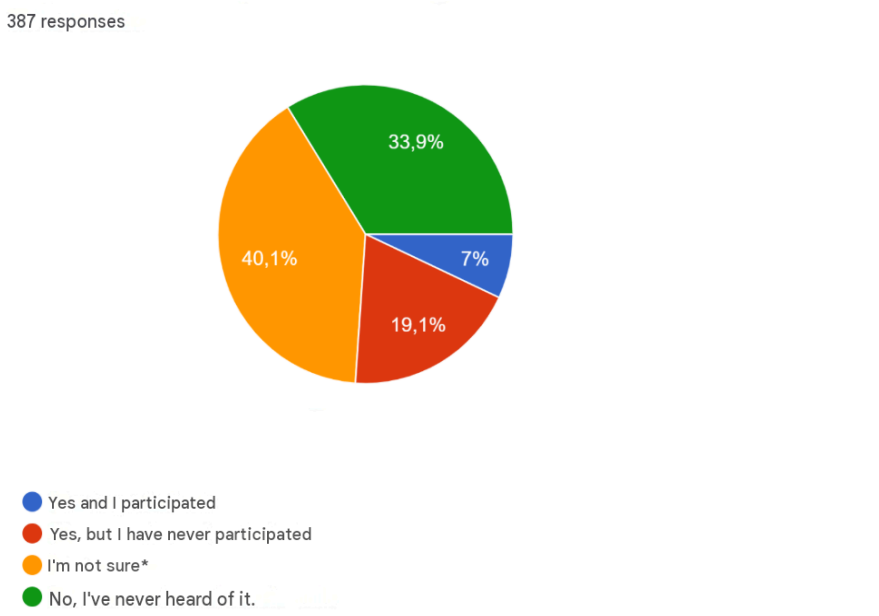
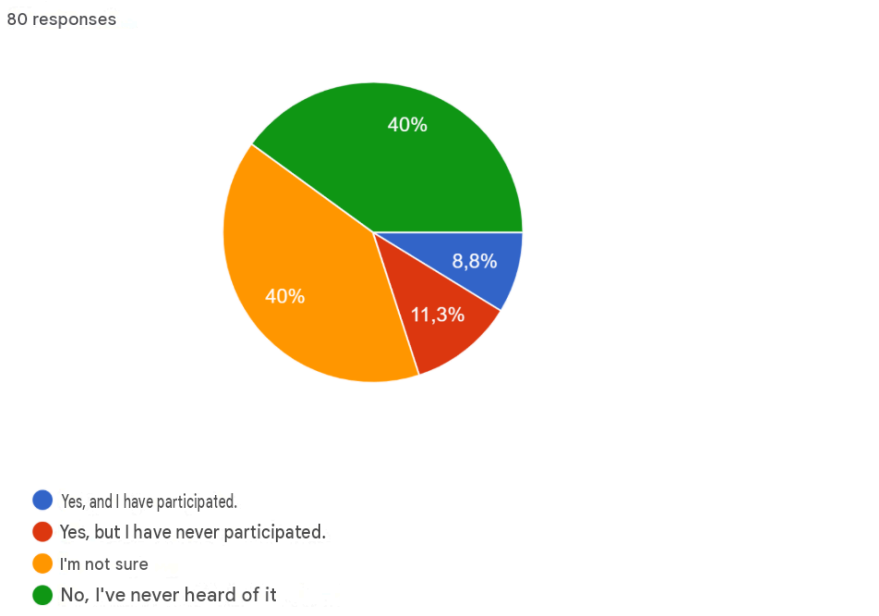


Chart 59. Awareness of Structured Dialogue or Similar Youth Consultation Processes in Italy "Have you heard of "structured dialogue" or similar youth consultation processes"

Chart 60. Awareness of Structured Dialogue or Similar Youth Consultation Processes in Spain "Have you heard of "structured dialogue" or similar youth consultation processes"





All charts were prepared by the authors based on Survey Reports from the participating associations.

7.6. Media literacy

Table 37. Summary of Field Research Findings for Media Literacy by country

Country	Key findings	Barriers identified	Needs detected	Illustrative quotes

Germany	75.7% understand how algorithms influence the content they see, and 62.9% feel able to verify whether a news story is accurate before sharing it. The majority of respondents (62.9%) do not believe they have unknowingly shared fake news. The research also highlights the widespread presence of misinformation, toxic online interactions, and cyberbullying. Although many young people report feeling confident in verifying information and recognising unreliable content, both desk research and field research indicate that rapidly evolving digital environments pose ongoing challenges, particularly regarding algorithms, AI-generated content, deepfakes, and manipulated media.	There are significant differences in digital skills, critical evaluation capacity, and access to training, with socioeconomic factors, educational level, and geographical location continuing to influence learning opportunities and outcomes. There is uneven implementation across educational settings, gaps in teacher preparedness, and difficulties in keeping curricula aligned with rapidly evolving digital technologies. Exposure to misinformation, cyberbullying, and hostile online interactions is common (48.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had witnessed toxic online debates or cyberbullying) and may discourage participation, expression, and engagement in digital spaces.	Stronger skills to evaluate information and recognise misinformation. Prepared educators, youth workers, and organisations are needed. Respondents identified digital rights and privacy (69.8%), identifying fake news and deepfakes (44.8%), creating content responsibly (34.5%), fact-checking (31.9%), and understanding how algorithms work (28.5%) among the media literacy topics they would most like to learn about. Need for media literacy opportunities that are accessible to all young people.	"I mostly get information through social media or platforms like YouTube and podcasts rather than traditional newspapers." "There are also a lot of posts that are meant for clicks or humor, but sometimes you can't really tell what is real anymore." (Focus Group, Germany
Netherlands	The research highlights a significant gap between how young people use technology and how well they understand it. Many young people admit having believed fake news or AI-generated political images before realising they were false.	The digital democracy gap: young people who lack strong language skills, adequate devices, or reliable internet access are disconnected from digital civic spaces. News is consumed largely through automated social media sources.	They need concrete tools to evaluate sources, detect propaganda patterns, and recognise AI-generated content. Safe digital environments where young people can express themselves without fear. Students need structured support to	"...people on the internet just love to hate and ruin other people's lives... she posted a video. It wasn't even a big deal or anything but like some teenage boys

	Although the Netherlands has a strong educational framework for media literacy, access to these programmes remains unequal. Furthermore, young people are aware of their own biases, admitting that they are mainly critical of content they already disagree with.	This constant flow of information makes in-depth critical analysis uncommon. Fear of public online expression: young people choose to maintain their privacy due to strong fears of severe online hate, digital footprints, and negative reactions from future employers or teachers.	recognise their own confirmation bias. They need to learn to analyse media objectively, even when information challenges their personal or political beliefs. Need for equitable skills training to bridge the digital divide between different social groups.	just contacted her parents and there was like a whole scandal. And I think that's also like a reason why people don't want to put themselves out there." (Focus Group, Netherlands)
Lithuania	Young people are intensive daily users of social media (45% spend 3–5 hours per day, and 19% more than 5 hours). Digital platforms are central to their information diet. Self-assessed media literacy is mixed: 68 of the 118 respondents gave a high rating (4–5/5) to their ability to verify news; however, 69% had witnessed toxic online debates or cyberbullying, and only 37% strongly agreed that they understood how algorithms shape what they see. Focus group participants confirmed regular exposure to misinformation and inconsistent fact-checking habits, with some cross-checking sources while others rarely verified content.	The reach of training is unequal: 47% of respondents received training on fake news at school, but 27% had not received it and would like to. Focus group participants linked frequent exposure to misinformation with insufficiently developed critical digital awareness, particularly regarding algorithmic personalisation.	The priority learning needs are identifying fake news and deepfakes (66 mentions), digital rights and privacy (65), fact-checking (54), and understanding how algorithms work (53). There is a clear need to expand training beyond the approximately half of young people currently reached through schools, to address emerging formats (deepfakes, AI-generated content, manipulated videos), and to develop skills for respectful and less toxic online discussion.	"Online discussions about politics get really aggressive really fast, it's hard to have a normal conversation." "We use social media every day but no one has ever taught us how to tell if something is true or not – the only way we know is to check multiple sources." "I know I see certain things more than others but I'm not really sure why."

				(Focus Group, Lithuania)
Belgium	The findings show that social media occupies a central place in young people's everyday lives; however, access to media literacy training remains unequal, and many young people continue to want more opportunities to develop these skills.	Access to training remains unequal, leaving many young people without opportunities to develop essential skills despite their clear interest in doing so. Media literacy provision also focuses more on critical consumption than on active digital participation, limiting confidence in creating content or participating in online civic debate. Participants indicated that they relied mainly on curated social media feeds and trusted sources rather than systematic fact-checking. Furthermore, the prevalence of cyberbullying, toxic online debates, and misinformation creates a digital environment that may discourage active participation and make it difficult for young people to participate confidently and safely in digital spaces.	The majority of respondents (75.7%) have received some form of training on how to identify fake news, either at school (45.7%) or through non-formal learning opportunities outside school (30.0%). 20.0% of respondents have not received such training but would like to, demonstrating continued demand for stronger media literacy education. Only 4.3% reported no interest in receiving this type of training. The most requested topics were identifying fake news and deepfakes (70.0%), followed closely by digital rights and privacy (67.1%). More than half of respondents would also like to improve their ability to verify information (55.7%) and understand how algorithms work (51.4%). Topics related to active online participation received less attention, with 25.7% interested in creating content responsibly and 20.0% in engaging respectfully in online debates. Focus group participants reported understanding how algorithms	"Regarding toxic debates, she has seen many, they are all over the Internet. X is the worst, but every platform has them." "I have not shared a fake news story because I check the sources first, but maybe it happened with fun facts, or gossip about celebrities." (Focus Group Belgium)

			shape their online experience and managing their feeds by following trusted sources rather than relying on systematic fact-checking. Although some create civic or political content in professional settings, they are generally reluctant to do so on their personal social media accounts.	
Italy	Young people are highly aware of algorithmic manipulation and filter bubbles, but consider rigorous verification of online information to be an exhausting effort. Due to the high prevalence of toxic debates and online harassment, many actively avoid political discussions on social media.	Algorithmic opacity traps users in echo chambers, polarising debate. In educational institutions, teachers often lack the advanced technical training needed to educate students about rapidly evolving digital media, leaving current curricula dangerously outdated.	More than half of the surveyed young people urgently call for updated curricula that go beyond basic internet safety to address how algorithms work, digital privacy rights, ethical digital content creation, and advanced strategies for identifying sophisticated manipulation technologies such as deepfakes.	"It takes two days because you have to check all the infor-mation you put online to avoid spreading false information. It is very, very heavy to make content of this type." (Focus Group, Italy)
Spain	High exposure of young people to social media, frequent contact with harmful content, and a partial understanding of algorithms are identified. Although many young people report having received some training in identifying fake news and show strong interest in	Digital and media literacy training differs across educational institutions, depending on teachers' capacity and available resources. Media education rarely focuses on deeper critical analysis of media systems, algorithms, and disinformation structures. The	More comprehensive and up-to-date training on emerging risks, such as deepfakes, AI-generated content, and digital manipulation, is needed.	“Sure, and if you hit 'like,' even more so. They don't stop popping up... because they're going to keep you hooked watching videos on that same topic or related things because they

	continuing their education, especially regarding digital rights, privacy, and deepfakes, their knowledge remains uneven. Overall, initiatives are inconsistent in terms of their scope and depth.	treatment of emerging threats such as deepfakes and AI-generated content remains inconsistent. There is a gap between curriculum objectives and actual classroom practice. Many initiatives are linked to specific projects and are delivered in a fragmented and reactive manner (responding to already identified needs rather than preventing them).		know you'll be watching it, watching it. And in the end, it feels like that's the only thing out there." "That's wild. Those comments are wild." (Focus Group, Spain)

Table 38. International comparison of Field Research findings for Media Literacy

Shared European Trends	Cross-National Differences	Remarks
Media literacy gap and challenges: There is a cross-cutting gap between the high use of social media and the challenges that young people identify in critically evaluating online information. Although many express confidence in their ability to verify content, the findings show frequent exposure to misinformation and a widespread interest in strengthening their knowledge about fake news, algorithms, AI, and deepfakes.	In Italy, young people specifically emphasised that verifying information requires a significant personal effort.	Media literacy appears to require moving beyond the basic detection of fake news towards a broader understanding of how algorithms, AI, and disinformation processes work.
Hostile digital environments: There is consensus regarding recurrent exposure to toxicity, cyberbullying, and misinformation in digital spaces, factors that participants associate with a lower willingness to participate in online debates.	The perceived impact varies across countries: while in Italy some participants describe a voluntary withdrawal from political debates on social media, in the Netherlands the fear of the consequences of digital footprints and possible	The findings suggest that promoting safe digital participation requires combining critical competences with environments that reduce the

	academic or professional repercussions resulting from public online exposure is emphasised.	perceived risk associated with public expression.
Structural inequality in training: Media literacy is implemented in a fragmented manner, often depending on teachers' initiative, the availability of school resources, or specific projects, rather than being a standard curricular policy.	The educational gap is intensified by the academic pathway; in the Netherlands, for example, there is a clear quality divide between vocational and academic education.	There is a shared demand for training in digital rights, privacy, and protection against emerging technologies (AI), areas that participants consider insufficiently developed in their current education.

All tables in this chapter are based on the National Reports of the participating countries.

Most participants indicated that they know how algorithms shape the content they see on social media in all countries, although in countries such as Spain and Netherlands there is a higher concentration of participants who indicated that they strongly agree with this statement.

Regarding whether they felt capable of verifying information before sharing it, in countries such as Germany and Netherlands, the majority indicated that they strongly agree (5), whereas in the remaining countries the responses are more dispersed between levels 3, 4, and 5 on the Likert scale (from 1 to 5). In Italy, a higher number of participants selected "disagree" (2) compared to the other countries.

The majority of participants in all countries indicated that they strongly disagree (1) or disagree (2) with the statement that they have unknowingly shared fake news, although a considerable proportion selected neither agree nor disagree (3).

Regarding whether they feel confident creating content about social issues, in Spain the majority of participants indicated that they disagree (2), while in the remaining countries the most common response was neither agree nor disagree (3). Overall, participants tended to disagree or remain neutral regarding this statement across all countries.

In the Netherlands, Lithuania, Belgium, and Spain, a very substantial majority indicated that they strongly agree (5) that they have witnessed toxic online debates or cyberbullying. In Germany and Italy, the responses are more dispersed, with a considerable proportion of participants stating that they had not witnessed this type of content (Charts 37–42).

Chart 61. Level of Agreement with Media Literacy Statements in Germany

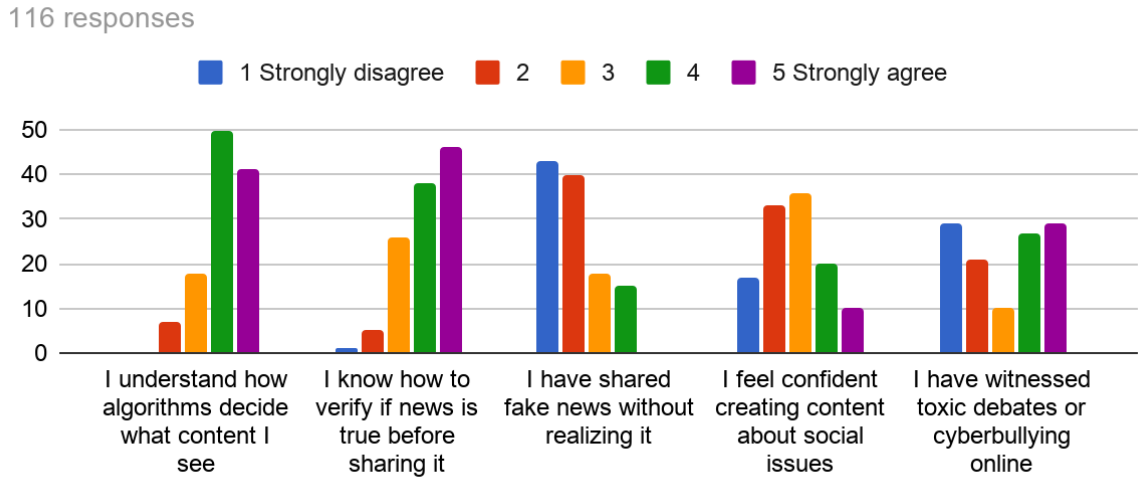


Chart 62. Level of Agreement with Media Literacy Statements in the Netherlands

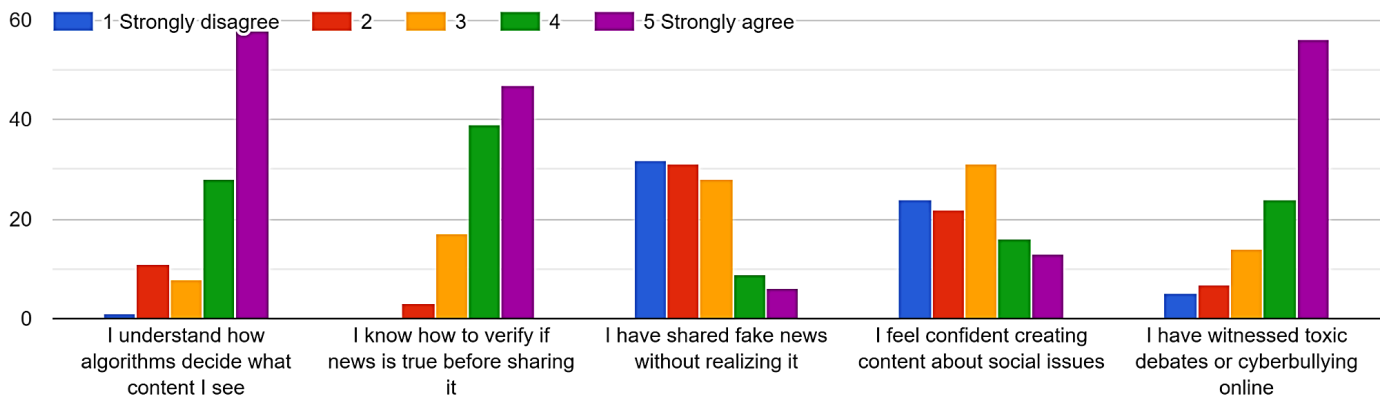


Chart 63. Level of Agreement with Media Literacy Statements in Lithuania

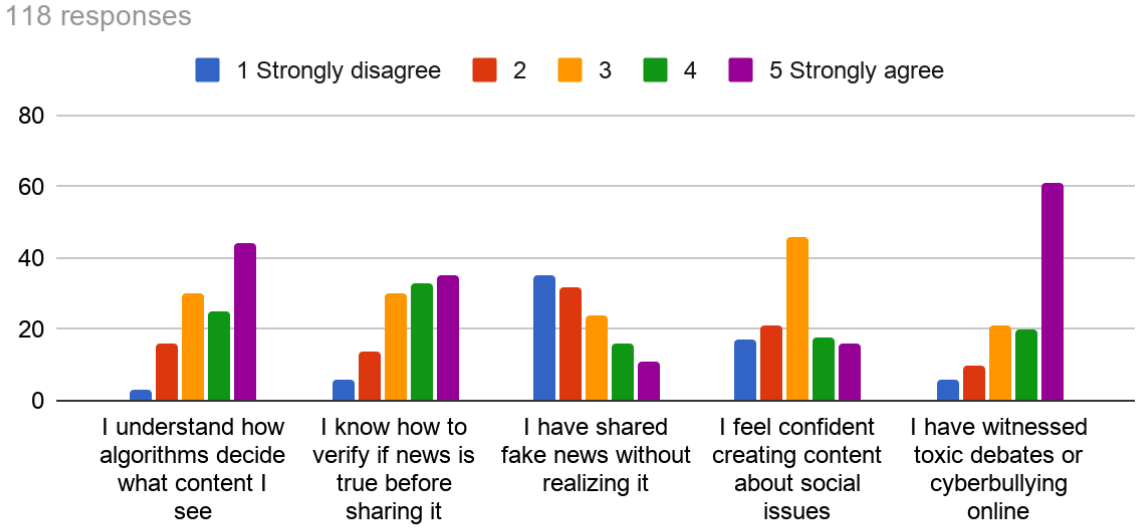


Chart 64. Level of Agreement with Media Literacy Statements in Belgium

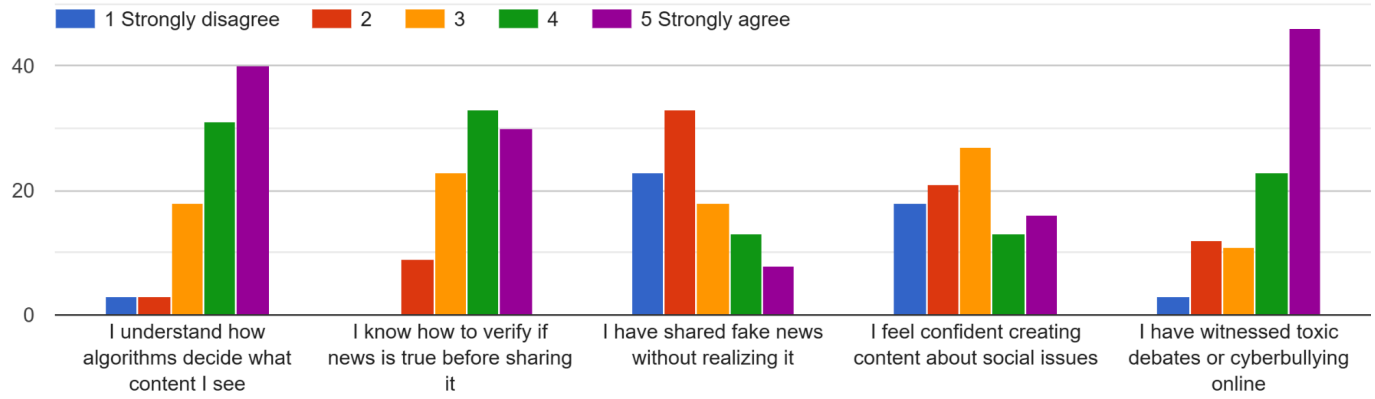


Chart 65. Level of Agreement with Media Literacy Statements in Italy

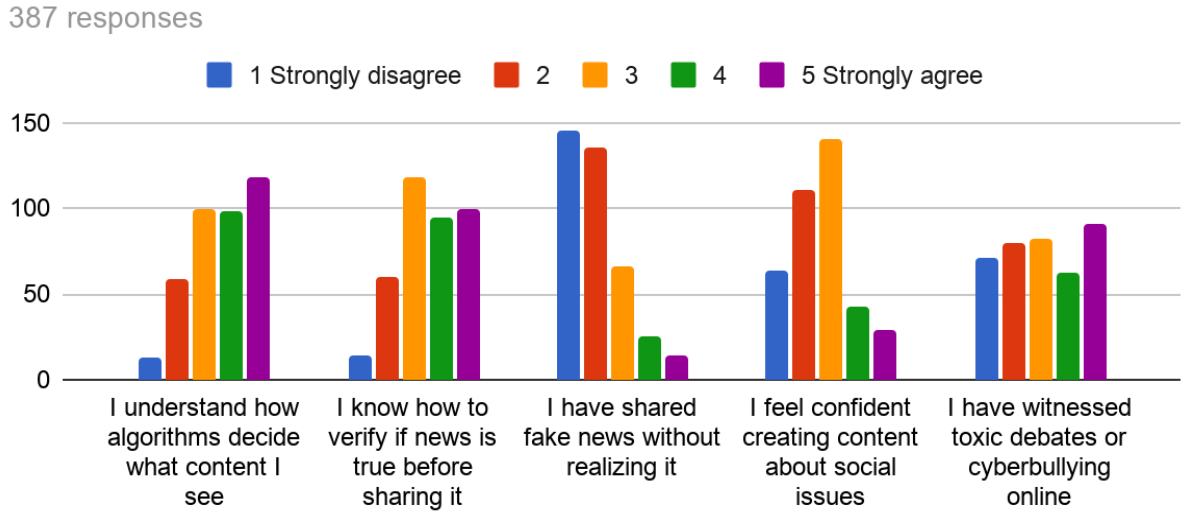
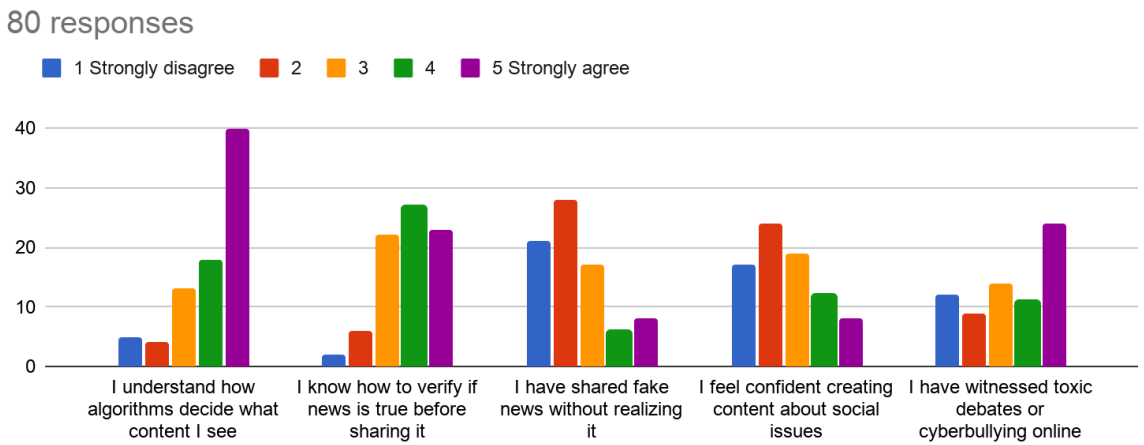


Chart 66. Level of Agreement with Media Literacy Statements in Spain



All charts are based on Survey Reports from the participating organisations.

7.7. Field research synthesis of the comparative European context

The comparative analysis of the six dimensions examined reveals a high degree of convergence across the participating countries. Although the institutional, educational, and political contexts present relevant differences, the findings show that the main challenges identified by young people are widely shared and affect different dimensions of their democratic participation.

Youth participation

The research provides evidence of a widespread willingness to engage in civic life, which is nevertheless channeled primarily through informal forms of participation, such as volunteering, community initiatives, or social movements. In Lithuania, for example, 53% of surveyed young people reported participating in volunteering activities, while in Belgium this form of participation reached 52.1%, well above participation in youth councils (15.1%) or public consultations (16.4%) in the same country. In Germany, participation is also concentrated in youth organisations (36.2%) and volunteering (31%), while in Spain social movements (24%) and volunteering (20%) represent the main forms of engagement.

However, this willingness coexists with a widely shared perception of having little influence over decision-making. Focus groups frequently described participatory processes as mechanisms that are essentially consultative, with limited capacity to generate visible change. In Belgium, one participant stated: "Tokenism is reinforced by the fact that students have no voting rights in higher committees, which means they cannot really have a direct impact" (Focus Group, Belgium). Similarly, in Germany several young people pointed out that "Many young people want to have a say, but often have limited real influence on final decisions" (Focus Group, Germany), while in Spain some participants expressed that institutional initiatives ultimately became "empty promises" (Focus Group, Spain).

The quantitative findings reinforce this interpretation. In Germany, 74.1% of respondents identified the visible implementation of changes as the main factor for increasing trust in participatory processes, followed by receiving clear feedback on how their contributions had been used (50%). In Lithuania, the most frequent demands were likewise seeing real changes implemented (76 mentions) and receiving information on how their proposals had been used (71 mentions). Overall, the findings suggest that the main challenge does not lie in increasing young people's motivation, but rather in strengthening the credibility and influence of existing participation mechanisms.

Intercultural dialogue

Across the six countries analysed, a generally positive attitude towards cultural diversity is observed, although this coexists with frequent experiences of discrimination, prejudice,

and polarisation. Intercultural contact appears to be primarily linked to educational settings or specific projects rather than being integrated into everyday life.

In Lithuania, participants indicated that most of their intercultural experiences took place exclusively within the school environment (Focus Group, Lithuania), reflecting the limited opportunities for everyday interaction. In Spain and the Netherlands, concerns related to political polarisation and the spread of hate speech emerged more frequently (Focus Group, Spain; Focus Group, The Netherlands), while in Germany and Italy references were made to everyday forms of discrimination and the normalisation of certain prejudices (Focus Group, Germany; Focus Group, Italy). Belgium, meanwhile, highlighted the need to create permanent meeting spaces where diversity can be experienced beyond one-off activities (Focus Group, Belgium).

The findings therefore point to a shared demand for safe, inclusive, and sustainable spaces that promote ongoing intercultural dialogue and reduce the linguistic, social, and administrative barriers that hinder the participation of certain groups.

Civic education

The comparison reveals a high level of dissatisfaction with the predominant approaches to civic education. Participants consider that education continues to focus on transmitting knowledge about political institutions without providing sufficient tools for active participation in democratic life.

This perception is reflected across several focus groups. In Germany, one participant stated: "At school, I never really learned about opportunities to get involved" (Focus Group, Germany). In the Netherlands, another young person commented: "They told us what you could do. You can go protest, you can go vote, but they didn't really explain how you should organize a protest that actually has an impact" (Focus Group, The Netherlands). In Italy, the idea also emerged that much civic learning had to be undertaken independently: "When I held the electoral ballot in my hand for the first time, I didn't know anything and so I did my own research. It was an entirely autonomous process" (Focus Group, Italy). Likewise, in Spain several participants questioned the ability of civic education to genuinely prepare young people for democratic participation (Focus Group, Spain).

Although implementation differs across countries, the findings consistently demonstrate a demand for more applied content, closer to everyday realities, and oriented towards developing practical competences for active citizenship.

Pedagogical methods

This need is closely linked to the findings on pedagogical methods. In all participating countries, young people express a clear preference for active, collaborative, and

experiential methodologies over approaches based exclusively on lectures or theoretical content.

The quantitative data support this trend. In Germany, 91% of participants reported preferring practical methodologies over exclusively theoretical approaches, a figure that reached 81% in Lithuania. Simulations, debates, case studies, project-based learning, and collaborative activities were consistently identified as the most useful strategies for developing democratic competences. Participants agreed that learning through real-life experiences promotes a better understanding of democratic processes and increases motivation to engage in public life (Focus Group, Germany; Focus Group, Lithuania; Focus Group, Belgium).

However, the focus groups also show that these methodologies continue to depend largely on individual teachers' initiative or on specific projects, creating significant differences between educational institutions and limiting their systematic integration into national curricula.

Structured dialogue

Awareness of structured dialogue as a specific participation mechanism remains limited in most participating countries. In Lithuania, only 2.5% of respondents had previously participated in this type of process, and more than 80% reported being unfamiliar with the concept. In Germany, one participant admitted: "I've actually never heard of the term 'structured dialogue' before, but I have been in similar formats" (Focus Group, Germany).

When young people had participated in institutional consultations, their assessment of the impact was predominantly critical. In Belgium, participants stated that young people's contributions "risk getting lost and remaining mainly symbolic" (Focus Group, Belgium), while in Italy some participants expressed deep scepticism regarding the possibility of genuinely influencing decisions: "They don't ask for young people's opinions. I think I would have to see Madonna with my own eyes to believe that participation can lead to real changes" (Focus Group, Italy). In the Netherlands, a similar perception emerged, with some participants considering that the processes were "only slightly removed from tokenism" (Focus Group, The Netherlands).

Overall, the findings show that transparency, feedback on how proposals are used, and the opportunity to participate from the earliest stages of decision-making processes are regarded as fundamental elements for strengthening trust in these mechanisms.

Media literacy

Media literacy emerges as a cross-cutting dimension of democratic citizenship. Although young people make intensive use of social media as their main source of information and, in many cases, express confidence in their digital competences, the findings reveal

important challenges related to misinformation, algorithmic personalisation, artificial intelligence, and hostile digital environments.

In Germany, 75.7% reported understanding how algorithms influence the content they consume and 62.9% stated that they verify information before sharing it; however, 48.3% had witnessed cyberbullying or toxic online debates. In Lithuania, 69% had observed these situations, while only 37% reported fully understanding how algorithms work.

The qualitative testimonies illustrate these challenges. One German participant stated: "There are also a lot of posts that are meant for clicks or humor, but sometimes you can't really tell what is real anymore" (Focus Group, Germany). In Italy, another young person described the effort required to rigorously verify information before sharing it: "It takes two days because you have to check all the information you put online to avoid spreading false information" (Focus Group, Italy). In the Netherlands, fear of online hate and the consequences of digital footprints also led many young people to avoid publicly expressing their political opinions: "If I made a TikTok about politics I could be opening myself up to so much hate... It could absolutely impact your life" (Focus Group, The Netherlands). In Belgium, one participant summarised the normalisation of digital toxicity by stating: "Regarding toxic debates, she has seen many, they are all over the Internet. X is the worst, but every platform has them" (Focus Group, Belgium).

Overall synthesis

Taken together, the six dimensions analysed reveal a consistent pattern. The findings suggest that the young people who participated do not express a lack of interest in democratic life; on the contrary, they demonstrate a significant willingness to engage, provided that accessible, transparent mechanisms capable of producing visible outcomes are available. The main demands converge around the need to strengthen the credibility of participation mechanisms through effective feedback systems, reduce inequalities in access arising from socioeconomic, educational, or territorial contexts, promote media literacy adapted to the challenges posed by artificial intelligence and misinformation, and consolidate civic education models based on active and participatory methodologies. Although these findings should be interpreted in light of the exploratory nature of the study, the high degree of convergence observed across the six countries constitutes one of the main findings of the comparative analysis and provides a solid basis for interpreting, in an integrated manner, the needs and priorities expressed by the participating young people.

8. TRANSVERSAL SYNTHESIS

The transversal synthesis seeks to integrate the findings obtained across the various levels of analysis in the report, such as the comparative sociodemographic overview, desk

research, and field research, in light of the theoretical framework presented. This triangulation exercise aims to identify the patterns that cut across the six dimensions of the project and to reinterpret them conceptually.

8.1. What currently characterizes youth democratic participation in Europe?

The most consistent finding when cross-referencing the six countries is the reproduction (with slight national variations) of a structural paradox between the formal recognition of participation rights and their effective exercise. This paradox can be understood through Turner's (2001) classic distinction between a rights-centred citizenship (passive in nature) and a citizenship that incorporates obligations and active practices of involvement: the data suggest that Europe has broadly consolidated the first dimension (legal frameworks, national strategies, European programs) but has not systematically managed to translate it into the second. Hoskins and Mascherini's (2009) definition of active citizenship as participation "characterized by mutual respect, non-violence, and respect for human rights and democracy" (p. 10) precisely presupposes that practical dimension which young people themselves perceive as weakened. This was expressed by a German participant: "Many young people want to have a say, but often have limited real influence on final decisions" (Focus Group, Germany), a perception reinforced by the Belgian testimony regarding student representative bodies: "Tokenism is reinforced by the fact that students have no voting rights in higher committees" (Focus Group, Belgium).

This gap between recognition and exercise is not limited to the political dimension; it reappears in a structurally analogous manner in intercultural dialogue, in civic education (broad curricular coverage versus the absence of genuine democratic experience), and in structured dialogue, where the EU Youth Dialogue itself, despite mobilizing over 50,000 young people per cycle (European Youth Portal, 2025), is described by participants as a mechanism whose contributions "risk getting lost and remaining mainly symbolic" (Focus Group, Belgium). In Heggart's (2020) terms, the results point to a youth that practices forms of "activist citizenship" or volunteering, social movements, or digital activism outside the institutional channels supposedly designed to channel such participation, corroborating the argument that traditional models of citizenship education fail to account for the real diversity of youth engagement forms.

8.2. What needs appear most consistently?

The triangulation of the six dimensions allows us to refine three transversal needs, present regardless of country or dimension analysed:

Feedback and impact traceability. The most recurrent demand is not the expansion of consultation spaces, but rather the guarantee that participation produces observable consequences. This demand coincides with the deliberative principle formulated by Habermas (1996) and Dryzek (2000), according to which democratic legitimacy depends on inclusive dialogue translating into decisions recognizable by those who participate in

their formation; and with the findings of Caluwaerts and Reuchamps (2015), who show that inclusive deliberative processes generate decisions perceived as more legitimate. The quantitative data are consistent with this reading: 74.1% of German respondents identify visible implementation of changes as the main factor of trust, and in Lithuania, observing real changes concentrates the highest number of mentions (76%).

Reduction of access inequalities. Both the desk research (educational elitism, "decentralization trap," social selectivity of institutional platforms) and the field research document that current mechanisms tend to preferentially recruit young people who are already politicized, urban, and with higher education, to the detriment of rural groups, NEETs, those with functional diversity, or of migrant origin.

Institutionalization of democratic practice and active methodologies. The preference for experiential learning is practically unanimous (91% in Germany, 81% in Lithuania), which empirically supports the triad proposed by Biesta (2010): the educational systems analysed reasonably achieve the qualification function (transmission of civic knowledge), but systematically fail in subjectification (the process by which the young person becomes an autonomous subject capable of acting on their own behalf), to the extent that such experiential learning remains subject to the individual initiative of teachers and lacks a stable curricular anchor.

8.3. What factors best explain the results obtained?

The gap is one of institutional trust, not access. Internet access and basic digital skills are practically universalized (>90% in most countries), which rules out access to information as the main explanatory variable. The dominant factor is institutional distrust (52% in Germany, 59% in Spain), reinforced by the absence of a legal obligation for feedback in structured dialogue mechanisms, configured as soft law. This reading is consistent with Helsper's (2021) notion of digital literacy, who warns that the literature has focused excessively on technical skills, neglecting the communicative and interactional dimensions that allow translating digital engagement into effective civic well-being outcomes; a Dutch young person illustrated this disconnection by pointing to the fear of consequences from digital exposure: "If I made a TikTok about politics I could be opening myself up to so much hate... It could absolutely impact your life" (Focus Group, The Netherlands).

Dependence on local political will and budgets. The existence of national youth strategies (Jugendstrategie in Germany, Youth Strategy 2030 in Spain, Action Plan 2023-2027 in Lithuania) does not guarantee homogeneous implementation, since their effective development is conditioned by the technical and financial capacity of each region or educational center (what the desk research calls "the decentralization trap"). This fragmentation limits in practice the transformative scope that Nanz et al. (2020) attribute to deliberative democracy when institutional design is not accompanied by stable cultural and political conditions.

The double social and digital divide. Participation mechanisms (advisory, educational, or media-based) tend to reach young people who are already integrated, while vulnerable groups accumulate overlapping barriers across several dimensions simultaneously, suggesting that these inequalities are not sectorial but systemic and transversal to the entire European model of youth participation.

8.4. What challenges should the Youth4Change curriculum prioritize?

From the above convergence, four curricular priorities emerge, formulated in direct dialogue with the theoretical framework:

Teach the mechanics of real influence, shifting the emphasis from qualification (knowing what institutions are) toward subjectification (Biesta, 2010): how a proposal is formulated, how institutional feedback is demanded and interpreted, how the impact of a civic action is documented. This need is directly supported by testimony gathered in the Netherlands: "They told us what you could do (...) but they didn't really explain how you should organize a protest that actually has an impact" (Focus Group, The Netherlands).

Prioritize active and experiential methodologies as the backbone of the curriculum, rather than as a complementary activity, in line with the Participatory Action Research model of the CCLAB project (Malinverni et al., 2025) and with practically all the quantitative evidence gathered.

Incorporate critical media literacy oriented toward artificial intelligence and disinformation, updating Jolls' competency framework (CO:RE, 2020) (construction, language, interpretative plurality, intentionality, and purpose of media messages) to address emerging phenomena such as deepfakes and algorithmic personalization, in response to the gap detected between the speed of technological change and curricular updating.

Design accessible content and formats for groups facing barriers, avoiding the training process itself reproducing the social selection bias already documented in existing participation mechanisms, and applying the intersectional perspective called for by Ferbežar et al. (2025) and Glotov (2023) for intercultural dialogue.

9. CONCLUSIONS AND GLOBAL INTERPRETATION

If the previous section made it possible to identify the pattern running through the six dimensions studied, this global reading of the results aims to go one step further and ask what that pattern reveals about the very architecture of European youth participation, and not just about its symptoms. The first thing that stands out when comparing six educational, political and welfare systems that are so different from one another is precisely the convergence of the results: regardless of each country's institutional

tradition, its level of administrative decentralization, or its particular political culture, the six dimensions yield structurally very similar diagnoses. This convergence is in itself a relevant finding, because it rules out the possibility of isolated dysfunctions or isolated national particularities, and reinforces the hypothesis that Europe is facing a problem of systemic design in its model of youth participation, rather than a sum of six different national problems that simply coincide in time.

This report documents shortcomings but also allows us to identify, in a transversal manner, a set of opportunities that have so far remained scattered and underutilized. The existence of specific experiences of municipal participatory budgeting, of Service-Learning projects with positive results, of school digital policies co-designed with students, or of effective peer-to-peer methodologies against hate speech, demonstrates that there is already within the consortium a repertoire of solutions that work, but that operate as isolated exceptions dependent on the will of specific individuals or teams, rather than constituting a systematic and transferable policy across countries. The real opportunity that opens up from this diagnosis is not, therefore, to invent solutions from scratch, but to scale up, stably finance, and coordinate at a European level the practices that have already proven their value on a small scale in one of the six contexts analysed.

This reading also forces a more uncomfortable reflection. One must ask to what extent a relevant part of the current participatory architecture functions less as a mechanism for the real redistribution of decision-making power and more as an exercise in institutional legitimation: the existence of youth councils, structured dialogues, or digital consultations allows administrations to show that they "listen" to young people, regardless of whether that listening is subsequently translated effectively into budgets, regulations, or specific policies. If this hypothesis is correct, the risk is not insignificant, because a generation that learns early on that its official participation channels are largely performative tends to transfer that distrust to the entire democratic system, not just to specific youth participation devices. The data on institutional distrust and on the displacement of civic engagement toward volunteering or informal activism, rather than a sign of disaffection toward the public sphere in general, can be read as a rational and adaptive response to that experience. This places the problem studied on a plane that transcends the strictly youth sphere: what these young people learn today about the real value of participating is, to a large extent, what will define their relationship with democratic institutions over the coming decades, in a European context where detachment from conventional politics and the rise of extremist discourse are already a cause for widespread concern.

A self-criticism should also be directed at the research process itself and at the projects, like Youth4Change, that draw upon it. A report of this nature runs the risk of becoming yet another consultation among the many that young participants describe as non-binding, if its findings are not effectively translated into concrete curricular decisions, sustained funding, and verifiable changes for those who have dedicated their time to surveys and focus groups. The coherence of the project therefore demands that the consortium itself apply to its internal functioning the same standard of transparency and feedback that it

demands of the institutions studied, communicating to participants what specific use has been made of their contributions and how these have influenced the design of the resulting training curriculum.

Recommendations

Recommendations for curricular design

- Prioritize active and experiential learning methodologies (Service-Learning, simulations, civic audits) over theoretical and rote teaching of institutional content.
- Incorporate, in a modular and updatable manner, literacy on algorithmic governance: how recommendation algorithms work, biases of generative AI, and disinformation detection.
- Assess non-cognitive competencies such as ethical judgment, digital critical thinking, or negotiation skills, in addition to the usual theoretical content.
- Integrate the intersectional perspective transversally, connecting culture, gender, social class, migrant origin, and geographic location, avoiding symbolic treatment of diversity.

Recommendations for youth organizations

- Deploy active outreach strategies specifically targeting non-organized young people, those in vocational training, from rural areas, or in NEET situations, without relying solely on usual institutional channels.
- Promote peer-to-peer training methodologies to address hate speech, prejudice, and digital safety.
- Assume a mediating role between the informal demands of grassroots youth and public administrations, preventing dialogue from being captured by bureaucratic dynamics.
- Use artistic, sports, and community channels as entry points to participation for groups with linguistic or social barriers.

Recommendations for educational institutions

- Grant real decision-making power to student representatives on concrete issues (school budget, coexistence rules, classroom organization), moving beyond their purely advisory role.
- Provide ongoing training for teachers in debate facilitation and management of controversial issues.

- Establish stable alliances with non-formal education entities in the local environment (youth centres, local NGOs) that connect the school with its community.

Recommendations for policymakers

- Introduce mandatory public response mechanisms to proposals arising from structured dialogue and youth consultation processes.
- Gradually replace project-based funding with structural and permanent budget allocations for youth councils and programs.
- Strengthen specific technical and financial support for rural areas and small municipalities, so that the exercise of participation rights does not depend on place of residence.
- Establish formal and binding participation channels for young people in policies that directly affect them.

Recommendations for future research

- Develop longitudinal studies that measure the real effect of youth participation on institutional trust and social cohesion over time.
- Analyse in depth the conditions that allow the transfer and scaling across countries of the good practices identified in this report.
- Explore in greater detail the specific dynamics of exclusion affecting vulnerable groups within the formal representative bodies themselves.
- Expand the sample size in countries with lower response volumes, strengthening the transnational comparability of future analyses.

Limitations

Beyond issues relating to sample size and composition, it is worth considering some limitations of a more interpretive nature. As this is a transnational analysis that aggregates information from six contexts with different statistical, educational and administrative traditions, some of the official indicators used in the comparative overview are not strictly equivalent across countries, whether due to differences in the operational definition of variables, in the reference year of the sources consulted, or in the data collection methodology used by each national agency. This requires the quantitative comparisons in the report to be taken as an indicative approximation of general trends, rather than as a strict statistical equivalence between countries.

Added to this limitation is the very design of the qualitative phase: the focus groups, despite following a common structure, inevitably depend on the particular dynamics of each session, the profile of the facilitator, and the specific composition of the group-factors that can influence which topics emerge more strongly in one country than in another without necessarily reflecting real differences in the underlying youth experience. The time frame available for project implementation has also conditioned the possibility of exploring certain sub-themes in depth during the focus groups, as well as the volume of surveys achievable in some of the participating countries.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that the voluntary nature of participation in surveys and focus groups introduces a self-selection bias that is difficult to correct: it is reasonable to think that young people who decide to dedicate their time to answering a questionnaire or attending a group session already have some link, however weak, with the associative or educational fabric of their environment. This implies that the voice of young people completely disconnected from any participation channel (likely those who experience the structural barriers described in this report most acutely) tends to be underrepresented in the collected data, which, in addition to being a methodological limitation of the study, paradoxically constitutes a new empirical manifestation of the very phenomenon that the research intends to analyse.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1. CHART INDEX

Chart 1. Composition of the survey sample in Germany by age 17

Chart 2. Composition of the survey sample in Germany by gender 17

Chart 3. Composition of the survey sample in Germany by educational level 17

Chart 4. Composition of the survey sample in Germany by context 17

Chart 5. Composition of the survey sample in the Netherlands by age 18

Chart 6. Composition of the survey sample in the Netherlands by gender 18

Chart 7. Composition of the survey sample in the Netherlands by educational level 18

Chart 8. Composition of the survey sample in the Netherlands by context 18

Chart 9. Composition of the survey sample in Lithuania by age 18

Chart 10. Composition of the survey sample in Lithuania by gender 18

Chart 11. Composition of the survey sample in Lithuania by educational level 19

Chart 12. Composition of the survey sample in Lithuania by context 19

Chart 13. Composition of the survey sample in Belgium by age 19

Chart 14. Composition of the survey sample in Belgium by gender 19

Chart 15. Composition of the survey sample in Belgium by educational level 19

Chart 16. Composition of the survey sample in Belgium by context 19

Chart 17. Composition of the survey sample in Italy by age 20

Chart 18. Composition of the survey sample in Italy by gender 20

Chart 19. Composition of the survey sample in Italy by educational level 20

Chart 20. Composition of the survey sample in Italy by context 20

Chart 21. Composition of the survey sample in Spain by age 20

Chart 22. Composition of the survey sample in Spain by gender 20

Chart 23. Composition of the survey sample in Spain by educational level 21

Chart 24. Composition of the survey sample in Spain by context 21

Chart 25. Barriers to Youth Participation in Germany “What are the most important obstacles” preventing you from participating more? 108

Chart 26. Barriers to Youth Participation in the Netherlands “What are the most important obstacles” preventing you from participating more? 109

Chart 27. Barriers to Youth Participation in Lithuania “What are the most important obstacles” preventing you from participating more? 110

Chart 28. Barriers to Youth Participation in Belgium “What are the most important obstacles” preventing you from participating more? 111

Chart 29. Barriers to Youth Participation in Italy “What are the most important obstacles” preventing you from participating more? 112

Chart 30. Barriers to Youth Participation in Spain “What are the most important obstacles” preventing you from participating more? 113

Chart 31. Actions to Improve Intercultural Dialogue in Germany. “What would contribute to improving intercultural dialogue? (Mark maximum 3)” 120

Chart 32. Actions to Improve Intercultural Dialogue in the Netherlands “What would contribute to improving intercultural dialogue? (Mark maximum 3)” 121

Chart 33. Actions to Improve Intercultural Dialogue in Lithuania “What would contribute to improving intercultural dialogue? (Mark maximum 3)” 122

Chart 34. Actions to Improve Intercultural Dialogue in Belgium “What would contribute to improving intercultural dialogue? (Mark maximum 3)” 123

Chart 35. Actions to Improve Intercultural Dialogue in Italy “What would contribute to improving intercultural dialogue? (Mark maximum 3)” 124

Chart 36. Actions to Improve Intercultural Dialogue in Spain “What would contribute to improving intercultural dialogue? (Mark maximum 3)” 125

Chart 37. Participants Who Have Received Civic Education and the Setting in Which They Received It in Germany “Did you receive any political education during your school years?” 132

Chart 38. Participants Who Have Received Civic Education and the Setting in Which They Received It in Netherlands “During your education, did you receive civic education?” 132

Chart 39. Participants Who Have Received Civic Education and the Setting in Which They Received It in Lithuania “Did you receive any political education during your school years? 132

Chart 40. Participants Who Have Received Civic Education and the Setting in Which They Received It in Belgium “Did you receive any political education during your school years?” 132

Chart 41. Participants Who Have Received Civic Education and the Setting in Which They Received It in Italy “Did you receive any political education during your school years?” 133

Chart 42. Participants Who Have Received Civic Education and the Setting in Which They Received It in Spain “Did you receive any political education during your school years?” 133

Chart 43. Perceived Usefulness of Civic Education in Germany “If so, how useful was it?” 134

Chart 44. Perceived Usefulness of Civic Education in the Netherlands “If so, how useful was it?” 134

Chart 45. Perceived Usefulness of Civic Education in Lithuania “If so, how useful was it?” 134

Chart 46. Perceived Usefulness of Civic Education in Belgium “If so, how useful was it?” 134

Chart 47. Perceived Usefulness of Civic Education in Italy “If so, how useful was it?” 135

Chart 48. Perceived Usefulness of Civic Education in Spain “If so, how useful was it?” 135

Chart 49. Learning Method Preferences in Germany “Which learning formats do you prefer?” (Check a maximum of 3) 141

Chart 50. Learning Method Preferences in the Netherlands “Which learning formats do you prefer?” (Mark maximum 3) 142

Chart 51. Learning Method Preferences in Lithuania “Which learning formats do you prefer?” (Mark maximum 3) 143

Chart 52. Learning Method Preferences in Belgium “Which learning formats do you prefer?” (Mark maximum 3) 144

Chart 53. Learning Method Preferences in Italy “Which learning formats do you prefer?” (Mark maximum 3) 145

Chart 54. Learning Method Preferences in Spain “Which learning formats do you prefer?” (Mark maximum 3) 146

Chart 55. Awareness of Structured Dialogue or Similar Youth Consultation Processes in Germany “Have you heard of “structured dialogue” or similar youth consultation processes” 153

Chart 56. Awareness of Structured Dialogue or Similar Youth Consultation Processes in the Netherlands “Have you heard of “structured dialogue” or similar youth consultation processes” 153

Chart 57. Awareness of Structured Dialogue or Similar Youth Consultation Processes in Lithuania “Have you heard of “structured dialogue” or similar youth consultation processes” 153

Chart 58. Awareness of Structured Dialogue or Similar Youth Consultation Processes in Belgium “Have you heard of “structured dialogue” or similar youth consultation processes” 153

Chart 59. Awareness of Structured Dialogue or Similar Youth Consultation Processes in Italy “Have you heard of “structured dialogue” or similar youth consultation processes” 154

Chart 60. Awareness of Structured Dialogue or Similar Youth Consultation Processes in Spain “Have you heard of “structured dialogue” or similar youth consultation processes” 154

Chart 61. Level of Agreement with Media Literacy Statements in Germany 161

Chart 62. Level of Agreement with Media Literacy Statements in the Netherlands 161

Chart 63. Level of Agreement with Media Literacy Statements in Lithuania 162

Chart 64. Level of Agreement with Media Literacy Statements in Belgium 162

Chart 65. Level of Agreement with Media Literacy Statements in Italy 163

Chart 66. Level of Agreement with Media Literacy Statements in Spain 163

ANNEX 2. TABLE INDEX

Table 1. Quadrant of focus group participants in Germany (association: JKPeV) 14

Table 2. Quadrant of focus group participants in the Netherlands (association: IDEA) 14

Table 3. Quadrant of focus group participants in Lithuania (association: Mano Europa) 15

Table 4. Quadrant of focus group participants in Belgium (association: OBESSU) 15

Table 5. Quadrant of focus group participants in Italy (assoc. InCo Molfetta APS) 16

Table 6. Quadrant of focus group participants in Spain (association: Guajira) 16

Table 7. Comparative indicators of the participating countries. 24

Table 8. Institutional characteristics for Youth Participation by country. 29

Table 9. Comparative challenges for Youth Participation 35

Table 10. Transferable good practices for Youth Participation 37

Table 11. Institutional characteristics for Intercultural Dialogue by country. 44

Table 12. Comparative challenges for Intercultural Dialogue 48

Table 13. Transferable good practices identified during desk research for Intercultural Dialogue 51

Table 14. Institutional characteristics for Civic Education by country 58

Table 15. Comparative challenges for Civic Education 62

Table 16. Transferable good practices identified during desk research for Civic Education 65

Table 17. Experiential Learning initiatives by country 72

Table 18. Project-based learning initiatives by country 74

Table 19. Comparative challenges for Pedagogical Methods 75

Table 20. Transferable good practices identified during desk research for Pedagogical Methods 78

Table 21. Institutional characteristics for Structured Dialogue by country 84

Table 22. Comparative challenges for Structured Dialogue 86

Table 23. Transferable good practices identified during desk research for Structured Dialogue 88

Table 24. Institutional characteristics for Media Literacy by country 92

Table 25. Comparative challenges for Media Literacy 97

Table 26. Transferable good practices identified during desk research for Media Literacy 98

Table 27. Summary of Field Research findings for Youth Participation by country 103

Table 28. International comparison of field research findings for Youth Participation 106

Table 29. Summary of Field Research findings for Intercultural Dialogue by country 114

Table 30. International comparison of field research findings for Intercultural Dialogue 119

Table 31. Summary of Field Research findings for Civic Education by country 126

Table 32. International comparison of field research for Civic Education 130

Table 33. Summary of Field Research Findings for Pedagogical Methods by country 136

Table 34. International comparison of Field Research Findings for Pedagogical Methods 140

Table 35. Summary of Field Research Findings for Structured Dialogue by country 147

Table 36. International comparison of Field Research findings for Structured Dialogue 151

Table 37. Summary of Field Research Findings for Media Literacy by country 154

Table 38. International comparison of Field Research findings for Media Literacy 159



Co-funded by the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme of the European Union.

Project Reference Number: 101249755



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



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