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What is Youth Participation?



“Youth participation in democratic life is about individual young people and groups of young people having the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and, where necessary, the support to freely express their views, contribute to and influence societal decision-making on matters affecting them, and be active within the democratic and civic life of our communities.”¹

Youth participation is about **ACTION** and **VOICE**.

A participation project can focus on both of these things, or just one of them.



VOICE - Young people expressing their views to decision makers (such as politicians, policy makers, head teachers or community leaders). The aim is to encourage decision makers to make changes based on young people's views.



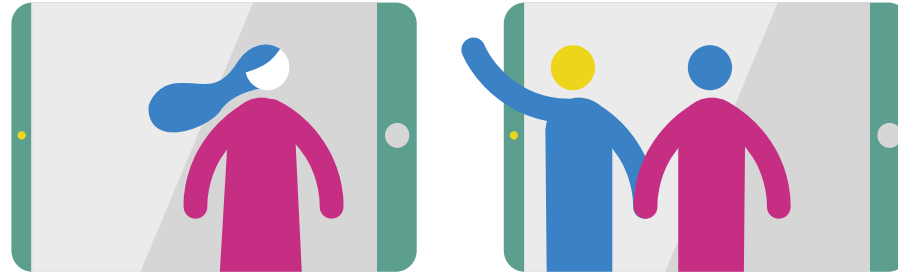
ACTION - Young people taking collective or individual action to make a change to the world around them. Rather than asking decision makers to make the change, young people lead the change themselves.

¹Definition of youth participation taken from the SALTO PI (2020) [Youth Participation Strategy](#), Tallinn

There are different forms of youth participation:

Traditional forms of participation. These include voting, standing for election, joining a trade union, youth councils, youth forums, school councils and some types of youth organisation.

Traditional forms of participation are based on the principle of representative democracy.



Alternative forms of participation.

Everything *other* than traditional forms, including:

- ✓ Campaign movements and youth activism, especially based around single issues or causes, like the environmental movement.
- ✓ Participation projects based on digital tools and digital spaces or communities. Co-production and co-management, where young people and decision makers share responsibility for creating or running something.
- ✓ Deliberative democracy projects, where young people work collaboratively with policy makers to create new ideas.
- ✓ Young people finding new ways to use public and community spaces, like opening a community café.
- ✓ And many other things...





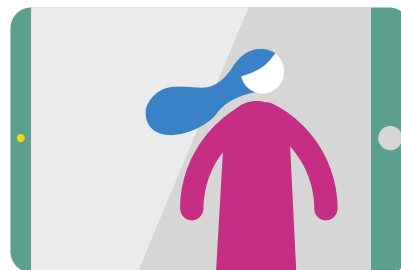
Focusing on: Forms of participation

Across Europe, there is a concern that young people do not take part in traditional forms of participation as much as previous generations. In general, young people are less likely to vote compared to older people, and have lower trust in institutions such as parliaments, governments and political parties. However, young people are not disinterested in politics. Many are still very active in alternative forms of participation.

To promote youth participation, there is a need to:

- 1)** Encourage more young people to take part in traditional forms of participation, and,
- 2)** Find ways to make better use of alternative forms of participation in our democracies.

Both of these things can help young people to have a voice and be active in our democracies.





Focusing on: Inclusion and diversity

Good quality youth participation should be accessible and welcoming to young people from all backgrounds, communities and social groups. All forms of youth participation can be socially inclusive. No one type is more or less inclusive than the other.

Not all young people have the same views. Different communities of young people experience the world in very different ways. Being inclusive means recognising different voices and making sure that there are opportunities for everyone to be heard, and for their experiences and needs to be considered.

Sometimes this can mean paying attention to who is involved in a participation project, and making sure that no groups are excluded. Access is only one dimension of inclusion. It is also important that young people from all backgrounds have the opportunity to lead it.

Inclusive participation can also require the creation of dedicated spaces and projects specifically for groups in society that are less visible and who do not often get heard. Doing so can provide safe spaces for them to raise issues that are important to them.



Focusing on: Digital transformations

Nearly all forms of participation can be created in an online format, and participation projects are increasingly starting to work with both online and offline approaches. This can refer to hosting virtual local youth council meetings, organising protests using hashtags and social media, organising digital voting for a group on any given issue, or simply using digital tools for communicating about your issue or about what you are doing in your project to a wider public.

The digital world also opens up new possibilities for things that cannot be done in the real world, such as running projects that connect people around the world to work together on solving problems and discussing common issues.



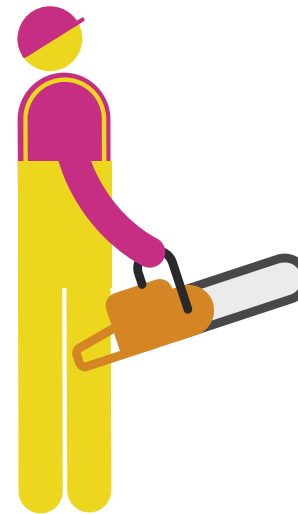


Focusing on: Sustainability, environmental and climate goals

Environmental issues are one of the key priorities young people wish to take action and have their voice heard on. According to the [European Youth Forum](#)², **“Throughout Europe, young people are on the streets demanding climate action. In initiatives like [Fridays for Future](#), [Climate Thursdays](#) or [Youth Strike 4 Climate](#), thousands of students gather each week to protest for immediate and decisive actions to fight the climate crisis, forming a still growing movement for climate action. Young people are also at the forefront of various climate marches taking place all across Europe”.**

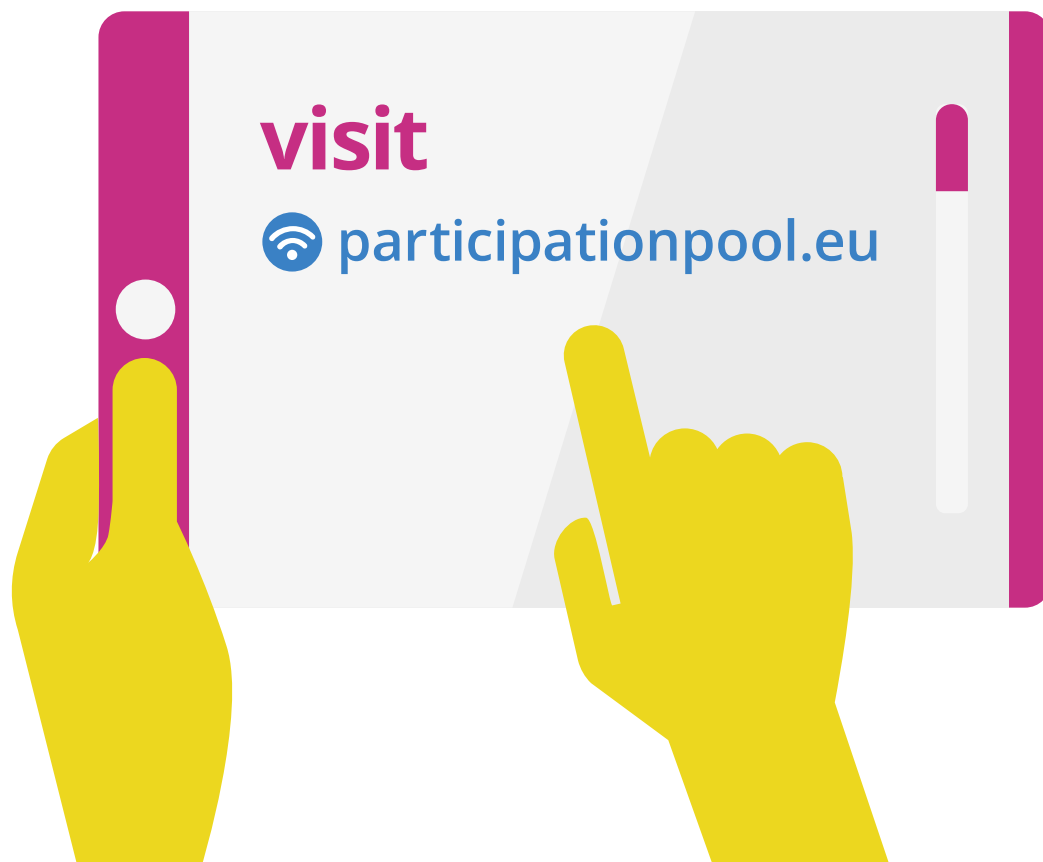
Youth participation also contributes directly to sustainability. Environmental activists recognise that climate justice and democratic participation are linked. Some groups and individuals have much greater control of the

world's resources than others, and they are using these resources at unsustainable rates. Achieving sustainability means democratising who controls our resources, who has access to them and how they are used is determined. Youth participation gives young people greater influence within our democracies. By having young people participate in the planning of urban or rural redevelopment, the use of energy or food production, it democratises those processes.



² European Youth Forum (2019) [Resolution in support of youth demanding urgent climate action](#), Brussels

If you want to go deeper...



Or read

The [Youth Participation Strategy](#) for enhancing youth participation in democratic life through the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes.

[Youth Participation Good Practices in Different Forms of Regional and Local Democracy](#) by Ana Gretchel and her colleagues.

The Council of Europe Study [New and innovative forms of youth participation in decision-making processes](#) by Anne Crowley and Dan Moxon.





What type of project are you dealing with?

Use the tool below to help think about what type of project you are dealing with. You may be interested in developing a project or are already involved in an existing project. Mark each line based on what the project focus is.

VOICE

Young people encouraging decision makers to effect change.



ACTION

Young people making the change themselves.

DIGITAL ONLY

Connecting and working together in digital spaces without meeting in person.

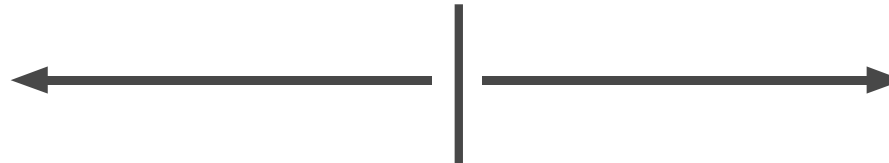


OFFLINE ONLY

Bringing young people to physical spaces to connect and work together.

OPEN TO EVERYONE

Being accessible to all.



JUST FOR ONE TARGET GROUP

Creating space for a group that doesn't often get heard.