

FINAL REPORT

PARTICIPATION FORUM 2024

Tallinn, Estonia | 27-28 November 2024



SALTO PARTICIPATION &
INFORMATION



HARIDUS- JA NOORTEAMET

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Enriching lives, opening minds.



**EUROPEAN
SOLIDARITY
CORPS**

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Participation Forum 2024 – Final Report

Authors:

BACALSO Cristina, BÁRTA Ondřej

Contributed by:

SALTO PI team and facilitators

Lead facilitators:

Olga Glumac, Eleni Stamouli

Parallel session facilitators:

Veronica Stefan, Olga Glumac, Sara Southam, Joana Freitas, Elitsa Hadzhieva, Martina Paone, Henrique Goncalves, Artūrs Pokšāns, Gianluca Rossino, Christina Cieslak

Notes from parallel sessions: Marcela Gomez, Katariina Järve, Veriko Dundua, Brigita Medne, Cristina Bacalso, Ondřej Bárta

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Disclaimers:

In an effort to communicate in a gender-sensitive and friendly manner efforts titles of the speakers have been avoided throughout the paper.

This report summarises proceedings and contents of the Participation Forum 2024. This includes contents of inputs made by various speakers, with all and any information provided in these sections strictly referring to the contents of the speeches, and not representing opinions of SALTO Participation & Information.



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Summary





The driving force of the democracy is to teach the ones that have the power how to share their power and relate to citizens.

(participant of the Forum)



On 26 to 29 November 2024, Participation Forum 2024 was organised by SALTO Participation & Information Resource Centre in Tallinn, Estonia, bringing together 128 participants from 27 European countries. The **event programme and content were ambitious and engaging**, focusing on complex topics related to Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes with reflection and creativity. **It successfully involved a diverse range of target groups**, including managers and Participation contact points of National Agencies for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps, umbrella organisations working with all sectors of the programmes and the topic of democratic participation, and representatives from the European Commission.

The aims of the Forum were:

-  To provide a space to exchange experiences and build capacity on the priority „Participation in Democratic Life, Civic Engagement and Common Values” and
-  To serve as a key moment to reflect on the mid-term evaluations of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes and their future.

In Parallel Sessions I, “Exploring Democratic Participation as a Topic in Our Activities”, participants explored **democratic participation as a topic of practice**, examining it from multiple angles: supporting cross-sectoral collaboration, creating inclusive environments for participation, discussing common values as a part of the priority, the value of producing and communicating research on participation and the potential of democratic participation in schools.



Participation Forum 2024, Tallinn, Estonia

In Parallel Session II, “Participation in Our Own Organisations – Involvement of Target Groups in Our Decision-making”, participants zeroed in on **participation and shared decision-making in their own organisations**. Each session provided insights into different cases and experiences and provided

a chance to discuss what it might mean across various contexts: looking at the importance of involvement of target groups on an institutional level, the inclusion dimension of shared decision-making, the involvement of young people in National Agencies and SALTOs, the involvement of programme ambassadors in decision-making, the potential for learning from youth-led organisations and specifics of shared decision-making in adult education.

Second day was dedicated to discussing the challenges and potential improvements in the future of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes. Emerging from the discussions, some of the recommendations from sectors include:

- Recommendations from the group on Youth emphasised the need for bottom-up approaches, involving young people in designing European programmes and fund allocation, with participatory feedback mechanisms from past beneficiaries. Suggestions included making application processes more youth-friendly, including by using digital tools, fostering cross-sectoral collaboration, training Agencies' staff on youth participation, and introducing simple entry grants to attract new participants.
- Recommendations for the School Education group stressed recognising EU values as a priority and enhancing links between formal and non-formal education, supported by dedicated funding under KA2 and KA1. Additional suggestions included making the LTA PEACE mandatory, integrating e-Twinning into Erasmus+, and decentralising Jean Monnet activities for schools.

- The group working on Adult Education in Erasmus+ recommended creating a Europe-wide network of guidance centres to consult on the opportunities of the programmes for accessibility, using simple language in communications, and involving grassroots actors to address real needs. Suggestions also included "two rules out for every new rule in" policy to simplify regulations.



Participants of the cross-sectoral forum organised by SALTO PI

- The group working on democratic participation and VET in Erasmus+ recommended embedding EU values at the core of programmes, with financial support for their inclusion, and fostering long-term, meaningful beneficiary engagement. Other suggestions included redesigning platforms to enhance collaboration, centralising programme ambassador networks with resources and visibility, and simplifying reporting processes for better accessibility.
- The Higher Education group recommended creating a participation strategy within the European Chapter for Higher Education and encouraging civic engagement during mobility through specific top-ups (financial support) to remove barriers. They also suggested allocating more KA3 funding for research on democratic policy development and awarding extra points to Erasmus+ projects that incorporate participatory processes.
- The European Solidarity Corps group recommended establishing a European Year of Democratic Participation with cross-sectoral forums, creating a European volunteer status with visa support, and lowering the age limit of the programme opportunities to enhance accessibility. Additional suggestions included microgrants for projects, mandatory youth advisory groups for programme co-creation, and increased funding for cross-sectoral initiatives and mobility opportunities.



Working on the horizontal priority “Participation in democratic life” across the sectors

Basic Information on and Objectives of the Participation Forum 2024

The Participation Forum 2024 was organised by [SALTO Participation and Information Resource Centre](#) in Tallinn, Estonia, from 26 to 29 November 2024. It brought together 128 participants from 27 European countries.

The aims of the Forum were:

- **To provide a space to exchange experiences and build capacity** in developing strategic work on the horizontal priority „Participation in Democratic Life, Civic Engagement and common values” of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps.
- **To serve as a key moment to reflect on the mid-term of the Programmes and their future**, including producing a report with recommendations for the future of the Programmes and actionable steps (for National Agencies, organisations and SALTO Participation & Information).

The programme of the Participation Forum 2024 was developed in a consultation process with SNAC New Power in Youth partners and Participation Contact Points from National Agencies, as well as based on the interest and profile of participants. The programme was designed to allow for exchanging of knowledge, inspiration, tools; networking and finding synergies; and debating on challenges and opportunities of promoting participation in democratic life in the Programmes and beyond. The event offered various forms of interaction and invited participants to connect the learning with their realities.

Parallel sessions were one of the formats introduced in order to foster group work, collaboration, and meaningful conversations, allowing participants to learn from a diverse range of practice stories. The **Cooperation Fair** was designed to foster connections among umbrella organisations and National Agencies working on democratic participation. This activity featured multiple rounds of parallel presentations in a larger space, allowing attendees to focus on specific tools, activities, accomplishments, or processes related to democratic participation, rather than typical organisational overviews. To add a practical and inspiring dimension to the Participation Forum 2024 experience, all participants were offered the opportunity to join optional **study visits** focused on local examples of democratic participation across Erasmus+ sectors and beyond. These visits included meetings with the project/organisation representatives, hearing more about their experience and topical discussions.

Welcome and Opening of the Participation Forum 2024

The lead facilitators, **Eleni STAMOULI** and **Olga GLUMAC**, welcomed all participants and invited them to introduce themselves to each other via a set of ice breaker exercises.

Jaak RAIE, Director General of the Education and Youth Board of Estonia, joined online to address the participants and to open the Participation Forum 2024. He stressed that participation is a vital topic for him personally and in the organisation, and he underlined points he considers crucial. Various types of youth participation mechanisms allow young people to take responsibility and take part in what is happening around them. Harno ([The Education and Youth Board of Estonia](#)) itself holds **participation as one of the important organisational values**. He recognised, that while it is important to acknowledge that individualisation and personalisation are key trends of today, it is equally crucial to keep the “we” at the forefront, because only “me” is not enough in difficult times. Citizens should consider themselves as the “we” of the states, since it is the citizens who give processes the critical mass. **United people bring forward ideas and actions**, and that is participation. It is examples from all different countries that push participation mechanisms forward, going from “me” to “we”.



Lead facilitators Olga Glumac and Eleni Stamouli

Rait TOOMPERE, Director of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Agency in Estonia and Head of Youth Affairs and Internationalisation Department of Education and Youth Board of Estonia, stressed that **democracy is about all of us, about reaching one another**. Democratic society makes us feel free, and it is important it does not make us feel alone. Values are key, and participation is one of them, because they give us a tool and a reason to move on to the future. He welcomed everyone and wished all participants a fruitful time together at the Participation Forum 2024.

The lead facilitators subsequently highlighted the Participation Forum 2024 objectives, namely to:

- **Provide a space to exchange experiences and build capacity** in developing strategic work on the horizontal priority „Participation in Democratic Life, Civic Engagement and common values“ of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes.
- **Serve as a key moment to reflect on the mid-term evaluation of the Programmes and their future.** This included producing recommendations for the future of both Programmes as well as actionable steps (for National Agencies, organisations, SALTO Participation & Information, European Commission and other relevant stakeholders).

The lead facilitators also introduced the SALTO Participation and Information team which worked tirelessly behind the scenes to organise the Participation Forum 2024. The agenda of the Participation Forum 2024 was subsequently introduced ([see Annex](#)), generally going from sharing experience and practice on various aspects of democratic participation, to having a look into the future of the engagement in the EU programmes in relation to the participation priority and potential future developments in this area.

The lead facilitators also introduced basic principles of working together throughout the event, including but not limited to:

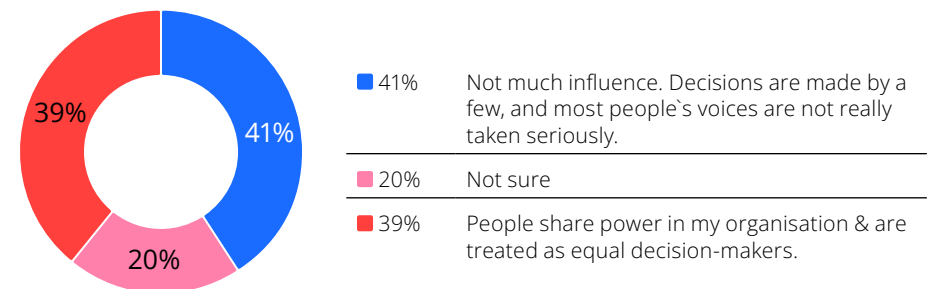
- Creating an environment where everyone feels respected, supported, and free.
- Practising attentive and non-judgmental listening, ensuring everyone's voice is heard and valued.
- Encouraging a positive atmosphere and collaborative spirit.



Essentials of Democratic Participation: Finding a common ground and food for thought

Cristina BACALSO, youth researcher and a Member of the Pool of European Youth Researchers, gave a keynote speech on the topic of essentials of the democratic participation. She inspired deeper thinking about democratic participation by pointing out the tension between seeing **participation as a means towards certain goals, or an end goal in itself**. Horizontal priority of the Erasmus+ is called simply “participation in democratic life”, but in order to meaningfully debate it further, key elements of this priority need further defining. **Participation does not only mean to take part, but also to influence decisions and matters that impact people**. She further outlined that participation happens “out there”, such as in the political domain (e.g., in influencing policy design and implementation), but it can also happen “in here”, within organisations and communities themselves (e.g., in how decision-making and planning is organised). It is therefore important to ask ourselves **how much power we share within our own organisations**. Mentimeter was used to explore opinions of participants of the Participation Forum 2024 on how much democratic participation is happening within their organisations (see graph below). 41% of the participants shared that their organisations are rather top-down, 20% were not sure, and 39% were convinced that their organisations are rather democratic and allow decision-making to happen in a wider group of stakeholders.

Think about your organisation and the people that it aims to support (e.g., adult learners). How much influence do they have in the decision-making?

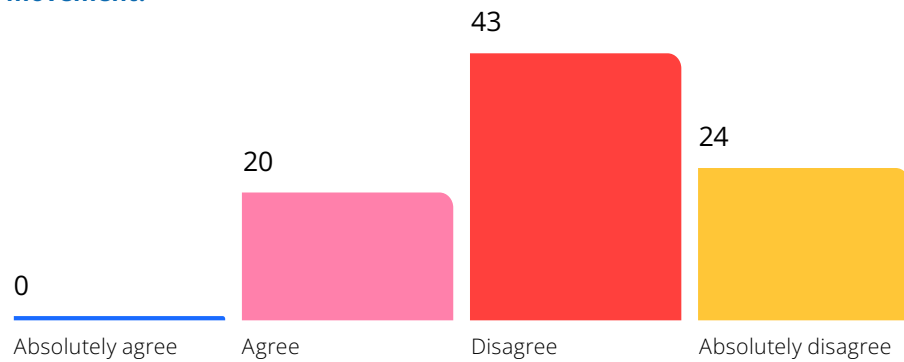


“Democratic life” is another concept in need of exploring.

Do all people share influence equally? Or are there groups which have more power than others? How much can we hear citizens' voices in comparison with voices of corporations and other power groups?

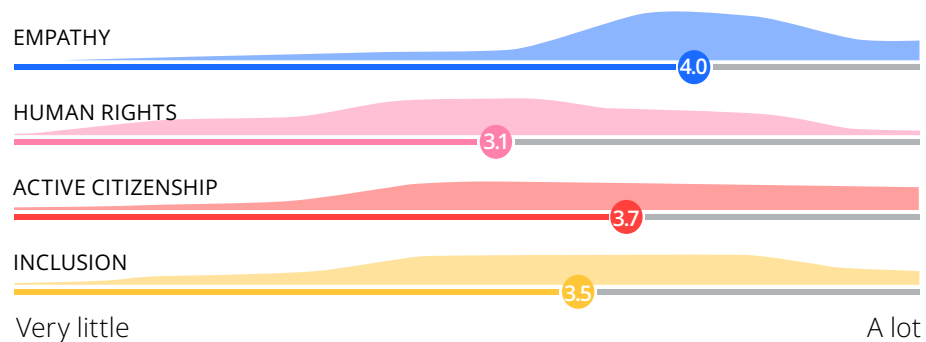
After posing the provocative questions, participants were asked to share their opinions on how they view one of the democratic participation mechanisms, namely civil disobedience. In the context of the climate justice movement, this has often been seen as the only way to have citizens' voices heard. Results (see graph above) suggest that most participants see civil disobedience as a valid democratic mechanism, although some see it as a rather harmful to the cause. This illustrates that democratic life is a complex matter and what one group sees as a normal way of getting heard is considered disruptive by others.

“Civil disobedience causes more harm than good for the climate justice movement.”



Bacalso subsequently pointed out that **volunteering is often seen as a prime example of civic engagement**, an important form of democratic participation. Giving time and energy creates solidarity, and the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes aim to develop the four key aspects of solidarity: empathy, human rights, active citizenship, and inclusion. Participants shared that they believe all of these aspects are developed as a result of participation in the abovementioned EU Programmes (see graph below), with empathy being seen as the most developed aspect of solidarity.

To what extent do you think a person has developed the following aspects of solidarity, after taking part in E+/ESC?

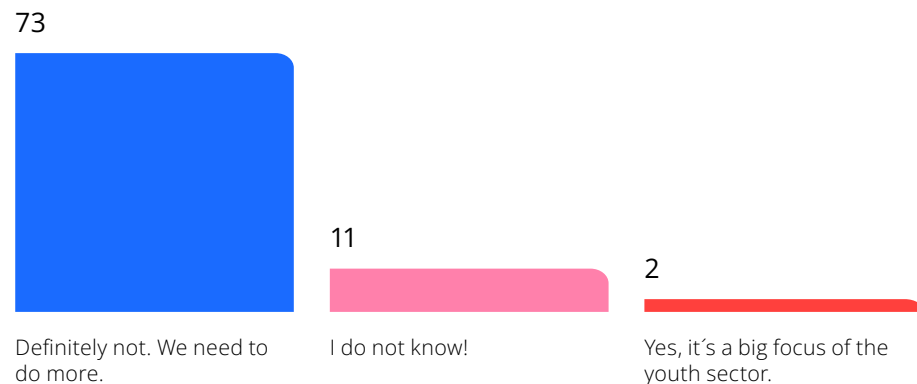


It was further underlined that the **concept of common European values is directly related to solidarity** as well. Consensus is needed, however, as to what constitutes these values. Participants were asked to share their own perceptions of European values (see word cloud below). The most frequently mentioned ones were democracy, freedom, equality, human rights, peace, and rule of law. The results also demonstrated how different outlooks there can be when it comes to something so seemingly universal as the common European values, and it is important to keep this in mind when approaching democratic participation.



Bacalso further pointed out a shift towards the (far) right-wing politics that can be seen in Europe and beyond. This trend is troubling as it can at times mean embracing non-democratic values such as xenophobia or authoritarianism. A vast majority of the **participants believed the European youth and education sectors are not doing enough to address these worrying trends** (see graph below).

Do you think we, in the European education and youth sectors, are doing enough to address the rise of the far-right?

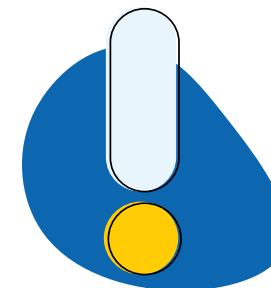


Bacalso finished by asking the participants **whether their participation activities should support autonomy and voice of a person** with no regard to the values such activities are furthering? **Or whether the European values should also be embedded into the participation mechanisms and activities?**

The subsequent debate touched, among others, upon the **rise of tokenistic participation mechanisms**, such as involving students, but eventually not listening to what they have to say. This can lead to shrinking of the civic spaces, effectively stealing away participation opportunities and pushing citizens to using other mechanisms, such as protests. Cross-sectoral cooperation was also debated, stressing that various sectors focus on young people in different stages of their lives. It was also noted that **diversifying approaches to participation**, supported by research, are potentially needed to tackle radicalisation and far-right rise in different parts of Europe, as there are likely various causes for these trends, not a single universal one. **It is key to also include young people in creating the participatory mechanisms**, to understand what interests and needs they have to become and to keep engaged.

The lead facilitators subsequently introduced a reflective exercise focusing on the following key questions which were debated in smaller groups:

- **What does participation mean to you personally?**
- **What new insights did you gain about participation today?**



Exploring Democratic Participation as a Topic in Our Activities: Parallel Sessions I

Subsequently, groupwork in parallel sessions was introduced and participants split into groups and deliberated on various aspects of participation. **These six parallel sessions offered an exploration of democratic participation as a topic of practice**, examining it from multiple angles and covering various sectors involved: supporting cross-sectoral collaboration, creating inclusive environments for participation, discussing common values as a part of the priority, the importance of and tools for inclusive democratic participation, the value of producing and communicating research on participation and the potential of democratic participation in schools. Each session offered an insight into specific cases and provided space for discussion on implementation across various contexts. Outcomes of these deliberations are summarised below, and detailed descriptions of all sessions are available as the [Annex](#) of this report.

Working across sectors and learning from each other

„How can we ask them (project beneficiaries) to do it if we are not ourselves cooperating even between departments and among National Agencies?“

The session included conclusions, points for discussion and lessons learned from an ongoing mapping project. This mapping conducted by strategic partnership New Power in Youth aimed to collect cross-sectoral projects that stimulate and promote youth participation in democratic life. Some topics

raised in the session included **challenges with funding such cross-sectoral collaboration, the lack of knowledge and inspiration on the topic** of participation itself among National Agencies, project beneficiaries and other stakeholders (despite a lot of documented practices), and **the lack of spaces and opportunities for cooperation** that would support cross-sectoral projects. Controversial topics which came up included that often NAs will ask beneficiaries to collaborate cross-sectorally on participation projects, while they might not do this themselves (**not “practicing what they preach”**), and also that most of the collaboration across sectors **might actually be just information-sharing**, and not true cooperation.

Creating environment for participation

“The driving force of the democracy is to teach the ones that have the power how to share their power and relate to citizens & young people.”

The session looked at different opportunities to develop municipal-level youth work and youth participation shared by Democracy Reloading and Europe Goes Local partnerships. Some topics raised in the session included that there is a lack of knowledge about participation and **a lack of political will to share power**. Many still see participation as a privilege and not as a right, and **there is a need for meaningful participation**. However, a good practice that was mentioned was how sometimes it is municipalities driving

youth participation, and in other contexts, it is National Agencies. A controversial topic that was covered was that there appears to be a decrease of youth in organisations, and the debate on how to accommodate a lessening of interest from young people in participation.

How do we discuss the “common values”?

“We cannot save the world with one programme.”

The session presented the Participation Erasmus Alumni for Civic Engagement (PEACE) programme, whose main focus **is developing Erasmus+ alumni as ambassadors of European values**, for which they go back to their local contexts (e.g. schools, workplaces) and are able to speak competently about European values. Some topics raised in the session included if and how ambassador programmes are addressing the rise of right-wing movements and illiberal values in European society, and how grassroots organisations might have a hard time relating to concepts such as “human rights” and “active citizenship”, potentially finding such concepts alienating. A controversial topic that came up was the question of **if the European youth sector is conflating promotion of EU values with the promotion of the EU and its programmes and policies**. For example, a young refugee could absolutely be in favour of human rights, but not necessarily see the EU as being the promoter of human rights, given their experience of being pushed back at borders.

The right to participation for all

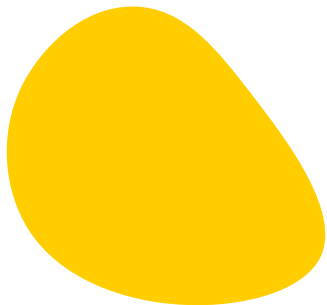
“Make sure to look at your own assumptions and blind spots, try to hear the diverse voices.”

The session looked at different frameworks, methods and tools to support collaborative approaches to participation, as well as strategies and challenges to address **participation in connection with youth inclusion and accessibility**. Some topics raised included practical solutions to enhance accessibility, such as making information short and easy to understand, increasing readability of materials with easy-to-read fonts, and overcoming language barrier through translation. An example of a good practice that was highlighted was the CLEAR framework method as one of the methods in the [Inclusive Participation Toolkit](#) (Dutch Youth Institute, National Youth Council, Alexander Foundation), while a bad practice was **when a project highlights participants, such as people with disabilities, in a tokenistic way**, rather than actually having them involved. A topic of controversy which came up was if participation frameworks should differentiate between opportunities offered to adults and youth, given the unique barriers that youth may face in comparison to adults.

Research on participation: What's the point?

"What to do with the data?"

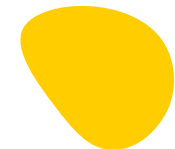
The session presented a joint, cross-sectoral study presented by two national agencies in France: the Erasmus+ Education and Training Agency and the Youth and Sports Agency. The aim of the study was to build a knowledge base around the notion of social and civic engagement of youth. Some topics that were raised related to the methodology of the study, including how to make it youth-friendly, and also how the researchers were able to cooperate with youth organisations. One topic of controversy that was discussed was that given the volume of data produced by the EU on such studies, if there was **thought given to what happens to the insights and data afterwards**, and if the data can guide further action or shape future programming.



Democratic education and the right to participate: From teaching democracy to living democracy in school

"It cannot all stay with teachers, have you tried to train headmasters and other stakeholders?"

The session consisted of a presentation on democratic schooling from [QUEST](#) (European education network advocating for democratic changes in education) and [EUDEC](#) (Community of democratic schools in Europe). Democratic schooling is about **embedding democracy in everyday school practices** as a way of experiencing and promoting democracy to children. Some topics that arose included how democratic schooling cannot only be left up to the teachers, but that **it requires structural change at the system level and in the curriculum**. A point of controversy related to the fact that while school councils exist and are sometimes even required by law, they can be very limited in scope or non-functional. Research is needed on the effectiveness and impacts of school councils on democratic education.



Participation in our own organisations: Involvement of target groups in decision-making

A panel discussion took place to provide more food for thought **on the importance of involvement of target groups in our decision-making** before the second round of parallel sessions on practical implementation of this principle. The panel was hosted by facilitators and the following experts took part:

- **Annabel VUILLIER-COOLS** (Technical Advisor for Culture, Participation Contact Point for the French Erasmus+ National Agency for Education and Training);
- **Spyros PAPADATOS** (Secretary General at Rural Youth Europe and a researcher);
- **Sara PORTA** (Youth Representative in the Youth Participation Strategy Steering group, and Erasmus+ Project Manager at VIEWS International)

Annabel VUILLIER-COOLS opened by describing some good practice examples from the French National Agency for Erasmus+ (FR NA). The first example was the [Erasmus+ Circle steering committee](#) which **supports the FR NA in setting up the priorities** and helps to identify new objectives. The body is chaired by a Member of French Parliament and includes 20 members, including experts from other National Agencies or other organisations, and leaders of youth networks. The Circle is independent and supports the management of the FR NA, for example by supporting the development of apprentice mobility, or contributing to the formulation of



Panel discussion with Annabel Vuillier-Cools, Spyros Papadatos and Sara Porta.

the request for an increase in the 2021-27 budget. Another example was a consultation group of trainers, teachers, international relations officers, and other personnel in the role of project managers. This consultation group meets three times per year with FR NA management **to deliberate on needs and barriers in the project management domain**. The group also **proposes recommendations for improvements** in the domains of follow up and project management.

Spyros PAPADATOS continued by sharing about his research on meaningful youth participation in the Council of Europe context, with a **focus on co-management**. The Council of Europe co-management structure is called Joint Council on Youth and brings together Advisory Council on Youth made up of 30 representatives of youth civil society, and the European Steering Committee for Youth which brings together representatives of the member states. He underlined that youth civil society feels in the role **of “a beneficiary”** within the context of the Erasmus+ programme, which is in contrast with the role **of a “partner”** within the context of the European Youth Foundation.

Sara PORTA, Youth Representative in the Youth Participation Strategy Steering group, spoke about responsibility and power. She pointed out that **it is impossible to teach democracy, but instead it is necessary to experience it**. She shared her personal story: A year ago, she applied to the Strategy Steering Group, as a young person with fewer opportunities. Since she started to be engaged in the Steering Group, she felt like she represented **the young people who are not able to be at the table**. She underlined, however, that it was not an easy task for her to work within the Steering Group.

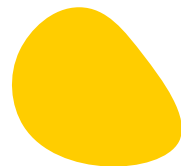
When asked why it is important to include target groups in decision making, Annabel VUILLIER-COOLS explained that it is important to make sure the

projects implemented within the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes **are relevant and connected to the needs and realities** of the given sector. Spyros PAPADATOS described **how service provision improves by consulting with the target group** of a given programme. Sara PORTA elaborated on her motivation to participate in the Steering Group as a youth representative, stressing **the importance of acting collectively**, which helps battle cynicism and gives hope to all involved.



Participation in our own organisations – Involvement of target groups in our decision- making: Parallel Sessions II

Groupwork in parallel sessions continued also during the rest of the first day of the Participation Forum 2024. These parallel sessions offered an exploration of **participation within organisations and shared decision-making with target groups**. Each session provided insights into different cases and experiences and provided a chance to discuss what it might mean across various contexts - looking at involvement of target groups on an institutional level, the inclusion dimension of shared decision-making, the involvement of young people in National Agencies and SALTOs, the involvement of programme ambassadors in decision-making, practice stories of youth-led organisations and specifics of shared decision-making in adult education. The outcomes of these deliberations are summarised below, and detailed descriptions of all sessions are available as [Annex](#) of this report.



Participatory culture as an institutional value

“Only when the organisation is participatory, then it can be taken seriously as a body which values participation and is driven to engage its target groups.”

Participatory culture is a collective commitment and at all levels.

The session focused on the importance and implementation of participatory culture in an organisation, which requires it to be shared value of all employees, supported by a strategy, and stated as an explicit priority. Reet Kost, Deputy Director of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Estonian Agency, shared the organisation’s efforts experience in various ways of involving target groups. When implemented properly, **shared decision-making builds trust and transparency, fosters innovation, and strengthens ownership**. Some topics that were raised in the discussion included the different ways to have target groups participate: ad hoc (consultations on a position paper, etc.), participant feedback loops (hop on hop off system, one-off consultations on a certain topic for example), permanent mechanisms on decision-making (e.g., Ministry steering group for youth). A point of controversy was that it must be recognised that for beneficiaries of the programmes who are asked to participate in consultations, this can be a demanding process and that **their participation requires time and resources** as well.

Who is involved in our decision-making and who is missing?

„How can we make sure that participation is not a privilege?“

The session explored the inclusion aspect of various shared decision-making mechanisms, taking as an example the experience of SALTO Inclusion & Diversity Youth in coordinating an advisory group for their implementation of the Inclusion & Diversity Forum 2024. They aimed for a mechanism to ensure **the right of people with lived experience of barriers to be included in the decision-making**, as well as for an event to better respond to diverse needs of the participants. Some topics that were raised included some challenges when convening such a group, and how people might have different levels of readiness for committing to longer involvement mechanisms and different types of involvement. The importance of financial remuneration, regular meetings (and face-to-face, if possible), active outreach to diverse groups, clear communication of expectations and clear process were also discussed. A point of controversy that was discussed was that the involvement of target groups, particularly those with lived experience of societal barriers, is hard work for National Agencies, and their staff are experiencing some pressure in being able to do this well. Another controversial point was that some participants experienced challenging situations in their context where they might be part of governmental organisations which do not necessarily see the importance of accessibility or even having opposite values / agendas.

How do we involve young people in our decision-making? Challenges and opportunities

“It is more difficult for a young representative to share their ideas if they are alone and just consultative body among others with voting powers.”

The session focused on how to engage young people in decision-making of National Agencies and SALTOs and the different modalities for this. Researcher Artūrs Pokšāns and co-researcher Gianluca Rossino shared preliminary results of a participatory research into different cases (conducted by SNAC New Power in Youth) that aim to do that, and discussed the lessons learned, as well as experiences and challenges of institutions and young people in the process. Topics discussed included the difficulty of involving youth at all levels, since some structures are very embedded in governments, which are **not flexible enough to engage with young people**. Participants discussed that decision-making around social media strategies was an easy entry-point to engaging young people, as a method of consultation, before moving on to more structural forms of participation. Other forms such as involvement of programme ambassadors, permanent Advisory groups or focus groups and consultations with young people with no experience in the programmes are also explored in the research. A point of controversy that was discussed was that **some National Agencies still do not include young people**, and that they expect this initiative or demand for participation to come from young people themselves.

How do we involve programme ambassadors in decision-making?

“Involving ambassadors requires structural changes and openness to doing things differently—it can be scary, but it’s necessary.”

The session focused on how the initiatives, EuroApprentices and EuroPeers, help young people get involved, give them the chance to run their own projects and make Erasmus+ programmes more visible and popular. Topics that were discussed included **the importance of co-creation with young people**, rather than looking for volunteers to do something pre-defined. This helps them feel more motivated, that they are doing something important, and that what they do is appreciated. A point of controversy that was discussed was the question of **how much power ambassadors should have in decision-making**. While participants wanted to have more young people with decision-making roles, they also expressed concerns that ambassadors might not always be able to meet the organisations goals or may have ideas that could conflict with those of the organisation.

Learning with and from youth-led organisations

“If I am elected, I’m not going to easily ‘ghost’ my job.”

The session focused on best practices and pitfalls of youth-led participation, as presented by the European Youth Forum and OBESSU. European Youth Forum shared specific mechanisms of management, such as different working structures and the importance of regular voting and deliberation on decisions, as well as good practice of cooperation between youth and governmental organisations for monitoring and management of European Youth Foundation and European Youth Centres. Meanwhile OBESSU shared some national examples from their members and international cooperation projects, emphasizing that **“serious opportunities for participation -> serious active participation”**. Some discussions included the importance of emphasising non-monetary benefits that young people would acquire by being part of such organisations, such as skills and knowledge that would help to support their education or career goals. It is important **to avoid the pitfalls of tokenistic participation**, where young people cannot see the positive impact that their contribution are having. A point of controversy that was brought up was the line between voluntary labour and internships, and how to keep youth motivated and engaged in voluntary work.

Working together with adult learners and educators

"You don't really collaborate with an organisation; you collaborate with an individual in that organisation."

The session focused on the **differences and opportunities for making decisions together with adult learners and educators**, exploring the experience of the EAEA – The European Association for the Education of Adults. The organisation aims to promote adult education and lifelong learning in Europe and represent political interests at European level. A topic that was discussed was the challenge of identifying beneficiaries for a membership organisation. While they work primarily with educators, National Agency staff, and institutions, their primary beneficiary is the adult learner, though they do not engage with them directly. This can make it **sometimes difficult to understand how best to respond to political realities**. A point of controversy that was brought up was that **engaging adult learners in participatory processes can be challenging**, given that it is a varied target group, encompassing all individuals aged 18+ who have completed primary education.



Parallel Sessions II: Participation in our own organisation

Cooperation Fair

The Cooperation Fair was a lively networking session on the first day of the Participation Forum 2024, **designed to foster connections** among umbrella organisations and National Agencies working on democratic participation. This event featured multiple rounds of parallel presentations in a larger space, allowing attendees to focus on specific tools, activities, accomplishments, or processes related to democratic participation, rather than typical organisational overviews.

Participants were encouraged to bring a meaningful object—such as a game, a photo, or event memorabilia—that served as a conversation starter, sparking curiosity and engagement with others. This dynamic format enabled everyone to showcase their innovative practices while exploring the inspiring contributions of their peers. Lively conversations took place, and practices were shared in an open and learning-focused manner.

Cooperation Fair included stories and experiences on democratic participation from European Alternatives, SNAC New Power in Youth, Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations (ALLIANCE), Erasmus Student Network (ESN), SNAC Europeans, European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training (EVBB), European Federation for Intercultural Learning (EFIL), European Democratic Education Community (EUDEC), Quality Education in Europe for Sustainable Social Transformation (QUEST network), SNAC Europe Goes Local, CoE-EU Youth Partnership & Pool of European Youth Researchers, European Youth Forum, European Parliament Youth Outreach Unit, Lifelong Learning Platform (LLL), Eurodesk, Inclusion Europe, European Forum of Technical and Vocational Education (EfVET), Volonteuropé,

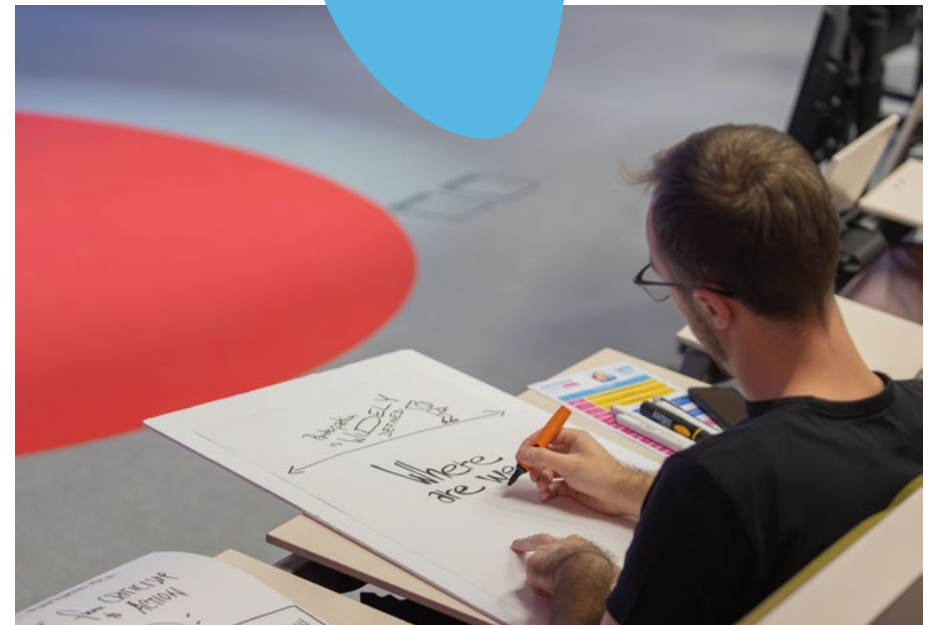
National Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps in Romania, GLL (Gemeinsam Leben Lernen), DYPALL Network, ERYICA (European Youth Information and Counselling Agency), INDIRE (National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research, Italy), Understanding Europe, European Youth Parliament, European Parliament Ambassador Schools (EPAS), LTA EuroApprentices.



Cooperation Fair, Participation Forum 2024

Reflections

On the morning of the second day of the Participation Forum, **Ondřej BÁRTA**, one of the two rapporteurs at the Participation Forum, a freelance youth researcher and a senior associate at People, Dialogue and Change, shared some reflections of the contents of the first day. He stressed that **participation is about responsibility and taking action** on a certain issue, topic, problem, solution, or future development. He underlined that it is necessary to think critically about **what participation means: it is not a panacea, but rather a powerful tool which needs to be used properly to bring the best results**. He reiterated the necessity for the continuous debate on what constitutes the common European values. He summarised that **participation without transparency and action leads to mistrust**, and that in turn leads to accusations of tokenism even in cases where participation is meant as a genuine tool. He also warned that **not everything that is labelled as participation is necessarily a participatory mechanism**, with some events, tools, or structures being rather educational tools than genuine participatory opportunities. He also reiterated that **consensus on and explicit treatment of values connected to democratic participation** is the best way to avoid bad practices introduced by far right and other non-democratic forces and labelled as participation.



The graphic facilitator of the Forum, Juraj Vig

Cross Sector Monitoring of the 'Participation Priority' within Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes

Ondřej BÁRTA, a freelance youth researcher and a senior associate at People, Dialogue and Change, shared results of the research into projects funded by the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes dealing with the participation priority. The research was commissioned by SALTO Participation and Information Resource Centre and conducted by Dan Moxon and Ondřej Bárta from People, Dialogue and Change, and is to be published in early 2025.

The research looked at all the projects funded by Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes dealing with participation priority in call years 2021-2023 (hereinafter called "participation projects"). Bárta started by pointing out that **the definition of the participation priority** provided by the European Commission **is extremely wide** and encompasses all forms of democratic participation (both civic and political), as well as support structures, such as capacity building, or creation of participatory mechanisms and policies. Despite this wide definition of the participation priority, most of the Erasmus+ funded participation projects were learning mobilities of individuals (75%) and therefore focused mostly on the level of the individuals, and much less on systemic changes.

When it comes to the size of the Erasmus+ project consortia, youth sector is the most diverse with only about 33% of projects featuring only one participating country, in comparison to much less diverse education and training

sector (about 72% of projects featuring only one participating country), and sport sector where all projects only featured one participating country.

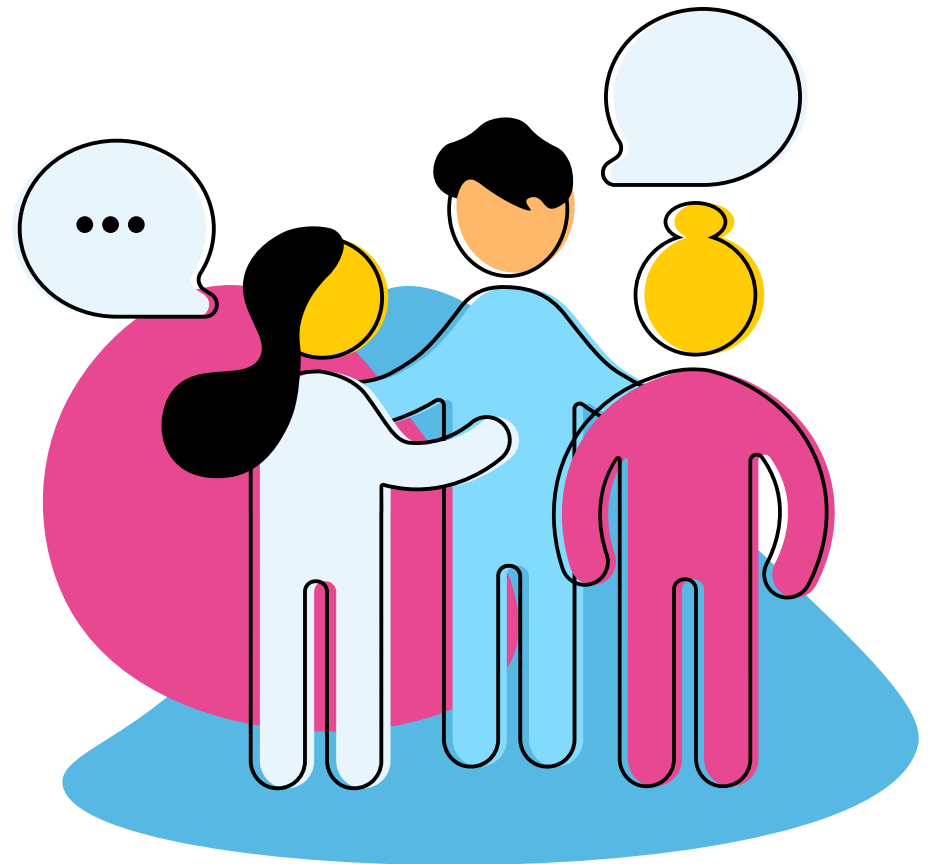
The number of participants has increased in the Erasmus+ funded participation projects over the years, including the people with fewer opportunities. On average, there were over 100 participants per project in the youth sector, while there were on average about 20 participants per project in the education and training sector. Among the coordinating entities of the Erasmus+ funded participation projects, **the ratio of NGOs and groups of young people decreases** over the years, while **the ratio of schools and public bodies increases**, suggesting a shift in attention to the participation priority among different stakeholders.

In regard to the budget, the total amount awarded in 2021-2023 to Erasmus+ funded participation projects was almost €464 000 000, with just over half dedicated to education sector, and just under half to the youth sector. Erasmus+ funded participation projects in the education and training sector cost on average €72 000 per project, in comparison with €50 000 per project in the youth sector, and €17 000 in the sports sector.

In case of European Solidarity Corps funded participation projects, most of the projects were volunteering projects (79%) and the average number of participants were about 12 per project, with an average of 5 being young

people with fewer opportunities. The most addressed priority of European Solidarity Corps funded participation projects was “Inclusion and diversity”, followed by “EU Youth Goals”, and “Participation in democratic life.” The types of entities that acted as project coordinators were primarily NGOs, followed by public bodies and schools.

In the subsequent debate, Participation Forum 2024 participants pointed out that **it was hard to determine what exactly beneficiaries do to tackle the participation priority**, and that two projects labelled as participation projects can have very different impacts. When asked what element of the research surprised researchers the most, Ondřej Bárta shared that there is a positive correlation between the size of the project budget and the number of people with fewer opportunities. In other words, the more budget there is in a project, the more people with fewer opportunities are engaged.



Youth Participation Strategy and Input from the Monitoring Process

Youth Participation Strategy Steering group members Gianluca Rossino (youth representative) and Zuzana Kopčanová (Slovak National Agency) presented some results from the Youth Participation Strategy monitoring process. The [Youth Participation Strategy](#) was developed by SALTO Participation and Information in consultation and cooperation with various stakeholders, and its aims are to contribute to achieve the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy and the European Youth Goals relating to youth participation, and to exploit the full potential of E+/ESC to foster youth participation in democratic life. The Youth Participation Strategy Steering Group is composed of 6 youth representatives and other stakeholders relevant to the Strategy implementation, such as National Agencies, European Commission, ERYICA, SALTO Inclusion & Diversity, and the RAY Network.

The Youth Participation Strategy Steering Group underlined that the survey results and other data used in the monitoring process suggest that for multiple reasons National Agencies, SALTO PI and other stakeholders were active at promoting the principles of youth participation across all actions and activities of the programmes (Aim 1: Embedding), but less successful at enabling effective support for programme applicants and beneficiaries to develop and implement youth projects with a quality youth participation dimension (Aim 2: Support), involving young people in decision-making of management and implementation of the programmes (Aim 5: Involvement) and at dedicating specific attention to the participation in democratic life of young people with fewer opportunities (Aim 6: Inclusion). The public data from the monitoring report will be available in first quarter of 2025.

They also invited the participants to reflect – **is youth participation a right or an obligation, and, if yes, then an obligation for whom?**



Youth Participation Strategy Steering group

Strategic Look Ahead and Recommendations for the Future: Parallel Sessions III & IV

While democratic participation is recognised as a priority in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes, its implementation, as well as place and expression in the programmes varies across contexts and sectors. Considering the necessity and potential for implementation of the priority across all sectors, the exemplary competence and experience in the group, as well as the event taking place in the light of future programme generation, this event served as a significant opportunity for sharing and collecting challenges and needs for the programme.

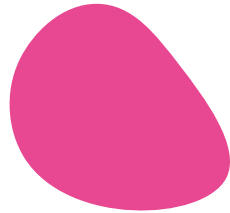
Throughout the second day of the Participation Forum, six double-length parallel sessions took place, each focused on the challenges and potential solutions related to improving the implementation and providing environment for democratic participation across various sectors of the programmes. The aim was **to address existing challenges, explore potential solutions, and support the further integration of democratic participation as a core priority** within the programmes in the current cycle and beyond.

To ensure the effectiveness and depth of the group work and identifying challenges and recommendations, these sessions engaged participants in meaningful, sector-specific discussions. Therefore, participants were invited to choose one of the sectors of Erasmus+ or sessions on European Solidarity Corps and corresponding set of parallel sessions. Co-creation activity aimed to engage participants in a creative and interactive way, fostering sectoral approach and ensuring that the recommendations were both practical and forward-thinking. The gamified tool (methodology in [Annex](#))

allowed participants to approach problem-solving in a more dynamic and enjoyable manner, ensuring their active involvement in shaping the future of the programmes.

The work built on “Mapping and gapping of Participation in Democratic Life, Common Values and Civic Engagement within Education and Training in the Erasmus+ Programme” (SALTO PI, 2023), monitoring of Youth Participation Strategy implementation (SALTO PI, ongoing), outcomes of the meeting of National Agencies (January 2024) and more. Recommendations produced at the Participation Forum 2024 are summarised below and listed in full text in the [Annex](#) of this report. The work on the recommendations will, however, continue, giving the participants an opportunity to continue contributing to it in various ways, depending on their availability and interest. Those will then be used in the SALTO PI daily work and further advocating for the improvement of conditions and opportunities for priority implementation in the programmes.

For the group discussing Youth Participation Strategy implementation, as well as Youth sector in Erasmus+, the recommendations included an emphasis on more bottom-up approaches, including **target groups to be included in the design of European programmes**, and for funds to involve young people in the allocation process, including getting feedback from former beneficiaries through participatory mechanisms, such as ad hoc consultation or steering groups. For the application processes, **incentives should exist for cross-sectoral cooperation**, it should include opportunities for video and digital formats to make it more youth-friendly,



as well as a feedback step to have more communication with applicants. Staff of National Agencies for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps (ESC) could receive training from young people about youth participation.

Simple, entry-grants (similar to ESC) would help new young people enter the programmes. The group also discussed that more **consultative structures within institutional decision-making and programme management should be created**.

For the School Education group, the recommendations included that **EU values should be recognised as an over-arching priority**. There should be **more support for schools** to integrate civic education in non-formal education, and **more links between formal and non-formal** education, for example, through a specifically allocated budget under KA2 for partnerships, or opening up KA1 mobilities for collaborations between formal and non-formal education institutions. Other specific recommendations included making the LTA PEACE mandatory for all National Agencies, integrating e-Twinning in Erasmus+ to enable full potential on ESEP, and decentralising Jean Monet activities for schools.

For Adult Education group, the recommendations included investing in and creating a Europe-wide **network of guidance centres for adults**. More specifically, the group also suggested using **simple language in communication** (e.g. Programme Guide to be shortened to 20 pages), and also to have communications outsourced to national and regional actors, to increase accessibility. Policymakers should **work more with grassroots level** to address the reality of needs and include those who actually work

in the field, and consider establishing a mobile guidance centre, to go to where people are (as opposed to waiting for people to come to them). Lastly, if the Commission is to apply a new rule for the Programmes, then they should be obliged to delete two old ones in order to decrease the burden on beneficiaries.

For VET group, the recommendations included that EU values should be remade as the heart of the Programme, in the design and structure of the Programme Guide for example. This includes **giving additional financial support for including EU values**, similar to inclusion. Moreover, it is important to **engage the beneficiaries in a meaningful and long-term way**, as opposed to ad hoc, time pressured consultations. Platforms should be re-designed as communication platforms that promote collaboration. Ambassador networks should be centralised, by coordinating them (with resources) and giving these networks more visibility and clarity. Also, reporting should be simplified to increase accessibility.

For Higher Education group, there should be a **specific participation strategy** within the European Chapter for Higher Education. Other recommendations included encouraging civic engagement during mobility by providing specific top-ups, and that these top-ups also help to ensure there are not barriers to participation. In regards to supporting democratic and participatory processes, it was suggested that more KA3 funding be allocated **to research for democratic policy development** in Erasmus+, and also **to include additional points for Erasmus+ project applications that includes participatory processes**.

For European Solidarity Corps group, recommendations included that there should be a European Year of Democratic Participation, which includes resources from youth but also education, and would feature **participation dialogues and forums** across different sectors. The group also recommended creating a European volunteer status, which would support the recognition of volunteering, and including visas in this status, enabling more participants outside of the EU to participate. **Lowering the age limit** would help to support cross-sectorality and install microgrants to support projects. There should also be obligatory **youth advisory groups, steering committees, and co-creation activities** with youth throughout the entire process, including programme design. Funding for cross-sectoral projects, and mobility opportunities, should be increased, and should also be more open (e.g. a teacher exploring the world of a youth worker).



Participation Forum 2024, Tallin University

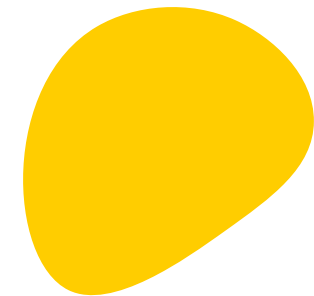
Practical aspects and considerations

Acknowledging that learning happens not just from the content but also inspired and encouraged by a particular learning space and practical conditions, as well as in efforts to use our power to follow our principles, organisers of the event spent particular attention to aligning the messages of the event with the space and organisational aspects. The principles of sustainability, participatory spirit, collaboration and accessibility were guiding the decision-making process. At the same organisers commit to learning from mistakes and striving for improvements further on.

Content was developed in consultation with the network of Participation contact points of National Agencies, with SNAC New Power in Youth partners, based on learnings from various events, as well as based on the contributions and suggestions of the participants via the application form. The types of activities (parallel sessions, study visits, Cooperation fair, social activities) were chosen to encourage communication, collaboration and active participation of everyone.

Encouraging communication and friendly atmosphere was one of the guiding forces for the design of the **venue** as well. To prioritise social dimension and align with the idea of the event, university was chosen as the main location of the event. At the same time, accessibility and ease of the usage of the space should certainly be reconsidered and improved in the future.

Quiet room, co-working space, as well as various interaction spaces were provided for diverse participants' needs. **Food** was offered vegan and vegetarian by default, due to sustainability efforts.



Study Visits

To add a practical and inspiring dimension to the Participation Forum experience, all participants were offered the opportunity to join optional study visits focused on local examples of democratic participation. These visits were chosen as just a few examples to offer food for thought, and included meetings with the project/organisation representatives from several sectors of the programme, hearing more about their experience and topical discussions. Participants were invited to ask questions and, most importantly, **reflect on their role in promoting or supporting similar initiatives** and the (potential) role of Erasmus+ and ESC Programmes. Descriptions of the study visits are available in the [Annex](#) of this report, and it includes the following visits:

How early can you participate in decision-making? Experience of Suvemäe democratic school

The Suvemäe democratic school section is a part of the Tallinn Art Gymnasium, offering basic education from grades 1 to 9. **What sets democratic education apart is the active involvement of students in decision-making affecting school life.** Students are encouraged to share their opinions, and weekly school-wide meetings are held where all students are invited to participate. For more significant decisions, a vote is held, with students and adults having an equal say. Students are actively involved in planning, including the development of assessment criteria. Fridays are dedicated to non-formal education, with various clubs allowing students to explore and develop their personal interests. Alongside academic studies,



Study Visit at the Banned Books Museum

Suvemäe focuses on cultivating executive functions and learning skills, with the aim of fostering self-directed learners. At the start of each academic year, students select a coach from among the adults to support them on their educational journey. Suvemäe is constantly evolving, adapting to the needs and dynamics of the community. Suvemäe democratic school is an Erasmus+ accredited organisation, so it will also be a chance to discuss the opportunities, challenges and connections of their activities and the programmes.

“We have influence” Pelgulinna gymnasium and living democracy in school

[PERG](#) is a new state gymnasium that was opened in 2023. Besides qualitative gymnasium education, they also focus on democracy and on „wicked problems“. They say: **“Our core values are „We have influence“ and „Together and flexibly“ and we truly believe in living and breathing democracy in our school.”**

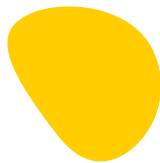
Students at PERG are equipped to address social challenges with a strong emphasis on sustainability, both social and environmental. Alongside a comprehensive general education, all students complete a Global Education Module (three courses), which teaches practical approaches to solving environmental issues and fostering strong democracies. This module culminates in a hands-on assignment, where students implement change through initiatives like creating petitions, organizing student movements, or developing projects. To support overall well-being, students also complete a Self-Directed Learner Module, focusing on mental, physical, and social health. Additionally, every student participates in mandatory community service practice, and each student is supported by a mentor to guide their development. The school life, co-organized by the Student Council, includes clubs such as an LGBTQ club, a youth choir, a recycling club and others.

The school has just started their journey in the world of Erasmus+ programme, and this visit was a chance to discuss how their existing and new activities can potentially be supported by this.

Who gets to make decisions about budgets? Participatory budgeting in schools as a youth participation project

Participatory budgeting is a tool of participatory democracy which gives students the chance to decide how part of the school’s budget will be spent. Initial pilot and impact assessment showed that the **number of students actively involved in school life grew and pupils who felt students to be included in making decisions**. Since then, they have reached 25 schools and around 3500 students through brainstorming activities, workshops, voting and other events. They also offer the schools a digital platform to use for voting, so that young people have the necessary digital skills to e-vote and partake in civic life (which in Estonia relies quite heavily on digital tools). They now expand their work and seek to integrate existing participatory budgeting practices in other local municipalities and schools, creating a sustainable participatory democratic ecosystem that empowers youth and promotes active citizenship ([English instruction booklet](#)). Work on school participatory budgeting development is supported by Erasmus+ Youth participation activities among other funding sources.

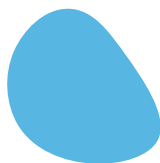




Who creates the city? City government simulation as a youth participation project

Tallinn city youth council implemented a project - city government simulation, where young people were working on their proposals for improvements of the city. One of their proposals (after many meetings) **was accepted by the city government and will be implemented**. What makes the project even more special is the fact that they did an impact analysis alongside the project, bringing out how the project increased the awareness of young people in Tallinn about the existence of a youth council and increased the number of people who applied for the next period in the council. The project also had a long-term impact on the young people themselves and has turned into other initiatives.

Project implementers appreciate that Forum participants focused on questions **whether the young people were still making their own decisions** or under our guidance. As in this project a lot of emphasis was put on the young people making all the decisions themselves and leaders just helping with the technical stuff (drafting the juridical acts etc.) project presenters welcome that this was given special attention.



Adult education, folk high schools and citizenship ABC Visit to the Tallinn Folk high school

In the meeting with the Association of Estonian Folk High schools participants had a chance to get to know the main idea of Nordic Folk high schools, initiated by Nikolai F.S. Grundtvig, and how it has developed in Estonia, including insights to overall adult learning trends in our country. The work of folk high schools and the advocacy work of the umbrella organization were introduced. Civic education plays an important role for them, so this was a chance to discuss their project "Citizenship ABC", where study circles was used as a method. Study circles are an important part of the Nordic liberal education tradition as well.

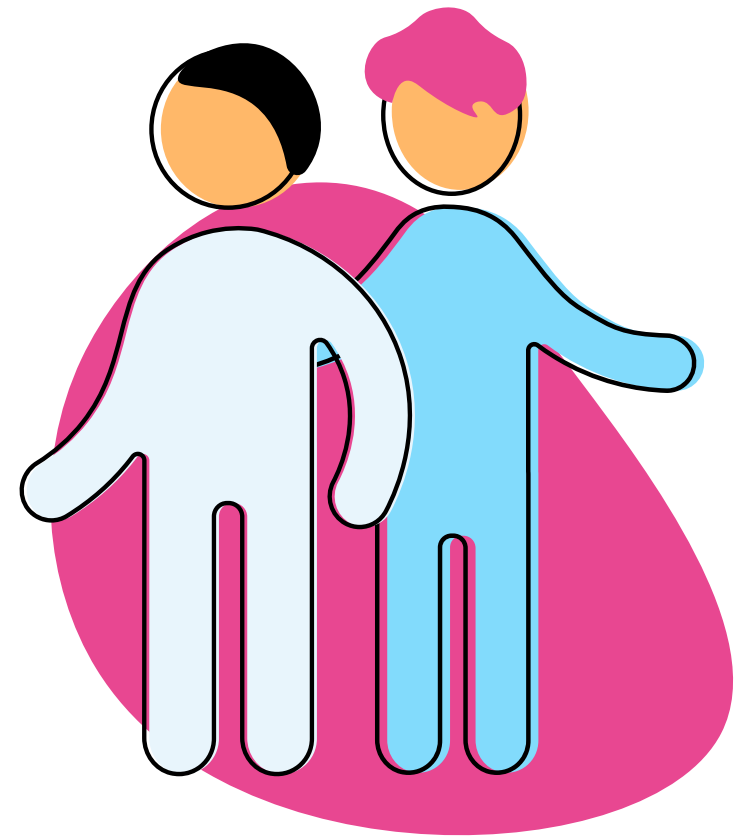
Democracy, freedom of expression and critical thinking. Visit and a discussion at the Banned Books museum

The Banned Books Museum collects and preserves banned, burned, and censored books from around the world. The museum representatives say: "Our museum is as politically neutral as possible, and we do not condone or condemn the content of the books in our collection or judge the authors themselves. Instead, we give our visitors the skills to evaluate for themselves by supporting critical thinking, and encouraging them to interact with books that may offend them. (..) **Education is a slow process, but it remains the most effective way to build a resilient society who can talk about**

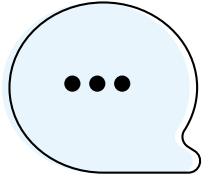
difficult cases with respect, prepared to re-consider their own opinions and explain themselves clearly." Opened in December 2020, they currently have more than 350 books in the collection representing over 100 different countries. Their dream is a "higher standard of public discourse around censorship". They are a social enterprise, not funded by projects from Erasmus+ or other programmes, providing a platform to discuss this topic as well.

Experiencing Europe through a role play

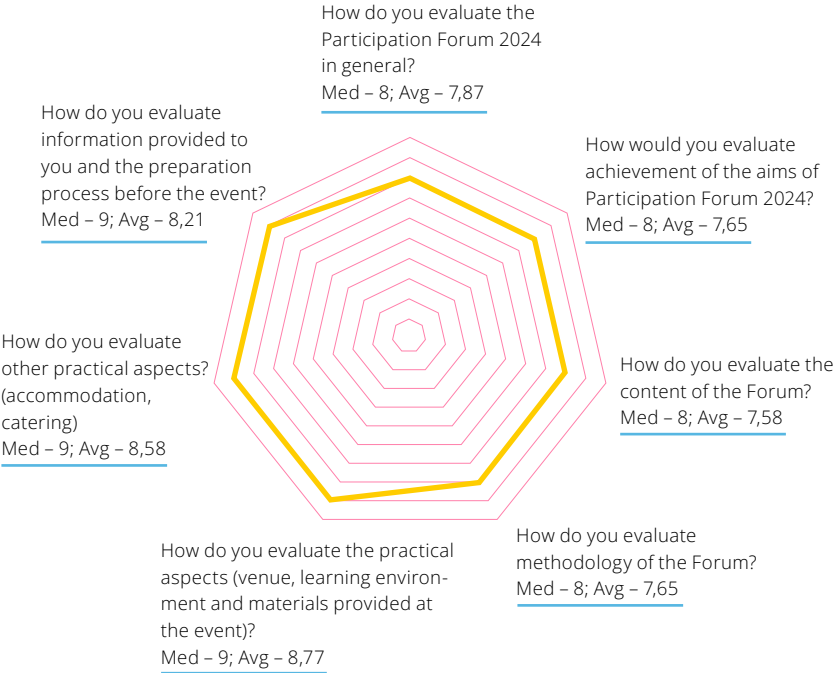
Visit to the Europa Experience centre was a chance to learn more about the EU, European politics and how each of us can make a difference. Participants watched a short movie about the European Union and discussed the latest events such as elections of the EU Commission, presidential elections in the US and in various EU states and how they might be influencing our lives in the coming years. The participants showed particular interest in learning about how democracy was formed here in Estonia and the reasoning behind the current political decisions.



Participants' feedback



As crucial for the improvement of institutional processes and quality of activities, evaluation was conducted both in person (interactive) and via an online feedback survey. 71 participants filled out the survey, and the results of it will be taken in consideration both for the future of similar activities and for daily work of SALTO PI and other stakeholders. As participants' backgrounds, sectors, experience and needs were different, also the feedback highly varied.



Some takeaways:

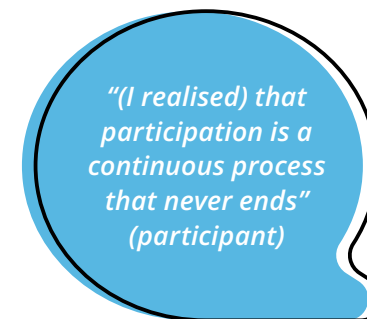
- While appreciating a chance to discuss with different sectors, sharing experience and learning from each other, some participants would have appreciated more sector-specific conversations and emphasize the potential of this in the future;
- Despite the efforts to widen the focus to all sectors of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps, including parallel sessions dedicated to that and work on sectoral recommendations, some participants expressed that the focus on Youth was persistent which might be explained by young people's participation in most of the sectors,
- Most participants would be in favour of a longer event, particularly dedicating time for in-depth discussions, sharing experience and national contexts
- While some participants appreciate the energy and structured approach of producing recommendations for the future of the programmes, others emphasised the need to continue working on those and doubted the extent to which these recommendations will be taken into consideration
- While the focus of the event was on the responsibility of National Agencies and umbrella organisations, some participants would appreciate more diverse group of stakeholders and target groups present that is an opportunity full of potential for the future.

Some characteristic quotes from the evaluation of the participants on the topic of main takeaways are:



Most of the comments on the takeaways of the Forum mentioned **acquiring contacts and networking opportunities as an asset for their work in the future**. Many also referred to the experience as **inspiring, empowering and full of new knowledge**. Some also identified the need for a strategy on Participation in their context and were inspired to work with their colleagues for a long-term national participation plan.

SALTO PI is committed to continue work on the outcomes of the event, including but not limited to a follow-up meeting, to continue providing spaces for learning from each other, creating supportive tools and advocating for the future improvement of the participation priority across all sectors of the programmes.





ANNEX to the report

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Parallel session descriptions - Involvement of target groups

17-24

Challenges and recommendations for the future of the programmes

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PROGRAMME - Presentations and links

	Wednesday 27.11. <i>SHARING & BUILDING ON EXPERIENCE</i>	Thursday 28.11. <i>CRITICAL LOOK AHEAD</i>
9:30-11:00	<p>Welcome</p> <p>Essentials of democratic participation <i>Finding a common ground and food for thought</i></p> <p><u>PPT of Keynote presentation</u> <i>(Cristina Bacalso)</i></p>	<p>Participation and the programmes</p> <p><u>PPT of Participation priority monitoring presentation</u> <i>(SALTO PI; People, Dialogue and Change)</i></p> <p><u>PPT of Youth Participation Strategy monitoring presentation</u> <i>(YPS Steering group, SALTO PI)</i></p> <p>Youth Participation Strategy available here Reports available soon</p>
11:00-11:30	Coffee break <i>Reflecting and connecting</i>	
11:30-13:00	<p>Exploring democratic participation as a topic in our activities</p> <p><u>All parallel sessions' presentations</u> <i>(individually on the next page)</i></p>	<p>Participation and the programmes <i>Challenges and recommendations for the future</i></p>
13:00-14:30	Lunch <i>Reflecting and connecting</i>	
14:30-16:00	<p>Participation in our own organisations: Involvement of target groups in our decision-making</p> <p><u>All parallel sessions' presentations</u> <i>(individually on the next page)</i></p>	<p>Participation and the programmes <i>Strategic look ahead</i></p>
16:00-16:30	Coffee break <i>Reflecting and connecting</i>	
16:30-17:45	<p>Cooperation fair <i>Getting to know NGOs, SNACs and building bridges in an interactive way</i></p> <p><u>All posters</u></p>	<p>Reflection <i>Individual and collective look ahead</i></p> <p>Evaluation and closing</p>

Click to find: [All presentations](#)





PARALLEL SESSIONS:

Exploring democratic participation as a topic in our practice

Wednesday, 27 November, 11.30-13.00

ABOUT

These six parallel sessions offer an exploration of democratic participation as a topic in our practice, examining it from multiple angles: supporting cross-sectoral collaboration, creating inclusive environments for participation, discussing common values as a part of the priority, the value of producing and communicating research on participation and the potential of democratic participation in schools. Each session will offer an insight into specific cases and provide a space for discussion on implementation in your context.

Session A

Working across sectors and learning from each other

Veronica Stefan & Aleksandra Mangus, New Power in Youth Strategic Partnership

Session B

Creating environment for participation

*Laszlo Foldi, Democracy Reloading Strategic Partnership
Judit Balogh, Europe Goes Local Strategic Partnership*

Session C

How do we discuss the "common values"?

*Pietro Michelacci & Matteo Minà, INDIRE - LTA PEACE
Mahira Karim, European Wergeland Centre*

Session D

The right to participation for all

*Linda Janmaat, Dutch National Agency Erasmus+
Veronica Arduino, the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLL)*

Session E

Research on participation: what's the point?

*Annabel Vuillier-Cools, Agence Erasmus+ France / Education Formation
Anaëlle Rollin & Emmanuelle Daill, Agence Erasmus+ Formation Jeunesse et Sport
Carmen Teubl-Kiviniemi, RAY Network*

Session F

Democratic education and the right to participate: from learning to living democracy in school

Martina Paone, European Democratic Education Community



PARALLEL SESSION:

A - Working across sectors and learning from each other

DESCRIPTION

This session aims to explore the potential of cooperation, offering practical insights from the ongoing mapping of cross-sectoral practices of youth participation, coordinated by the New Power in Youth Strategic Partnership (NPIY SNAC).

The study collects and analyses practices on cross-sectoral collaboration to inform the NPIY Partnership and foster capacity-building activities between professionals working in the non-formal and formal education sector, as well as develop and pilot new concepts and approaches for youth participation in democratic life. Particularly it will map practices made in a collaboration between the non-formal Youth sector and at least one of the four formal education sectors: School Education, Vocational Education, Higher Education and Adult Education.

During the session, participants will explore ways to enhance collaboration across sectors to foster democratic participation. They will gain inspiration from peers working across diverse sectors and contexts, considering practical steps to enhance democratic engagement in their own work.

MEET THE PRESENTER AND FACILITATOR



VERONICA STEFAN is the European coordinator of NPIY SNAC, since its beginning in 2021. She is a professional with two decades of international experience, working at the intersection of youth participation, education, and new technologies. Her recent activity includes contributions to digital policies, research on the social impact of artificial intelligence and new technologies, and development of digital competences for educational and youth actors. Veronica is a member of the EU-Council of Europe Pool of European Youth Researchers and works as consultant for UN and EU bodies on issues related to AI and digital transformation.



ALEKSANDRA MANGUS is a member of the NPIY SNAC Pool of Experts and Trainers. Aleksandra merges her extensive professional experience in communications with her passion for the European youth sector to contribute to the European values and promote them. Since her collaboration with UNESCO and publishing her Master's thesis on the digital citizenship of international youth in 2019, she has authored and managed several research and communications projects at SALTO Participation & Information Resource Centre. She attended as keynote speaker at various capacity-building events at the Council of Europe and Estonian National Agency. Also, Aleksandra organised, hosted, facilitated and reported on youth-focused events such as SALTO Awards. Among other venues, her work has been published in SALTO's Participation Resource Pool, European Youth Portal, Mihus magazine (Estonia), Verke blog (Finland).



PARALLEL SESSION:

B - Creating environment for participation

DESCRIPTION

This session focuses on the importance of work with decision-makers to provide environments for democratic participation as a right. It also zooms into enhancing democratic participation at the local level.

The Democracy Reloading initiative, part of the Erasmus+ programme, empowers municipalities to engage young people in decision-making by providing municipal staff with essential competencies and practical resources, such as an online toolkit and expert networks. Europe Goes Local strengthens local youth work by fostering collaboration among stakeholders and integrating the European dimension into local youth work provision.

Through both projects, participants will explore strategies to build environments for youth engagement, develop activities for various decision-makers, exchange best practices, and develop actionable steps to promote active citizenship and democratic participation in their own contexts.

MEET THE PRESENTERS



LASZLO FOLDI is the project coordinator of the Democracy Reloading Strategic Partnership and brings extensive experience in youth participation and local democratic engagement. He is currently a project manager at Bureau International Jeunesse (BIJ) in Brussels, Belgium. His work spans a wide array of initiatives focused on youth involvement, including training municipal staff and youth work professionals, conducting research on issues like online hate speech, and preparing young people for leadership roles in youth policy through organisations such as the Council of Europe. Laszlo's expertise lies in collaborating with diverse target groups—youth workers, local and regional policymakers, and young people—to strengthen democratic processes and promote active citizenship within local communities.



JUDIT BALOGH is the project coordinator of the Europe Goes Local network project. She currently works with Coördinatie Orgaan voor Internationaal Jongerenwerking ASBL (JINT), where she leads a network of 27 European countries and 200 municipalities to foster collaboration in youth policy at the local level. Judit's expertise lies in building strategic partnerships and fostering engagement among diverse groups, including municipal staff, youth policy officers, and youth organisations.



PARALLEL SESSION:

C - How do we discuss the "common values"?

DESCRIPTION

This session explores how we can discuss and promote "common values" as a part of the priority on democratic participation. What are they and how do we include them in our activities? What is the connection between competences and values?

Two cases will be used for inspiration and reflection.

The PEACE initiative, coordinated by INDIRE, empowers Erasmus+ alumni to lead civic activities and public dialogue through tools like the "Participate in Europe" video series. It also explores the expanded scope of PEACE+ to enhance networks, training, and research. The session will also cover democracy training at Utøya, where youth are equipped with competencies for fostering democratic culture.

Participants will gain practical insights on engaging young people in meaningful discussions about shared European values and how to create inclusive spaces for dialogue and participation.

MEET THE PRESENTERS



PIETRO MICHELACCI is a project manager at the National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research (INDIRE). INDIRE manages ERASMUS+ in Italy for the sectors School Education, Higher Education and Adult Education. Pietro brings nearly 13 years of experience managing European adult education projects. Since 2014, he has led numerous KA2 projects, coordinated transnational cooperation, and organised international events.



MATTEO MINÀ is an Italian journalist and also collaborates with the Erasmus+ National Agency INDIRE on communication and content for the long-term European activity PEACE, which focuses on civic engagement and EU values. Currently, he contributes to various newspapers, magazines, online publications and radio stations. Matteo is a lecturer in fashion business and press office matters for an undergraduate degree programme at an Italian higher academic training centre. He is also the co-author of the books Machiavelli social, Il Galateo del Terzo Millennio, Funiculi & Funicolare.



MAHIRA KARIM is an advisor, educator, and a project manager at the European Wergeland Centre. Her focus areas are non-formal education, intercultural understanding, human rights, and making democratic citizenship education accessible and engaging for young people. Anchored in the Council of Europe Reference Framework for Democratic Competences, she leads projects aimed at increasing youth participation and political efficacy. Her work combines developing training programmes, facilitating workshops, and advising organisations, youth workers, and youth councils connected to her project areas.



PARALLEL SESSION:

D - The right to participation for all

DESCRIPTION

This session explores inclusive participation in youth and adult education, focusing on strategies and tools to engage diverse groups and to decrease barriers that exist in democratic participation.

It will introduce a Toolkit on Inclusive Youth Participation, developed during the European Year of Youth, which helps organisations foster meaningful youth engagement and facilitate discussions on inclusion and diversity. The session will also explore methods like the privilege walk and the CLEAR model of participation to inspire collaboration and shared learning. Additionally, it will highlight the iBOX Project, which aims to create more inclusive NGOs and civil society organisations by enhancing access to learning, especially during the digital transition. Participants will have a chance to discuss and reflect on how to strengthen inclusive participation practices and promote democratic engagement within their organisations.

MEET THE PRESENTERS



LINDA JANMAAT works as a programme advisor for Nederlands Jeugdinstituut, the Dutch National Agency for Erasmus+ Youth, where she plays a vital role in fostering youth engagement and inclusivity through the Erasmus+ programme. With her expertise in structuring projects and optimising processes, Linda supports initiatives aimed at building a more inclusive and engaged society. She thrives in collaborative team environments, contributing her energy and dedication to advancing the agency's mission.



VERONICA ARDUINO is a project and policy coordinator at the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLL) - European Civil Society for Education, where she manages international projects in education and training, focusing on inclusion, societal engagement, and digitalisation. She is responsible for project proposals and coordination, developing partnerships, and promoting cooperation within the LLLP membership, while also supporting exchanges in the Erasmus+ Coalition. She's currently coordinating two LLLP initiatives focusing on Equity and Inclusion in Education, Training and Learning: the Inclusion Box and STRIDE EU projects. Prior to joining LLLP, Veronica was engaged with various non-profit organisations in project management, fundraising, and advocacy focused on youth, education, and social inclusion. She holds a Master's degree in Psychology and an Advanced Master's in "Interdisciplinary Analysis of European Integration" from Saint-Louis University in Brussels.



PARALLEL SESSION:

E - Research on participation: what's the point?

DESCRIPTION

This session will explore the critical role of research in democratic participation, focusing on its impact on enhancing civic engagement, responsible citizenship. Why should and how could organisations produce, use and communicate research on participation?

Research provides essential evidence to evaluate current strategies, refine practices, and develop more effective approaches to fostering youth participation. Key findings from the [Erasmus+ Observatory study](#) will be presented, focusing on projects related to "participation in democratic life, common values, and citizen engagement," and exploring their characteristics, motivations, and impacts on participant engagement. The session will also cover the work of the [European youth research network RAY](#), including research on youth participation, monitoring surveys, and longitudinal studies on participation and citizenship competencies. Participants will gain insights into the relevance of research and reflect on how it can be applied to their own practice.

MEET THE PRESENTERS



ANNABEL VUILLIER-COOLS is a technical advisor for culture at the French Erasmus+ Education and Training Agency. She supports cultural organisations in accessing Erasmus+ opportunities and leads the "Education and Civic Engagement" strategy. Annabel represents France in European working groups on Erasmus+ Citizenship Ambassadors and a Salto platform on civic engagement, promoting initiatives focused on democratic values, and supporting migration and gender equality.



ANAËLLE ROLLIN is currently a project manager for Erasmus+ Youth & Sport at the Agence du Service Civique in Paris, focusing on initiatives that foster youth engagement. With extensive experience in project management, especially within European and civic programmes, she has previously managed employment initiatives and asylum integration funds in France.



EMMANUELLE DAILL is the Deputy Head of the "Erasmus+ Projects" division at the Agence du Service Civique. With over 30 years of experience in education and popular education, she has worked in various roles in France and abroad, including in the French National Education system as a teacher and supervisor, and in associations as an animator, professor, and trainer in French, literacy, and professional communication for adults. She has contributed to numerous educational publications to support teaching teams in France and internationally.





PARALLEL SESSION:

F - Democratic education and the right to participate

DESCRIPTION

This session explores the shift from teaching to living democracy at school, by mobilising examples of schools applying democratic education, a pedagogical approach based on self-directed education and shared decision-making.

Based on the experience of the work of QUEST and EUDEC networks, we will reflect on the possibilities and limits of implementing democratic education practices in diverse traditional school settings, and we will delineate what strategies and actions could participants put in place in their own profession to support the development of democratic environments enhancing students' participation and voices.

MEET THE PRESENTER AND FACILITATOR



MARTINA PAONE is co-founder and director at QUEST - Quality Education in Europe for Sustainable Social Transformation, a European network that supports children's rights in education. She currently also serves as Council Member for Research at EUDEC, the European Democratic Education Community. Martina has an academic perspective and background (PhD in Political Science and in International Relations) coupled with expertise in grassroots social actions at the intersection between education and democracy. She brings her researcher, managerial and coaching skills in the non-profit with the ambition to promote children's right in education. She is certified sociocracy facilitator and enjoys supporting organisational changes towards collaborative and inclusive systems.



PARALLEL SESSIONS II:

Participation in our organisations: Making decisions together with our target groups

Wednesday, 27 November, 15.00-16.00

ABOUT

These parallel sessions offer an exploration of participation in our own organisations - **how do we and could we make decisions together with our target groups?**

How do we "walk the talk"?

Each session will provide insights into different cases and experiences and will provide a chance to discuss what it might mean for each of our contexts - looking at involvement of target groups on an institutional level, the inclusion dimension of shared decision-making, the involvement of young people in National Agencies and SALTOs, the involvement of programme ambassadors in decision-making, practice stories of youth-led organisations and specifics of shared decision-making in adult education.

Session A

Participatory culture as an institutional value

*Reet Kost, Deputy Director of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Estonian Agency
Estonian Education and Youth Board*

Session B

Who is involved in our decision-making and who is missing?

Henrique Goncalves, Project officer at SALTO Inclusion and Diversity

Session C

How do we involve young people in our decision-making: challenges and opportunities

Artūrs Pokšāns and Gianluca Rossino, researchers on youth involvement in National Agencies

Session D

How do we involve programme ambassadors in decision-making?

*Kristin Wilkens, Senior expert, Coordinator of the European EuroApprentices Network
Marie Heimburg, International Network Coordinator EuroPeers*

Session E

Learning with and from youth-led organisations

*Sina Riz a Porta - Board Member in European Youth Forum
Albert Janssens, Board Member in Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU)*

Session F

Working together with adult learners and educators European Association of Education of Adults

Christin Cieslak, Head of Programmes and Stakeholder Engagement at the European Association for Adult Education (EAEA)



PARALLEL SESSION:

A - Participatory culture as an institutional value

DESCRIPTION

This session aims to provide some insights into ensuring that involvement of our target groups is considered at an institutional level, as well as to offer a space to discuss how we can do it in our own contexts.

How do we ensure that involvement in decision-making is sustainable?

It will offer encouragement from the management perspective, emphasising the value of shared decision-making and maintaining contact with the target group in our work. The session will also share the experience of long-term managerial efforts in making decisions collaboratively with the people we work with, highlighting the practices, challenges, and lessons learned throughout this process.

This will be a chance for participants to think and discuss - how do we ensure that involvement of our target groups is not just a one-time initiative? Who can we cooperate within the organisation and beyond, and how do we expand these efforts?

MEET THE PRESENTER



REET KOST has been actively engaged in the European youth field as a youth leader, trainer, developer and manager since the nineties. Currently the Head of Youth Programmes Centre of Estonian Education and Youth Board and the Deputy Director of the Estonian National Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes, that hosts also the SALTO Resource Centre on Participation and Information. Active in the co-ordination group of the National Agencies network in the youth field, a member of national and European expert groups in the field of training and quality of youth work and youth policy, like the Advisory Group for the European Training Strategy of Erasmus+: Youth In Action, etc.



PARALLEL SESSION:

B - Who is involved in our decision-making and who is missing?

The example of the ID FORUM Advisory BOARD

DESCRIPTION

This session will look critically at - who do we involve when it comes to various mechanisms of shared decision-making (Advisory boards, Steering groups and so on)? What are the barriers that people might face when trying to participate in our involvement mechanisms and how could we decrease them?

Why is it important?

Drawing inspiration from SALTO I&D's experience with the Inclusion & Diversity Forum Advisory Group, participants will have the chance to connect their own experiences, share challenges, and discuss strategies for a more inclusive decision-making by involving people with lived experiences in their work.

MEET THE PRESENTER & FACILITATOR



HENRIQUE GONCALVES is a project officer at SALTO Inclusion & Diversity. Born in a small village in northern Portugal, he gave up on his aspirations to become an architect to explore his potential for social impact after a life-changing experience during my European Voluntary Service in 2013. Since then, he has been designing and coordinating international projects on various social and environmental topics. In 2020, he joined SALTO-Youth Inclusion & Diversity. Next to his work, he is also a climate activist and advocate for Degrowth, and he is fond of hikes, early morning workouts, cooking, moshpits and songwriting.



PARALLEL SESSION:

C - How do we involve young people in our decision-making?

Challenges and opportunities

DESCRIPTION

What are some of the potential mechanisms of involving young people in decision-making of National Agencies and SALTOs? How has that been going and what can we learn from the process? What are our own challenges and opportunities to introduce this in our organisations?

In this workshop together with lead researcher Artūrs and co-researcher Gianluca we are going to look at the results of ongoing research on the way NAs are involving young people in decision making. After the introduction the participants will be invited to join a group discussion on the practices and opportunities concerning youth involvement in decision making and plan for the future how to make it a reality in their respective organisations. In this research project we are looking at how different organisations (National Agencies for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps from Estonia, Germany, Latvia and SALTO Participation & Information) involve young people in their decision-making. This study includes exploration of experiences of NA staff, as well as young people, and is realised with youth participation as a core element also in the research process.

MEET THE PRESENTERS



Artūrs Pokšāns PhD is a social anthropologist. Works at the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, Department of Anthropology. Research topics include digital anthropology, growing up, aging, family studies, violence, the education system, and the out-of-home care system. This year he is leading the research process on youth involvement in National Agencies and SALTOs in the framework of Strategic partnership New Power in Youth.



GIANLUCA ROSSINO is a passionate and determined young European, born and raised in Italy. From primary school to university, he has always challenged himself a step further to explore the world around him and the opportunities it offers. Since 2018 he is active in the youth sector, focusing on European mobility opportunities and youth participation in decision making processes. As a youth representative, he has been playing an active role in advancing youth policies at local, national and European level. After completing a bachelor degree in international relations, he is now focusing more on the value and impact of the third sector in Italy, supporting non-profit organisations in accessing funding for their key activities. He is a member of Youth Participation Strategy Steering group and a co-researcher in this research on youth involvement in National Agencies and SALTOs.



PARALLEL SESSION:

D - How do we involve programme ambassadors in decision-making?

DESCRIPTION

More than promoters of the programmes?

In this session participants will have a chance to discuss what are the opportunities and challenges to work together with people who have been participants in the programmes and have expressed initiative to be programme ambassadors. How do we develop shared decision-making processes? How do we develop the programmes and our work together with them?

Two examples (Europeers and EuroApprentices) will be used for inspiration and reflection.

The EuroPeers Advisory Group: EuroPeers SNAC have recruited 2 so called "Advisory Groups". This group consisted of 14 young "consultants" with inside perspective from all the SNAC countries. This youth committee was designed to be a strong tool to make sure the youth perspective is represented in the SNAC development, but the group also functioned as a communication tool to reach others. Sounds exciting? It sure was! Find out more about this process and explore: www.europeers.org.



EuroApprentices – Erasmus+ ambassadors in VET is a sectoral bottom-up ambassador initiative, which strengthens, on the one hand, the visibility of learning mobility in VET and, on the other hand, political and societal participation of VET students and alumni, European values and active citizenship of VET learners. The network empowers the ambassadors to implement their own projects, such as their own EuroApprentices instagram channels, a panel discussion on local European Youth Event or their new podcast project to name some. Learn more about how we work together with the Erasmus+ ambassadors and spread European values and the Erasmus+spirit. www.euroapprentices.eu



MEET THE PRESENTERS

MARIE HEIMBURG is a communication specialist with a passion for storytelling and interpersonal connection. She is working as the international network coordinator of the EuroPeers network since 2022 – a strategic national agency cooperation project between 14 European member countries working with alumni of the programs (hosted by EE NA). Having started her journey as a European volunteer years ago, Marie has worked as a trainer in the youth field for some time before taking over the international coordination of the EuroPeers. Her passion in the network is to empower young people to take part in decision making processes and to share their stories in order to reach a diverse target group of young people.

KRISTIN WILKENS is a senior expert, Erasmus+-Team, Mobility and internationalisation of Vocational Education and Training, since 2017 at the National Agency Education for Europe (NA BIBB/DE02). In this function: Coordinator of the European EuroApprentices Network since 2022. Before she worked as a mobility coach and E+project coordinator at a chamber of skilled crafts. She is also an intercultural trainer and lecturer on the topic of International VET systems. She believes in the power of learning and the empowerment of young people. Moreover she loves music, travelling, nature and flamenco



PARALLEL SESSION:

E - Learning with and from youth-led organisations

DESCRIPTION

What is the experience of youth organisations in making decisions together with their members and partner organisations?

How can institutions and non-governmental organisations cooperate?

Two examples and learnings will be used for reflection and discussion.

In the European Youth Forum practice story, we will showcase the way in which meaningful decision-making processes take place both WITHIN and WITH youth-led structures. The session will focus on the one hand on the internal processes that take place in the European Youth Forum architecture, to ensure that the voices of the young representatives from our member organisations are appropriately represented in terms of the expertise they bring on the table, their diversity of opinions, and the reflection of their will through fair and democratic processes. On the other hand, and equally importantly, we will put forward an instance of meaningful engagement of youth-led representatives and young people in institutional funding processes.

OBESSU is the largest and only platform for cooperation between secondary school student-led unions active in second general and Vocational Education and Training (VET). Composed of 37 member organisations across 27 European countries and active since 1975, it strives to represent and protect the rights of one of the youngest cohorts in the education policy field (14-19) on their own terms, and it does so through its interconnected, democratic structures. When looking to intersect the themes of democracy, education and youth participation, OBESSU's student-led organising is inherently linked to all three. This is why we will aim at showcasing the variety of ways and tools through which OBESSU co-creates, designs and leads its various projects, activities, partnerships, and consultations.

MEET THE PRESENTERS



SINA RIZ à PORTA is currently a project manager for Erasmus+ Youth & Sport at the Agence du Service Civique in Paris, focusing on initiatives that foster youth engagement. With extensive experience in project management, especially within European and civic programmes, she has previously managed employment initiatives and asylum integration funds in France.



ALBERT JANSSENS is a member of the Board of the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU). He has worked extensively with student involvement and participation on both the regional, national and European levels. He has been involved in the student movement since 2017, first being elected in his local student council and later in his national student's union in Denmark, serving as vice president for 2 years.



PARALLEL SESSION:

F - Working together with adult learners and educators

DESCRIPTION

How is it to involve adults in our decision-making processes in learning opportunities and institutions? Why? Is it different than involving youth? Also, how do we get to know and advocate for the needs of our target group?

In this session, Christin Cieslak from the **European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)** will share insights on how EAEA, as a policy-focused organisation, ensures that adult education associations' voices are included in decision-making. As an umbrella organisation EAEA does not work directly with learners but advocates for learners' rights and promoting their needs at the European level, working closely with the European Commission and the Parliament.

Christin will discuss how EAEA gathers input from its members through EAEA's country reports, consultations, and collaborative projects. She will also reflect on the challenges and lessons learned in bringing diverse stakeholders into the decision-making process—such as balancing different priorities and fostering meaningful engagement.

This session is an opportunity to explore how even a meta-level approach, focused on policy and advocacy, can incorporate participatory practices. Participants will be encouraged to think about how these strategies could be adapted to their own contexts, whether in policy, education, or community work.

MEET THE PRESENTER



CHRISTIN CIESLAK is a gerontologist and adult education expert with over ten years of experience in public programmes, funding, and political administration. Christin has worked for the European Parliament, served as Project Manager for the central support service of EPAL and worked for six National Agencies to advance adult education across Europe, and previously. As the Head of Programmes and Stakeholder Engagement at the European Association for Adult Education (EAEA) in Brussels, she leads initiatives to build partnerships and promote democratic, inclusive practices within adult education.



Challenges and recommendations for the future of the programmes

This contains a full list of recommendations from the participants (as much as possible to be transcribed and elaborated on).

Some of the information might not be perceivable without context and participation in the process - if there are any points you would like to discuss, let us know via participation@salto-youth.net.

Group on Youth Participation Strategy

- Format of ESC and E+ programmes documents need to be accessible for all
- Let's work on resources and activities addressing the European dimension and cooperation of youth participation in democratic life (to promote the understanding of democracy as also a European value)
- Share more of concrete examples and practices from NAs or other stakeholders that can be used across borders
- A framework (should be) built between every stakeholders (NGOs, NAs) to meet and exchange more regularly
- It would be great to organise an event with NAs and relevant actors (like the composition of people in the Forum) to connect methodologies and best practices to achieve the goals in the strategy and share them in a written format (in case of lack of funding this could be a spreadsheet)
- Collect examples of good practices on all Youth Participation Strategy aims
- Guide in plain language so it would be easier to understand
- Collect information in one manual about organisations and their focus - that would help to build cooperation
- Better compensation of volunteering work – in order to improve democratic participation in civil society, the biggest target group are youth volunteers and they need: 1) more operative grants for stable structures and institutional memory; 2) better validation of volunteering (financial + other)
- We need to land specific actions in order to promote participation in democratic life – training, resources and commitment
- More cooperation and info sharing, also in order to share each other's activities among beneficiaries
- A strong joint commitment for a stronger focus on democratic participation in the future programme

Group on Youth

Challenges

- Difficult and complex application procedures; tools and platforms are not youth-friendly
- Youth participation is not always clear for project officers from NAs. Participation priority can also be perceived as too broad
- Lack of integration between the formal and non-formal learning sectors
- There is a lack of trust and visibility (of the sector)
- Lack of accessible and targeted examples and good practices
- Reaching out to young people beyond the programmes
- Young people face challenges to engage, especially if coming from vulnerable backgrounds
- Lack of participatory culture in decision-making
- There is no sustainable process (in the programmes) – just single actions
- Inadequate recognition of volunteer work and (lack of) resources for compensation
- Young people opt away from participation projects due to not being able to afford it (due to other obligations, the need for long-term voluntary commitment etc.)
- Lack of accessible, welcoming, representative youth spaces
- Broader context has to be taken into consideration – shrinking civic space

Recommendations

- Bottom up approach in identifying the needs and the priorities of the programmes.
- To actually get feedback from former beneficiaries
- Funds (should) take into consideration the needs of the young people and to involve them in the allocation processes.
- To give incentives for cross sectoral cooperation (a separate action)
- Simple and local entry grants for young people as a way to reach out to young people who are not in the programmes
- NA and organisations should be obliged to have a participatory mechanisms (ad hoc consultancy and steering groups); participatory mechanisms need sufficient and sustainable funding
- Application process should be enriched with a video and an interview, so it is more accessible and more interesting for young people
- Application procedure should also include feedback from applicants so that NAs and evaluators can assess better.
- NAs could receive trainings on Youth Participation once a year by young people

Group on Youth

Recommendations

- We need to recognize that youth are not a monolith, and (we should be) meeting youth where they are
- Youth work needs more operational multiannual funding
- (We should be) making space for participation in existing structures (e.g. school, work).

Group on School Education

Challenges

- Lack of concrete sector-specific tools, practices
- Lack of coordination within and between NAs
- Legal framework is limited, is not supporting
- Structure of NAs and schools as beneficiaries is too formal / hierarchical; rigid structures & curriculum don't allow enough space for democratic practices
- Challenges in engaging with democratic values and belief in the power of changes
- Participation priority is the least prioritised
- There is a lack of trust in children agency, and external actors (NGOs)

Recommendations

- Make the LTA PEACE mandatory for all National Agencies
- Full integration of e-Twinning in Erasmus+ to enable full potential on ESEP (European School Education Platform)
- Concise definition of priority in collaboration with school stakeholders (project week)
- One overarching priority should be EU values. Participation should still be part of horizontal priorities
- Decentralise Jean Monet activities for schools, burden is too heavy
- Mandatory module on EU for Erasmus+ participants adopted for different age groups
- Specially allocated budget in KA2 for partnerships between organisations from non-formal, informal, and formal education
- Opening up KA1 mobilities to collaborations between organisations from non-formal, informal, and formal education
- Quality label in Erasmus+ for organisations from non-formal, informal, and formal education

Group on Adult Education

Challenges

- The diversity of the field which requires various different approaches & communication strategies; the lack of outreach; the difference of the adult education sector from others
- The term of participation is vague and hard to define and understand in practical terms
- There are high barriers in participation due to life situation
- Lack of information, infrastructure, guidance and services; lack of resources
- Lack of developed life-long learning culture
- Underestimation of adults with fewer opportunities
- Lack of opportunities where to apply: intergenerational projects, cross-sectoral topics and learning opportunities

Recommendations

- Proactively approaching (participants), do not offer passively
- Invest in infrastructure to enable participation from all areas
- Invest and create a Europe-wide network of info- and guidance centres for adults
- Outsource communications to national and regional actors to tailor the communications according to the needs of the target groups through concrete and practical language
- Actively involve beneficiaries in decision-making about programme rules and regulations, talk directly to them
- Proof reading by target group
- Understand each other's realities and needs and find jointly decisions
- Use simple language, such as B1 level for publications, guides, and other information
- If you come up with a new rule, you have to delete two old ones
- Take the feedback you have gotten seriously & implement when valid
- Policymakers work together with grass-root level to make sure we answer to local needs & policies and actions can be put into action on local level
- Get closer to potential participants - establish mobile local info & guidance centres where all people can easily go and find opportunities

Group on Vocational Education and Training

Challenges

- Lack of information and interest from schools
- Definition of participation can be too general
- The perceived lack of connection between the participation priority and professional context
- There is a lack of accessible good practices and funding
- There are no targeted questions on the priority in the application and report forms

Recommendations

- Introduce small-scale Erasmus+ projects with simplified application and reporting processes with €10 000 to €15 000 maximum budget and minimum time of 1 to 2 months.
- Create channel or platform (more user-friendly) to connect more directly (final) beneficiaries and National Agencies.
- Possibility to cooperate more cross-sector (youth sector with vocational education and training) enhancing participation dimension and include some form of financial support for participation activities (e.g., a lump sum)
- European values are the heart of the programme and should be treated as such
- The beneficiaries and their target groups should be involved when discussing changes in the programme guide from the beginning (given time and resources)
- European Commission should provide centralised coordination for the existing networks and provide resources for alumni officers at the National Agencies
- EU values became assumed and were lost in the programme so far, an afterthought that was anticipated as simply 'part' of the programme by people engaging in Erasmus+ and ESC. Therefore, the group recommended that EU values were made the heart and basis of developments in the programmes, making them more visible, tangible and core part of the programme
- It was recommended to take similar approaches to encouraging inclusion and diversity in the programme, by introducing concrete incentives for projects which focus on the priority through dedicated additional funding. This could be integrated into the application forms and provide a recognition of the importance of the priorities as well as ensuring the topics are more measurable

Group on Vocational Education and Training

Recommendations

- Beneficiaries and participants should be engaged more authentically and inclusively in the shaping of the programmes or future programme, in ways which reflect their capacity and context i.e. not only through a long survey with a week to complete it. As we recognised that participation takes time and structures to share power, the same will be the case for involving participants more in the programme. One way to do this would be to redesign the channels and platform which connect beneficiaries and NA's, such as the EPRP (Erasmus+ Projects Result Platform), to better increase communication and voice. This kind of channel or platform could make better use of the historic data of the programme, allowing sharing and communication across priorities, practice and needs.
- The groups also recommended that there should be centralised coordination of ambassador / alumni networks, with NAs or regional bodies given resources to manage these and avoid duplication of effort. The networks should be mentioned in the programme guide and given more visibility and purpose across the programme
- (there should be) more trainings for NA staff and beneficiaries on the importance and the topic of the priority
- More tools to reflect are needed (potential to use a similar process like Youthpass) – to enable VET teachers to reflect on the “soft” skills

Group on Higher Education

Challenges

- Lack of tools to be able to implement participation
- There is a lack of trust / distrust in institutions
- There is a lack of concrete examples and good practices
- Lack of clarity and understanding of the priority – training, materials, resources, external experts and trainers to be able to evaluate this priority. Time should be dedicated to working on this
- Lack of training and information (on the participation priority) for external evaluators of projects
- There are diverse interpretation from institutions about EU values
- Lack of capacity (time, money, language barriers)

Recommendations

- Creation in each higher education institution of a participation strategy within the ECHE (Erasmus Charter for Higher Education)
- Encourage civic engagement during mobility through specific financial top-ups
- Financial incentives for participation - "Democratic top-up"; students as multipliers for the 4th priority, including points for projects that have participatory processes
- More KA3 with sufficient long-term funding research to develop systemic change, as well as for policy development
- NAs, Higher Education institutions and students (should be) more involved in participatory process for programme implementation by European Commission
- Research (needed) on democratic participation in Erasmus+
- Training all NA staff, experts and beneficiaries, potentially joint training between EC, NA, students on democratic participation, including job shadowing, simulation games (role reversal)
- More KA3 funding to research good democratic and participatory processes for policy development in Erasmus+.
- Include points for projects that have participatory processes in Erasmus+ project application evaluations to incentivise projects to include participatory processes.
- Opportunities for action – advocating with the management staff to explain the priority, talking with colleagues from other sectors, creating an action plan and an internal working group, looking for good practice examples in other sectors to promote them among target group, train NA staff on participation priority

Group on European Solidarity Corps

Challenges

- Lower reputation of non-formal sector
- Limited cross-sectoral learning opportunities and weaker synergies between formal and non-formal education; differences in contexts
- Communication issue – for different target groups different language is needed
- Lack of space for dialogue on the concept (socially, politically, funding)
- Contact points for different priorities (in the National Agencies) work separately / in isolation; difficulty prioritising and working with all the priorities of the programmes
- Visibility of ESC volunteers is rather low

Recommendations

- More funds for placements outside of the EU
- Youth volunteering schemes on all levels – providing funding and support
- Involve young people in the programme committee (steering committees, decision making processes, co-creation of processes) mandatory
- Install micro-grants for participation projects
- Lower age limit to enable early participation mechanisms, e.g. in Solidarity Projects
- Create a European volunteer status to support recognition of volunteering, support visa processes, etc.
- NAs to create space for exchange on and activities to tackle participation priority continuously (e.g. create formats on international level and bring it to national level; use TCA + NET)
- Create a European year of democratic participation, incl. Participation dialogues, participation forums cross sectorial (make resources available (from youth and E&T)
- Strengthen the role and resources of sending organisations (before, during and after placements) to empower young beneficiaries to live the participation priority.
- Create a format that targets the democratic participation education of policy and decision maker (KA 154 does currently not allow that)
- Actions should be more flexible in terms of formats & target groups bring in the principle of cross-sectorial synergies, e.g. teacher should be able to apply for a youth exchange or a solidarity project (youth-led element has to be assured); use mobility cross-sectorial, e.g. teacher goes on job-shadowing in youth work and other way around.