

Youth participation activities



Youth participation is a process in which power is shared with young people, whether in the context of decision-making or other processes involved in the project. Youth Participation Activities (YPA) aim to help young people engage and learn to participate. The youth participation process interlinks with the YPA life-cycle from the moment the idea for the YPA project is born through every step in the planning, preparation, implementation and follow-up.

Youth participation is about *ACTION* and *VOICE*, and Youth Participation Activity projects should focus on both of these.



ACTION - Young people taking collective or individual action to make a change to the world around them.



VOICE - Young people expressing their views with the aim of encouraging decision makers to make changes.

The tools in this module are focusing on:

How to create

a participation experience for young people in a Youth Participation Activity

How to ensure

the Youth Participation Activity is really designed to be inclusive and accessible to marginalised and excluded young people

How to make sure

the Youth Participation Activity contributes to greater youth participation after the YPA project



If you are not sure where to start, there are other people around you that might have experience in doing this kind of activity and who can offer you advice or answer your questions. They can be in your organisation, in some other organisations near you, in the National Agency for Erasmus+ Programme, online or perhaps already sharing their experience. Look them up and reach out to them with your questions and ask for support! Also, you can have a coach in the YPA project who can support you with this, as well.

How to create a participation experience for young people in a Youth Participation Activity?

An idea is born...

A good place to start is... at the very beginning.

When you have an idea for developing a Youth Participation Activity (YPA) project, your starting point could be to share your idea with your peer group, with the young people you are working with or with any concerned group of young people, using the participatory methods. Use any channel at your disposal to share this interest with young people:

- **face-to-face meetings** check for meetings and activities organised in your area and attended by young people that you could use to share your idea;
- social networks and online communication tools check if there are social media channels that address young people specifically (your organisation, or organisations around you might have one) and see if it could be used for sharing your idea;
- info-boards check for info-boards in places visited by young people (youth clubs and other youth spaces, schools and educational centres, info centres, cultural spaces, etc.) and see how can you share your idea there;



Use your imagination and think about what young people or your peers will find most interesting. Think about why they would be motivated to join an YPA project, and ask them about that. When starting these conversations with young people, check their interest in participating. Encourage them to express their motivation, as well as their needs and any potential obstacles and fears that they might face. In the future, you will have to think and plan ways with them to address any identified obstacles and support needed for their participation.



Be creative about how you present your idea. You can think of creating a story-board, poster, video, etc.



As a youth group you could start by looking at the © EU Youth Goals and see if any of the topics there are related to the topic you are interested in pursuing with your YPA project.



The project is taking shape...

The participatory approach places the focus on the **process**. This changes the **power relations** between the project leaders, project staff and the participating young people. It also **increases the sustainability** of the project action beyond the end of the project because the young people continue to take responsibility and have developed their social, civic and political efficacy. Choosing a participatory approach is, therefore, a political act. It is important that the YPA project, in itself, is providing a participation experience to the involved young people in addition to the participation-related topic it will focus on.

Now, when you have a youth group, you will want to involve them in shaping your YPA project. Together, you will decide on the focus of the project and the issues related to youth participation that the group is going to address. You should also look at ways to make your YPA project a participatory experience.





Your YPA project group wants to make a difference in youth participation in a certain identified area. While doing so, you will gain valuable experience in addressing issues related to youth participation and acquire a deeper understanding of what youth participation is about (check the What is youth participation? module for more details). With your YPA project group, you should decide what kind of participatory experience your YPA project should provide to all involved. There are many ways for young people to participate. What you do and how can also depend on the degree to which you feel confident and motivated to participate (check the Young people leading projects and Creating change modules for more details). This tool can help you decide on this. It can also help you to start looking at different programme elements you need to design into your joint project.





Everyone in the YPA project group could answer the following questions:

Are you informed about decisions?	
Are you consulted about decisions?	
Are your ideas taken into account and are you able to influence the decision-making?	
Are you the one initiating and sharing the decision-making with others?	
Are you the one initiating and making the decisions?	

Looking at different groups that you are part of - how would you describe your participation?







How would you like the decision-making power to be in your YPA project group?

Could you imagine challenging yourself and going for another degrees of participation compared to where you usually find yourself?

Check the © Degrees of Participation and see where you feel confident and what you would like to experience, test and improve when it comes to different participation opportunities in this YPA project.

Based on what you have discovered and decided, you can review the programme of the YPA project and see if in the design you can add elements that focus primarily on providing group members with participation experiences, in relation to their areas of interest, of course.

As your YPA project is taking shape and you have decided on what kind of participatory experience it should provide, you now want to make sure that each young person participating is aware of the opportunities and choosing the level of engagement that is most appropriate for them.



Once you have decided what kind of participation experience you want your YPA project to be, you can look into ways to understand and support each other to accomplish that. Everyone in the group could benefit from looking at the following questions and sharing their ideas:



Why are you interested in this YPA project?





What might be a genuine obstacle to your involvement?





Evaluating your group's participation needs and interests

What kind of support would you need to be able to fully participate?

Could you invest in this activity if the support is provided?

How much responsibility for the project would you feel confident to have?

Consider the needs and any potential obstacles or fears that were shared in the group.

Perhaps you can support them in overcoming those. What kind of support could you offer to others in the group?



You can propose this tool to the coach. You could use it on your own as a group and then decide to share the results with the coach. In any case, do use all the support you need.

Depending on what your group has agreed about their participation, you could apply some of the following tools for informing, consulting and sharing decision-making with group members.



You would need an **information and/or consultation channel**. Agree with your group about which channel is most appropriate and then use this channel to inform and/or consult on any relevant milestones and issues.

Not sure what you need to consult on? The following are possible suggestions; however, it really depends on the specific YPA project, as well as the interests and competences of the group members involved.



Planning phase - Group members could share their opinions and jointly decide about: **identifying and defining the needs, objectives and learning outcomes** − consider the youth participation related issues in your communities and your own participation needs and interests (check the tools Designing participation experience and Evaluating your group's participation needs and interests in this module).



Activity formats - consider innovation and out-of-box thinking while having in mind different learning styles and learning needs; also, consider different options by looking at accessibility, environmental footprint, digital aspects.



Schedule - consider the different learning styles and learning needs of each individual.





Preparing phase - Group members should consider and review all elements from the planning phase.

In this phase you should discuss how to bring in innovation, accessibility, sustainability, digital aspect and relevant youth participation thinking/practices to your YPA project. Identify resources you might need for this and ways on how to access them. Your group should discuss and jointly decide about the **detailed planning of activities, practical arrangements and set up of agreements with partners.**

Furthermore, you should finally **confirm the target groups for the envisaged activities.** This also involves informing and consulting them about their desired participation in the project. Their participation interests and needs might be different from what you may be thinking, or you might be right; in any case, you should look at creating the participatory experience for them as well (check the lock the lock the lock the lock).

Once you have determined the participation needs of the young people that are the target group of your YPA project, you can address them through the **linguistic/intercultural/learning-related and task-related preparation of participants**. In addition to the linguistic, intercultural, learning and task-related preparation, a **preparation for participation** is also crucial. You shouldn't take for granted that participation comes easy and naturally to all young people. Providing an opportunity for meaningful participation experience is important, but it should be accompanied by adequate support. Designing adequate support and preparation of project participants for participation will be most successful when consulted and agreed together with participating young people (check the Designing participation experience and Designing your group's participation needs and interests tools in this module).





Informing and consulting group members



Implementation phase - Set up **daily reflection and evaluation meetings** to consult your YPA group members, and project participants, about the decisions you need to make regarding the programme and/or technical arrangements. Share inspiration moments and get ideas about how to share stories from the YPA project with other young people. Potentially, you can get ideas for other projects after the YPA project that you are implementing is completed.



Follow-up phase - YPA group members, as well as project participants, should share their opinions regarding the different elements to be implemented at this stage:

Evaluation of the activities – Consider also how to evaluate the participation experience they had through the YPA project.





Informing and consulting group members



Identification and documentation of the learning outcomes of participants – consider when and how to reflect about the planned learning outcomes and participation experience (check the Group self-assessment for Youth Participation Activity projects tool in this module).



Dissemination and use of the project's outcomes - consider innovation and out-of-box thinking while also bearing in mind options that look at accessibility, environmental footprint, digital aspects Online tools and platforms for informing and consulting could be useful if the whole group has no opportunity to meet face-to-face in the run up or during the activity. In this case, you could use your chosen information/consultation channel and add pooling options, or as needed use other tools that have features for the easy collection of opinions.



Make sure to inform the project participants beforehand on the issue in question and the platform you are using, so that they can confidently participate in consultations. Bear in mind that there may be GDPR or internet security considerations to take into account when working with young people under the age of majority.





Sharing decision-making between project leaders and project participants

To share decision-making between your YPA youth group/youth organisation, project leaders and young people, as project participants in the YPA project it is important to (jointly) create a **decision-making model** that everyone feels is appropriate to both the project and the participating young people. The following models (and tools) can be presented to participating young people as a basis for discussion and deciding on which would work best for your YPA project.



Participatory model – all project participants are engaged in decision- making on given issues through dialogue, consensus building exercises or voting systems, whether face-to-face or online. **Online tools and platforms** for online voting are **⊘** Polys, **⊘** Choice voting, **⊘** ElectionBuddy, **⊘** Helios-Voting, **⊘** Poll-maker, **⊘** Electionrunner, **⊘** Opavote (list created by **⊘** European Youth Forum).





Sharing decision-making between project leaders and project participants



Representative model – some project participants, who are either willing or wish to take up additional responsibility in the project, are elected by others to participate in the decision-making on their behalf, i.e. represent them.



Appointive model – project leaders offer interested young people a "seat at the table" by appointing one or more to participate in decision-making. In this case, those appointed may still consult with the group they are "representing". However, the chances they would feel the urge to do so, and that the group would feel represented, are lower than in other models.



For shared decision-making, a **Project steering committee** can be formed in the early stages of project planning.



Regardless of the model through which the project participants are involved in decision-making, you would need to make sure to inform them beforehand on the issue in question, so that they can confidently participate in the decision-making process. Informing them may include organising a specific face-to-face meeting and/or preparing material for them to read/watch/listen to.

The final step in making your YPA project a truly meaningful participation experience for your youth group is by supporting them to reflect about it and identify learning points. The following tool can help with that and provide insights to be used for **S** Youth Pass.



You should plan reflection about your group's own participation and learning. Also you should provide the same opportunity for project participants. This will help you to understand whether your YPA project is contributing to a positive change in the participation of young people, especially the YPA project group and participants.



You could implement some of these strategies:

Schedule specific **reflection time slots** after major activities are organised as part of the YPA project and discuss your participation experience. Compare your experience with what you decided initially (© Designing participation experience tool in this module).





Reflection on learning about participation



Schedule specific **reflection time slots** during major activities and support project participants in discussing their participation experience. Support them in comparing their experience with what they decided initially (Identifying participation needs and interests tool in this module).



Propose that the group members and project participants create a **learning diary**. It can be in different forms – written in a notebook, scrapbook from activities with side notes and drawings, written in notes on a phone, recorded as audio or video on a phone, be physical or online in written, audio or video format, etc. A learning diary could serve as a good reference for discussions during reflection sessions or during meetings with a coach who is supporting you in implementing the YPA project.



If there is a coach who is supporting you in applying and implementing the YPA project, they could potentially also offer further support and guidance in identifying and documenting learning outcomes.



Reflecting on one's own learning is a demanding task, and even more so if participants have never done anything like that before. Participants might show resistance or appear to struggle with the task. That is nothing out of the ordinary. It might make sense to make ongoing 'reflection on learning' an offer, something that participants can choose to do rather than an obligatory activity, but which the youth exchange provides infrastructure and support for. Keep in mind that participants will need support and time, and make sure they can access it. You can also consult the learning by doing module for more ideas!

How to ensure the Youth Participation Activity is really designed to be inclusive and accessible to marginalised and excluded young people

Before you start » The inclusion of all young people in participatory processes is about supporting young people from all backgrounds and with different life experiences to access participation opportunities equally. Once involved, it is for them to have their voice heard and specific experiences shared, as well as to take action and assume leadership roles within a project.



You can start by considering which groups of young people are most likely to get left out when you plan, prepare, implement and follow-up your Youth Participation Activity (YPA) project.

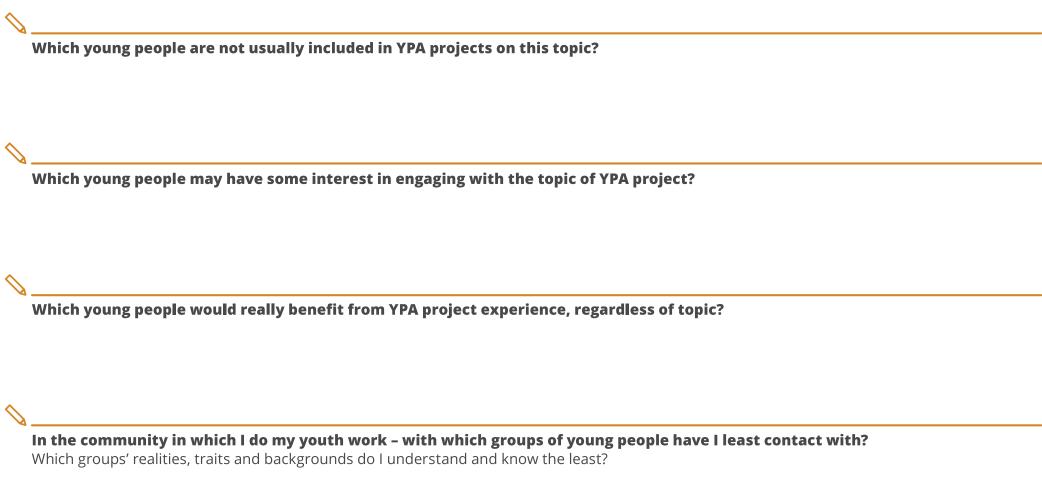


Mapping questions:

Which young people are usually not involved in YPA projects?







If you ask yourself 'How come?' after any of those questions, you are already on the path to finding ways to involve excluded young people.



Reach out to the young people you have identified as at risk of being left-out and plan together their engagement with the YPA project. Reaching out is about making initial contact. Sometimes, it can be easier to get into contact with them in their comfort environment (their neighbourhood and places they visit and are comfortable with e.g. park, youth club/space, online social networks).







You should attempt to find out:

Would they be interested in joining your YPA project? (As needed, start by explaining to them what the YPA project is)



What are their participation needs? What might be an obstacle for their involvement?





Identifying participation needs and interests



How much would they like to/could they invest themselves in this youth exchange if the support is provided?

Share with them the @ Degrees of Participation. Ask them about where they feel confident in engaging.

Also ask them what they would like to experience, test or improve when it comes to different participation opportunities?



How to make sure your Youth Participation Activity is contributing to greater youth participation after the YPA project?

Before you start » Participation is best learned through *experience* and *reflection*. You may want to share with young people some theory on participation and degrees of engagement. However, the most important thing to remember when designing your Youth Participation Activity (YPA) project is that it must create conditions for young people's experiential learning and reflection about their own participation. Those young people can be both in your youth group in the role of project leaders and in the target group of your project in the role of project participants. Your YPA project can make a key difference in experience, understanding, capacity and motivation for youth participation for both of those groups.



You can review the programme of the Youth Participation Activity to check if there is space in the design for session(s) that would add an experiential learning dimension in preparation for actual participation activities that the project is envisioning. For example, you could consider adding a simulation whose main focus is to provide project participants with a participation experience. This session can, of course, be adapted to the theme of your YPA project. There are many good reference manuals for participation specific activities that can be adapted to the topics of YPA projects, such as the have your say manual on the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life; Compass - Manual on Human Rights.





Here are some examples of activities for experiencing participation:

Meeting the mayor (page 109): Participating young people prepare for the meeting with local authorities on the basis of a case study. In this activity, youth dissatisfaction is displayed through violent behaviour in public and conflicts with police. You can adapt the case study to be more relevant to the topic you are dealing with.



The triangle of co-operation – Confusion city (page 123): Participating young people take the roles of the local authority, young people and representatives of non-governmental organisation. They formulate their needs and interests and then engage in negotiation. In this activity, nine case studies are offered; however, you can adapt them to reflect the situation your YPA project is addressing.



Solution Visit to Jeunessia (page 129): Participating young people envision the perfect community for youth participation. Depending on the focus of your YPA project, you can focus on certain aspects of youth participation and start the visioning process.





Simulation exercise "Youth in action" (page 131): Participating young people take on roles in a simulation of a consultation meeting organised by the mayor. In this activity, the mayor wants to initiate a process for setting up a local youth parliament, and various interest groups are invited to the consultations. You can adapt the topic to be more relevant for your YPA project.

© Electioneering: Participating young people take positions on a statement (e.g. agree, disagree) and build arguments to explain their position. They also reflect on the arguments of others. In this activity, the statements are mainly about voting rights. You can adapt the statements to be more relevant for the topic you are dealing with.

To vote or not to vote?: Participating young people go into the community to find out what community members think on any given subject. In this activity, the topic is voting. You can adapt the topic to be more relevant to your YPA project.





♠ Let every voice be heard: Participating young people engage in a discussion about what might need to be improved about a given topic. Then participants design a democratic system through which young people can have a say in bringing about the desired improvements. In this activity, the topic is education and young people having a say about the kind of education they are receiving. You can adapt the topic to be more relevant for the topic you are addressing with the YPA project.

© On the ladder: Participating young people reflect on the meaning of youth participation and discuss ways of increasing their own participation in the local community.

a A mosque in Sleepyville: Young people take on roles in a simulation of a town council meeting. In this activity, the topic is freedom of religion and discrimination. You can adapt the topic and respective actors to be more relevant to your YPA project.



Supporting young people to initiate and implement a YPA project

Young people might initiate and implement a YPA project on their own, and you can offer them support and encouragement. In such cases, you will need to create opportunities for those young people to lead the project in its different stages of planning, preparing, implementation and follow-up. Youth workers and other staff can act as coaches and provide support as needed and as requested. The programme guide envisages the role of coach/coaches for such a situation.

Some ways of offering support and encouragement while young people take the lead include:

Mentoring – Mentoring is about meaningful dialogue between a young person (mentee) and a more experienced person (mentor) that supports them in developing on their chosen learning journey – in this case, the topic would be leading YPA projects.

MEL (Monitoring, Evaluation, learning) meetings – Support young people to generate learning objectives for their own leadership role in the YPA project, and to identify monitoring and evaluation questions that help them understand what they are learning. Then support them in applying the knowledge gained through evaluation to improve their practice.

Peer reviews – Support young people to connect with peer individuals/groups working in the same field who can help them to evaluate or provide feedback on their work and provide relevant insights.











You can offer support to young people interested in initiating and implementing a YPA project. If you have noticed in which areas they might need support, you can suggest those. They could also have different ideas about where they might need support. Discuss both and agree on a way forward.

These questions can be a starting point for discussing with young people:

What experience do you have with YPA projects?

As needed you could explain the life-cycle of YPA project as described in the Guide. Which positive aspects would you like to keep and incorporate in the design of your YPA project? Which aspects would you like to avoid/prevent from happening in your YPA project?





Discovering how best to support young people



What experience do you have with youth participation and related topics that you are interested in addressing through your YPA project?

As needed, you could explain youth participation (check the @ What is youth participation? module)

and refer young people to explore this **a** toolbox.

What makes it exciting and important?

How could you translate that in the design of the YPA project?

Who could provide good input and advice on this topic?

Which areas overall are you still unsure about?

Who do you think could support you and how?

You could refer to the life-cycle of YPA projects as described in the Guide and offer your support to them. Make sure to outline under which conditions it could be provided (e.g. it could be offered at a specific time, in relation to finalisation of some other steps, only when they feel they need specific support and directly ask for it, etc.)



If different steps are not working the way you intended them; if the results are not there in the time frame that you have expected; if you are feeling powerless and are unsure if it all makes sense at all - remember that participation is about process! So whenever you feel uncertain, feel free to check with young people about what they feel and how the process is working for them. It helps to realistically define what would be a success with particular young people that you are supporting in initiating and implementing a YPA project. Also re-define it along the way in constant dialogue with young people as you both learn more and can assess better the scope and scale of the support needed. You can also consult the Young people leading projects module for more ideas!

A Youth Participation Activity project in its purpose and design ought to serve to encourage youth participation in Europe's democratic life. The following tool can help you assess and identify your YPA project's potential for impact.

Assessing the impact potential of your YPA project for participation

You can review the approach and programme of the YPA project and see if in the design you can address the issue of youth participation in Europe's democratic life. Participation should strive to either give young people a VOICE or to support them in taking an ACTION. An YPA project is in itself an ACTION type of participation for the group members involved. As a group, you can jointly think about adding some of the elements to your programme to engage more young people and give them a VOICE and/or support them in taking ACTION. Based on this assessment, you could engage more young people as project participants and further refine design in consultations with them.



Is your YPA project intending to provide young people with opportunities to engage and learn to participate in civic society (in regards to meaningful civic, economic, social, cultural and political participation)?

How will you do that? Think about ways of consulting young people about your plan and how the information could reach young people with fewer opportunities.





Assessing the impact potential of your YPA project for participation



Is your YPA project intending to raise young people's awareness about common European values including fundamental rights and contribute to the European integration process, including through contribution to the achievement of one or more of the © EU Youth Goals? How will you do that?

Think about ways to motivate and support young people to raise their voice and/or to take action in relation to those topics?



Is your YPA project intending to increase young people's resilience to disinformation, fake news and propaganda and develop their digital competences and media literacy? How will you do that? Think about ways to consult young people about your plan and how could you support them in reflecting on their learning.



Is your YPA project intending to bring together young people and decision makers at local, regional, national and transnational level and/or contribute to the EU Youth Dialogue? How will you do that? Think about understanding young people's participation needs and ways you can create a programme to help them prepare for such participation.





Assessing the impact potential of your YPA project for participation



Is your YPA project intending to map existing actors, resources and initiatives and seek synergies with them?

How will you do that? Think about all those actors in the specific field you are focusing on that you could initiate contact with and promote the concept of youth participation.



Are you planning to share the experience from your YPA project with other young people?

How will you do that? Think about which channels and means are the most appropriate for sharing information with young people that might be most interested in joining and/or initiating a YPA project. It would be good if you also add a short explanation about the opportunities offered by Erasmus+.

Your YPA project as a participatory activity might be developed in a participatory manner, and this already means that involved young people had a meaningful experience of participation that would set a standard for other such experiences.

When thinking about your YPA project's impact on youth participation you can look at the ideas for follow-up. You could plan activities that would further provide young people with opportunities to learn and experience, as well as to raise a voice and take action.





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After the YPA project, depending on your group experience and topics of your interest, you may think about:

Organising meetings with young people (both group members and project participants) to plan joint actions:

presenting your experience and learning from the YPA project to other young people;

raising your VOICE or taking an ACTION on the topic that interests all of you;

you could initiate and/or participate in another YPA project;

you could check @ Erasmus+ and @ European Solidarity Corps and opportunities for the implementation of other projects;

you could check the opportunities offered by the @ Eurodesk platform;

you could check the @ European Youth Portal and the opportunities for participation in @ EU youth dialogue.





For greater impact and sustainability of the results of your YPA project, check which international and national documents are there that can support your cause. You can look for specific European/national/local laws, policies, strategies, recommendations, declarations, action plans or any other public commitments in relation to the topic of your YPA project. You could also look for key institutions in the field and use their youth programmes (or lack of) to support your cause.



Researching into youth organisations and initiatives that address the youth participation and other topics you find interesting and initiating contact with them to explore ways you could join and cooperate on some activities of interest;

Agreeing with young people to share information with each other about participation opportunities, as well as youth organisations and their initiatives, campaigns and events that you find and believe might be interesting to join and participate;

Exploring with a coach that supported you other ways in which they could support you and/or ways they would recommend for you to explore as potential next steps.



For greater impact and sustainability of the results of your YPA project, check which international and national documents are there that can support your cause. You can look for specific European/national/local laws, policies, strategies, recommendations, declarations, action plans or any other public commitments in relation to the topic of your YPA project. You could also look for key institutions in the field and use their youth programmes (or lack of) to support your cause.

Where are you at now?



You can use this self-assessment tool, both before you even start your Youth Participation Activity (YPA) project – to know what you should pay attention to – or after you have implemented it and used some of the tools proposed in this module, in order to assess how it worked for you.



How well do you as project leaders know what youth participation is?

Check it against what is explained in the What is youth participation? module.



How well do you as project leaders understand the different degrees of youth participation?

With which do you have least experience?

Check it against what is explained in the **S** Young people leading projects module.





Group self-assessment for Youth Participation Activity projects



Are all project participants at the *beginning of the project* aware of their own participation needs and possibilities offered through this YPA project?

If yes, how? Could that be improved?
If no, why not? Could that be changed?
What could you do to inform them and support them in identifying their own participation needs?



To what extent do you as project leaders feel competent to take ACTION (and raise a VOICE) during the YPA project? How come?

How about **after** the YPA project? What has changed for you?





Group self-assessment for Youth Participation Activity projects



Are young people as a target group of your YPA project feeling competent to raise a VOICE and/or take ACTION during the YPA project or even after?

If yes, to what extent? Could that be improved?
If no, why not? Could that be changed?
What could you do to build their competences and/or confidence in this respect?



Are young people as a target group of your YPA project feeling motivated to raise a VOICE and/or take ACTION during the YPA project or even after?

If yes, to what extent? Could that be improved?
If no, why not? Could that be changed?
What could you do to build their competences and/or confidence in this respect?





Group self-assessment for Youth Participation Activity projects



Are all project participants at the *end of the project* aware of their participation experience and learning about youth participation through this YPA project?

If yes, to what extent? Could that be improved?
If no, why not? Could that be changed?
What could you do to support young people in understanding their own experience and learning in regards to participation?



Did you notice differences in the level or quality of participation of the young participants in your YPA project? Were some participants more active and some less active?

If yes, what were those differences? Why do you think those differences exist? What would need to happen in the context of a YPA project to change the level of participation of the less active participants?

