



Quality Standards for Meaningful Youth Participation in Democratic Life

SALTO Participation and Information Resource Centre



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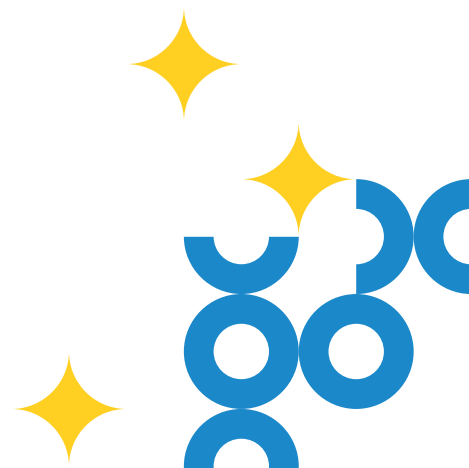
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1. INTRODUCTION

Encouraging youth participation in democratic life in Europe is embedded in Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. The EU Youth Strategy (2019–2027) builds on this. It is based around the terms **Engage, Empower** and **Connect** and places **youth participation right at the forefront of youth policy**. The European Youth Goals, which have been integrated as an annexe to the EU Youth Strategy, also identify the importance of youth participation among young people themselves. The current Erasmus+ (2021–2027) and European Solidarity Corps (2021–2027) programmes (hereinafter the European Youth programmes) further support this policy basis by setting the objective to enhance youth participation in democratic life. The Youth Participation Strategy for enhancing youth participation in democratic life through the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes (2021–2027) has also been developed to support this objective. It is expected that future versions of the EU Youth Strategy, the EU Youth Goals, and the Erasmus+ (2028–2034) programme will continue this emphasis on democratic participation.

It is now well recognised that the youth sector has used the EU programmes **to make a significant contribution to enhancing youth participation in democratic life**. The work of the RAY network has identified some important messages. Their RAY:MON research on the effect and outcomes of the Erasmus+ (2021–2027) Youth Chapter¹ identifies that the **majority of participants are more likely to engage in civil society and stand up for rights**, and a significant proportion of participants are **more likely to engage in democratic processes after taking part in an Erasmus+ Youth Project**.

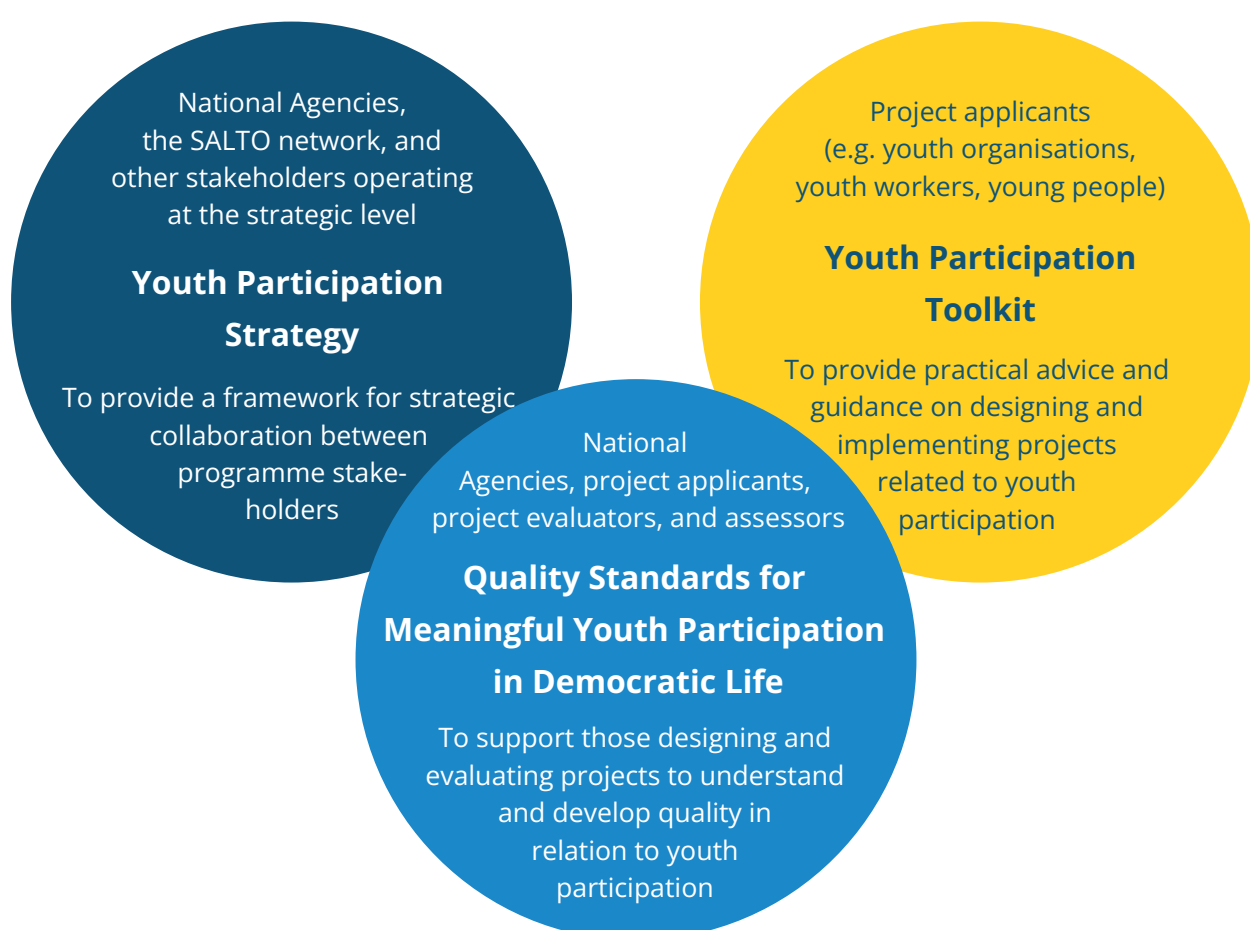
These Quality Standards draw on this learning and have been produced by SALTO Participation & Information Resource Centre through a collaboration between the document authors and the young people and programme stakeholders within the Youth Participation Strategy Steering Group.

¹ Ray Network (2024) *Thematic Factsheet Erasmus+ Youth and Active Citizenship*

The Quality Standards act as a supplement to the Youth Participation Strategy. They **expand and enrich the definition of youth participation in democratic life** within the original strategy, as well as identify what **a quality approach to youth participation looks like** within a project.

The standards are intended for use by EU Youth Programme beneficiaries and National Agencies who wish to consider the quality of youth participation within specific projects funded through the EU Youth Programmes. They can be used to inform project design, support the evaluation of projects, and clarify what meaningful youth participation should look like within a specific project.

Both the Youth Participation Strategy and the Quality Standards are supported by SALTO PI's Youth Participation Toolkit, which provides further practical support on the development of project methodologies and the Participation Pool resource platform.



2. WHAT IS YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC LIFE?

Definition of Youth Participation in Democratic Life

For the European Youth Programmes, SALTO PI defines youth participation in democratic life as:

Definition of Youth Participation in Democratic Life

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

Youth participation in democratic life can be understood in two interconnected ways:

Youth participation as youth voice and involvement in decision-making:^{2,3} This involves young people expressing their views to influence or be involved in decision-making processes. It can refer to a range of decision-making processes, from governmental, political or policy decisions, to how a community space is used, to the running of a youth project. Young people can have **varying degrees of involvement** in decision-making. These include consulting young people on decisions, making decisions in collaboration with young people, and enabling young people to lead decisions.⁴

Youth participation as civic action and youth activism:⁵ This involves young people taking individual and/or collective action with the intention of making a positive change in the world around them. This can mean taking political actions such as organising or being involved in protests, as well as social and civic activity such as community improvement initiatives at the local level or volunteering for a cause or civil society organisation.

European Youth Programmes help fulfil **the right to participation** enshrined in international and European human rights law (see below) by directly providing the **means, space**, and, most importantly, **support for young people to participate in democratic life**.

² Lundy, L. (2007) 'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, *British Educational Research Journal*, 33:6, 927-942

³ Arnstein, S.R. (1969) 'A ladder of citizen participation', *Journal of the American Institute of planners* 35.4, 216-224

⁴ SALTO PI Young People Leading Projects, *Youth Participation Toolkit*, Tallinn

⁵ Earl, J., Maher, T.V. & Elliott, T. (2017) Youth, activism, and social movements, *Sociology Compass*, 11:e12465.



At its heart,
youth participation in democratic life relates to power and agency.

Youth participation can mean sharing and distributing decision-making power away from those who typically control decisions and resources towards the young people they seek to engage. It can also mean working to promote young people's ability to exert power and influence within society, as well as their individual or collective agency.

Developing youth participation projects or initiatives therefore requires consideration of power changes and marginalisation within young people's lives.⁶



As a result of this,
youth participation in democratic life has a political dimension.

However, 'political' means more than just party politics and political institutions. In addition to these forms of politics, the political dimension of youth participation includes young people influencing how power is held or enacted in community spaces, through educational institutions, in the street, or within any manner of public and civic spaces.

Youth participation involves enabling young people to critically identify the asymmetries of power that occur in their lives (either as a result of youth or other intersections) and take critical action to reshape them.⁷

⁶ Ohana, Y. (2020) *What's politics got to do with it? European youth work programmes and the development of critical youth citizenship*, Jugend fur Europa, Bonn.

⁷ Ohana, Y. (2020) *ibid.*

To achieve this power transfer and address the political dimension, it is common within the **youth sector** to run projects and activities to support young people's participation in democratic life. These projects typically focus on creating opportunities for young people to directly influence democratic decision-making or take some form of democratic action during the project. The key feature of these projects is that they seek to **enable young people to exert some form of influence during the project**.

The youth sector's approach to promoting youth participation can be distinguished from 'citizenship education'. Citizenship education is a term used more commonly in the formal education field to refer to educational activities that enable young people to develop the competencies required for them to engage in democratic life. The primary goal of these projects is often to enable learners to have the necessary knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to then engage in democracy throughout their lives. However, there is also considerable overlap between youth participation projects and citizenship education.⁸ Promoting non-formal learning about democracy still remains a substantial part of the youth sector's projects, and learning is a core part of the European Youth Programmes.

Youth participation in democratic life also has close connections with promoting **solidarity** across Europe and **common values** of the European Union. The concept of solidarity is closely linked to empathy, human rights, active citizenship, and inclusion; thus, solidarity has a direct relationship with youth participation.⁹ Common values, as defined by Article 2 of the Treaty of European Union and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, provide the foundation of democratic culture within the EU. Enabling young people to contribute to sustaining common values and building the European project through their volunteering and civic activism is a clear agenda of European Youth Programmes. Encouraging young people to contribute to and uphold the values of democratic culture across Europe at

⁸ Moxon, D. (2024) *Youth Participation and Citizenship Education: A Cross-sectoral Perspective*, SALTO PI, Tallinn.

local, national and European levels is a vital part of the youth participation agenda.

Within all of this, it is important to recognise that **young people are not a homogeneous group**. Whilst they share many common experiences as a result of being part of the same generation, their lives are also intersected by gender, geography, sexuality, ethnicity, and many other factors. The topics of concern and areas of interest may vary between groups of young people, and there is not necessarily a single 'youth view' on an issue. Different groups of young people have varying experiences of the world we live in, as well as varying views and opinions. Thus, consideration of **inclusion**¹⁰ and which young people are more or less excluded from the opportunity to have their voices heard and be active in our democracies is also a vital dimension of effective youth participation.



⁹ SALTO ESC (n.d.) 4Thought for Solidarity, Vienna

¹⁰ Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2021) *Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy*, European Commission, Brussels

The right to youth participation

Young people's human rights underpin youth participation, and young people have the right to participate in democratic life. Participation is captured under various civil and political rights derived from the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (CFREU).

These instruments of international human rights law apply to all persons, regardless of age. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) additionally includes specific rights for children and young people that recognise their specific needs, including participation rights.

The UNCRC defines the 'right to be heard' in Article 12, which enshrines the right of a child or young person to express views on all matters affecting them, and for those views to be given due consideration by those who make decisions. Legally, Article 12 applies only to young people under 18. However, this Article is still often widely used as the conceptual basis for the participation of young people regardless of their age.

Overall, the rights supporting youth participation are enshrined in the following articles:



Young People's Participation Rights

Freedom of expression and information

(UNCRC Art. 13; UDHR Art. 19; ECHR Art. 10; ICCPR Art. 19; CFREU Art. 11)

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

(UNCRC Art. 14; UDHR Art. 18; ECHR Art. 9; ICCPR Art. 18; CFREU Art. 10)

Freedom of association

(UNCRC Art. 15; UDHR Art. 17; ECHR Art. 11; ICCPR Art. 22; CFREU Art. 12)

Right to free elections and take part in government

(UDHR Art. 21; ECHR Protocol No. 1, Art. 3; CFREU Art. 39)¹¹

Protection of privacy

(UNCRC Art. 16; UDHR Art. 12; ECHR Art. 8; ICCPR Art. 17; CFREU Art. 8)

Right to be heard

(UNCRC Art. 12)

These various instruments of international human rights law effectively place **an obligation on all states and state actors to ensure and promote youth participation in democratic life**. The European Youth Programmes provide a vehicle that enables the youth sector to contribute to upholding this obligation.

The means and space for youth participation

It is valuable to think about **the spaces in which youth participation happens** and how a space can enable or even inhibit youth participation.¹² For example, it can occur in schools and educational institutions, where young people may be involved in a school council or similar activities.

¹¹ Young people under 18 are often excluded from the right to vote by many governments. However, this has been challenged in recent years, with some EU Member States lowering the voting age below 18. Similar debates and restrictions occur relating to taking part in government, which includes standing for office. See Fundamental Rights Agency (2017) *Children's right to vote*

¹² Partispace (2018) *Policy Brief 3: Making Spaces For Youth Participation Accessible And Available*

It can happen in more public spaces, such as the town square or the street, through volunteering, campaigning, and street action, etc., as well as through activism in online spaces and forums. It can also happen within political institutions, such as the municipality council, a political party, or a national or European policymaking body, where young people might be involved in meetings with decision-makers. We might also think of it as happening within a youth organisation, youth civil society, or youth programme, where young people could potentially be involved in deciding or contributing to how that organisation or programme is run.



There are a range of different means through which young people can participate in democratic life. These are typically referred to as **‘forms of youth participation’**¹³ and include the following:



Involvement in voting and elections: This includes voting, becoming a member of a political party, and standing for election. It is arguably the most important form of participation in our democracy, and the election of representatives forms the basis of democratic structures across Europe.



Co-production and co-management: In this form of participation, public institutions or organisations may create youth advisory groups, youth steering groups, or similar structures that work collaboratively with young people to create, influence, and manage specific public policies, initiatives, programmes, and/or organisations.



Protest and advocacy: Young people can be involved in advocacy campaigns, protests, and marches, as well as expressing dissent through lifestyle choices such as boycotting and buycotting.

¹³ Crowley, A. & Moxon, D. (2016) *New and Innovative Forms of Youth Participation in Decision Making*. Council of Europe, Strasbourg.



Civic activism/volunteerism: Donating time, energy, and skills for the benefit of other people, organisations, and/or causes in the community as a social responsibility rather than for any financial reward.



Digital youth participation: The term digital youth participation, or e-participation, refers to the active involvement of young people in democratic and civic life in our communities through the use of modern information and communication technology (ICT), such as the Internet and social media. In this sense, each of the forms of participation above can be recreated in the digital sphere and might also be enhanced by digital activities. The online realm also allows for new methods and approaches to be developed, which may not be possible in physical spaces.



Involvement in deliberative participation: Deliberative participation includes a wide range of formats and methods. They typically involve the state or state actors bringing groups of young people together for a fixed period of time to explore or discuss a key issue or topic. Deliberative participation usually aims to enable participants to make recommendations for change related to that topic to a public body. This can include things such as identifying needed policy changes or selecting new initiatives to be implemented. Examples include youth dialogue, participatory budgeting, citizens' juries, and youth events.



Membership of civil society organisations: Civil society is a key part of democratic life, fundamentally connected to the right to freedom of association. Young people can become involved with civil society by becoming members of youth-led civil society organisations or civil society organisations for all ages. They can also become involved with new social movements, such as Black Lives Matter or Fridays for Future, which do not typically require formal membership.



Youth participation in democratic life can be both individual and collective.

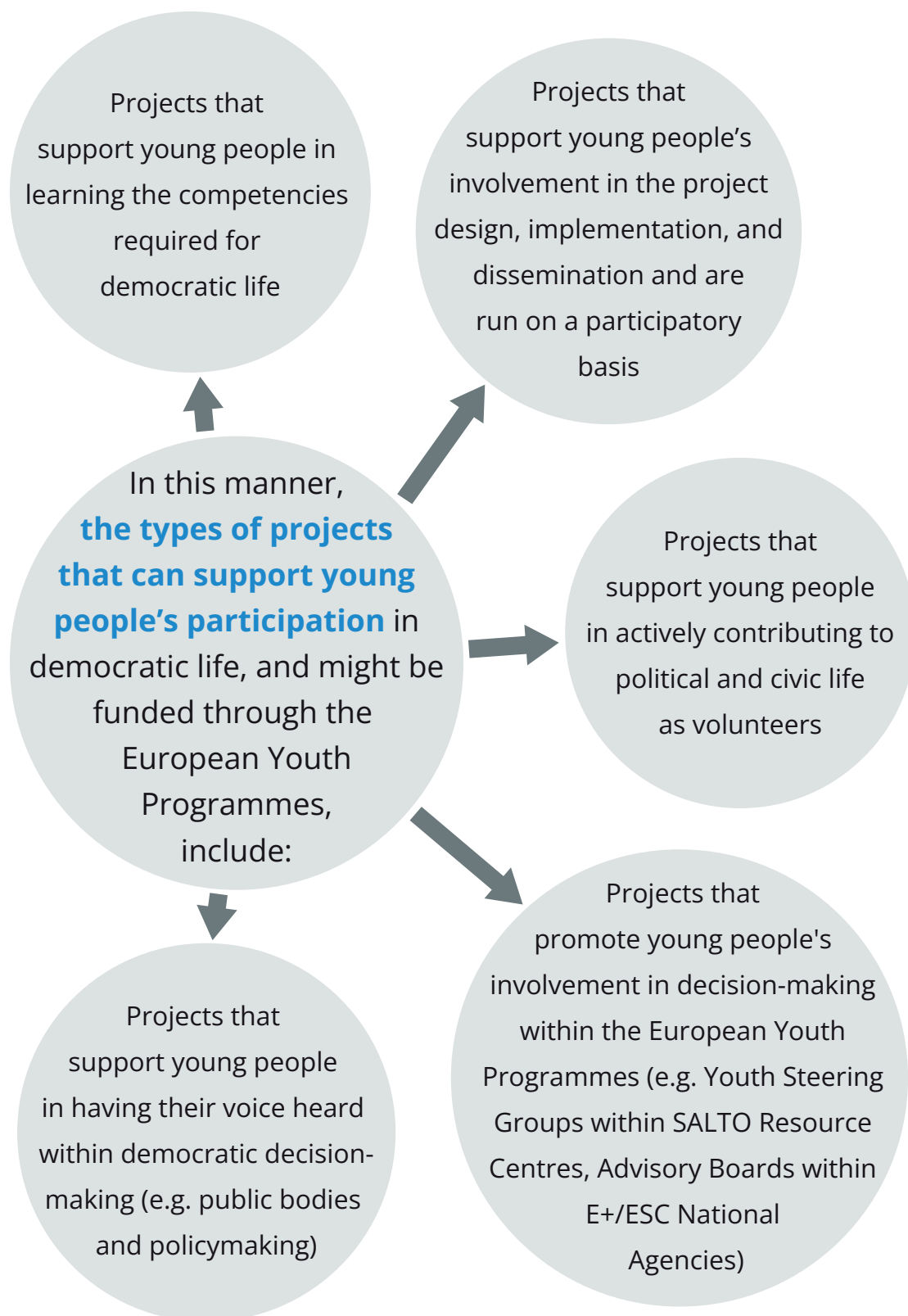
Young people can participate in democratic life individually, for example, by casting a vote or taking part in an online consultation. They can also participate in democratic life collectively by working with groups or youth organisations or as part of multi-generational movements.

Support for youth participation from the European Youth Programmes

The European Youth Programmes are a vital tool for providing 'support' for youth participation. The specific projects funded under them can support youth participation on many levels and in many ways. This reflects the variety of participation practices, the different opportunities the programmes offer and the diverging needs of the actors and young people involved. Every action within the programmes has the potential to fund activities that foster youth participation in democratic life.

Within European Youth Programmes' funded projects, participation can be addressed as a **topic**, where projects aim to educate and support young people in learning about participation in democratic life. Participation can also be a **process**, where project methods employ participatory principles, means, and practices. Participation can be an **outcome**, where the projects support and facilitate the engagement and involvement of young people in political and civic life.





Alongside this, it is also possible to use the European Youth Programmes to run **training courses for youth workers** and other actors to further build their capacities to deliver the projects above and their understanding of youth participation as a whole.

A variety of different stakeholders can undertake projects to promote youth participation as the European Youth Programmes are open to a range of bodies, including civil society, public bodies, non-formal groups of young people and youth-led civil society. However, **different stakeholders may have different reasons and rationales¹⁴ for promoting youth participation**. Whilst promoting the rights of young people always remains a central concern, other rationales can include democratic empowerment, good governance, and education (see diagram below).

The rationale for a project directly shapes its design and objectives, as different rationales, such as democratic empowerment or education, lead to distinct project structures. For instance, a project with an educational rationale will prioritise learning outcomes, while one focused on good governance will emphasise enabling young people to influence public decisions and policymaking. A project with democratic empowerment will emphasise shifting power towards young people, enabling them to shape their circumstances and the world around them and to exercise that power within their lives. Understanding the underlying reasoning is crucial for developing projects that achieve their intended goals and measures of success effectively.

¹⁴ Farthing (2012) Why Youth Participation? Some Justifications and Critiques of Youth Participation Using New Labour's Youth Policies as a Case Study, Youth & Policy (No. 109)

Rationales for the promotion of youth participation in democratic life

Rights-Based Rationale

Youth participation is a fundamental right. The right to be heard is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and, more broadly, is a civil and political right derived from the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, and associated articles. States and state actors have a duty to promote and protect these rights. This is a cross-cutting rationale which underpins all aspects of participation.

Democratic Empowerment Rationale

Young people are a population that is often overlooked and not listened to in society, lacking a voice and power within democracy, as well as being discriminated against due to age and perceived lack of knowledge or competence. Youth participation empowers young people and redresses this exclusion and marginalisation. It can be used as a tool to shift more power to young people within democratic life, allowing them to be agents of social change.

Good Governance Rationale

Youth participation makes for better and more efficient policies, accountability, transparency and builds trust in government. Young People understand best about their own lives, and can provide important insights to the demand-side of policies, as the end-users or target groups of programmes. Their needs, aspirations, experiences and obstacles can help address bottlenecks in service delivery and help design more effective policies.

Educational Rationale

Youth participation builds young people's skills and capacities. It can help build skills in forming opinions, expressing views, making decisions, communicating, and collaborating, increasing their confidence, self-worth, and self-efficacy. The development of democratic competences positively influences young people's democratic behaviour.

The European Youth Programmes can also support and protect the civic **space for young people¹⁵** and youth participation by **enabling youth civil society to engage with the European Youth Programmes** and create projects. Civil society organisations are important spaces that connect young people with the civic space, supporting young people's right to freedom of association. The term 'youth civil society organisation' is generally defined as a non-profit, non-governmental organisation or association whose governance structure is wholly or mainly composed of young people. The youth-led and associative nature of this type of organisation means that supporting them inherently supports youth participation.

Youth civil organisations implement activities for young people and/or engage in advocacy work to further the political, social, cultural, or economic goals of their members. Typically, their activities focus on promoting young people's democratic and social rights, offering opportunities for personal and social development through leisure activities and non-formal and informal learning. They also encourage young people's political participation and involvement in volunteering activities. National Agencies therefore have a key role to play in including youth organisations to access the support of the European Youth Programmes.

¹⁵ European Youth Forum (2022) *Safeguarding civic space for young people in Europe*, Brussels

3. QUALITY STANDARDS FOR MEANINGFUL YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC LIFE

By increasing the number of projects with a **quality youth participation dimension**, the European Youth Programmes can make an impact on young people's participation in democratic life. It is envisaged that the programme stakeholders can support programme applicants, potential applicants, and programme beneficiaries in taking a quality approach to youth participation by applying the standards in this section.

The relevant quality standard to apply depends on the goals of youth participation within the project. These goals might be one or more of the following:

- To **develop the competencies** of young people in relation to democracy and participation
- To ensure that the way the project is run **enables young people to influence decision-making** in the planning, preparation, implementation, and follow-up of the project
- To ensure the project **enables young people to influence decisions in the democratic world** around them, such as policy decisions
- To ensure that the project **enables young people to volunteer their time and make an active contribution** to democratic and civic life

It is not necessary to address all four of these goals fully within a project for meaningful participation to occur, however they can benefit from each other and, for example, learning about participation through participatory pedagogies can maximise learning. Whilst all of the goals are likely to be

present to some extent in the project, **each goal will be of varying importance depending on the specific project and its rationale**. A project can still have meaningful youth participation even if it only addresses one goal. However, it is essential to define the **primary goal(s)** of the project to be able to consider issues of quality.

For example, a local youth council might have the primary goal of enabling young people to influence decision-making within a municipality. Participants in the youth council will no doubt also learn about democracy and civic life, but this is a secondary goal compared to influencing decision-making. By contrast, a training programme for young people on rights and advocacy will be primarily concerned with the competencies acquired by participants and will not seek to directly engage young people in influencing public decision-making during the project.

The relevant quality standard to be applied will vary depending on the PRIMARY goal(s) of the project. The tables below explore this in more detail.

Primary Goal	To develop the competencies of young people in relation to democracy and participation.
Description and Example	Participation is addressed as a topic. The project is designed to enable participants to learn about participation and democracy, as well as related areas such as European Values and solidarity. It is understood that the development of democratic competencies will go on to influence young people's democratic engagement and behaviour, ¹⁶ but the project itself does not provide substantial opportunities for young people to engage in wider civic or political life. An example of this is an education programme or campaign to raise awareness of the right to vote among first-time voters or a training programme on democratic debate and fake news.

¹⁶ Moxon, D. (2024) *Youth Participation and Citizenship Education: A Cross-sectoral Perspective*, Salto PI, Tallinn.

Relevant Quality Standard	In relation to youth participation, the primary measure of quality is what participants learn from the project about democracy and participation. The Council of Europe's <i>'Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture'</i> (RFCDC) can be used to assess and consider the learning of participants. THE RFCDC contains a model of the competences that need to be acquired by learners to take action to defend and promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law, to act as active citizens, to participate effectively in a culture of democracy, and to live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse societies. The Framework also contains descriptors for all the competences in the model. It is based around four dimensions: Values, Attitudes, Skills, Knowledge, and Critical Understanding.
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Primary Goal	To enable young people to influence the decision-making of the planning, preparation, implementation, and follow-up of the project
Description and Example	A participatory process is used to develop and implement a project, allowing young people to shape and influence the decisions made within the project itself. The project may focus on any theme or topic, but young people are intended to be central to leading and designing the project. Examples include projects to organise cultural or arts-based activities, where the aims, activities, and budget are decided by an advisory group of young leaders, or training for youth workers on green practices, designed and implemented by young people.

Relevant Quality Standard	In relation to youth participation, the primary measure of quality is the way in which young people are involved in decisions about <i>how the project operates</i>. The 'Quality Standards for Meaningful Youth Participation in Decision Making' (see below) can be used.
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Primary Goal	To enable young people to influence decisions in the democratic world around them, such as policy decisions made by a public body.
Description and Example	Participation is addressed as an outcome. The project is designed to enable young people to have their voice heard on some sort of public decision(s) or policy(ies) – usually one being made by a public body, such as a municipality or national government. Examples can include youth councils, youth dialogue events, participatory budgeting, as well as advocacy and campaigning.
Relevant Quality Standard	In relation to youth participation, the primary measure of quality is the way in which the project enables young people to be involved in the decision-making of a public body (or similar). The 'Quality Standards for Meaningful Youth Participation in Decision Making' (see below) can be used.

Primary Goal	To enable young people to influence decisions in the democratic world around them, particularly decisions made by National Agencies
Description and Example	Participation is addressed as a process. Young people are involved in decision-making at the EU Youth Programme level, meaning that young people have the opportunity to shape the programmes themselves. This involvement typically happens at the level of National Agencies but can also be a centralised process at European level for involving the target groups in the development of the programmes. An example of this is a youth advisory council established to provide feedback to National Agency work programmes or a consultation conducted through surveys and focus groups, with young people as part of a strategy development process within the National Agency.
Relevant Quality Standard	In relation to youth participation, the primary measure of quality is how the project enables young people to be involved in the decision-making of the National Agency. The 'Quality Standards for Meaningful Youth Participation in Decision Making' (see below) can be used to consider this.

Primary Goal	To enable young people to volunteer their time and make an active contribution to democratic and civic life.
Description and Example	Participation is addressed as an outcome. The project aims to support the engagement of young people in political and civic life through volunteerism. A common

¹⁷ See page 58: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2025) *European Solidarity Corps Guide: 2025 Call*, European Commission, Brussels.

	example of this is volunteering opportunities created through the European Solidarity Corps, which create short- and long-term volunteering opportunities for young people to achieve a positive impact on communities.
Relevant Quality Standard	The primary measure of quality is the nature and quality of the volunteering opportunities created. The <i>'Principles and Quality Standards for Volunteering Activities'</i> from the European Solidarity Corps Quality Label 2025¹⁷ can be used. SALTO ESC is also producing a set of quality standards (Quality Charter) for European Youth Volunteering Activities, expected for publication in 2026.

Quality Standards for Meaningful Youth Participation in decision-making³

These standards are adapted from the 'Nine basic requirements' for child participation in UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 12,¹⁸ and the ERYICA & Eurodesk 'Principles for Youth Participation'.¹⁹ They can be used to assess and consider the quality of young people's involvement in decision-making. This can relate to decision-making in how a project is run or to young people's participation in the decision-making of a specific public body or policy.



i **Transparent and informative:**

Young people should be provided with full information about their right to participate and how their participation will take place. This includes the purpose of their participation (why they are participating), the scope (which decisions their views might influence), and the potential impact (how their views might influence decision-making). This information should be provided in an accessible, diversity-sensitive, and age-appropriate way so that young

people have a complete understanding of what they are participating in and can decide whether they want to participate in an informed way.

★ **Accountable:**

Participation by itself or sharing one's views does not automatically lead to change. This is particularly true in public / democratic decision-making, where decision-makers consider many voices when making policy. Nevertheless, young people should be informed about how their views were considered and

¹⁸ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) *General Comment No. 12: The right of the child to be heard*, United Nations, Geneva

¹⁹ ERYICA & Eurodesk (2022) *Youth Participation in Youth Information Services*, Brussels.

interpreted by those with the power to make decisions, so they can understand whether and how their participation had an impact and can strategise differently next time, if they so wish. Young people should be provided with full feedback and follow-up on how their input was considered in decision-making. They should have the opportunity to challenge those results and try to shape them again if desired. In the case of participatory project design or implementation, a commitment to follow-up and evaluation is essential.

Relevant:

Young people should express their views and contribute to and influence any decisions that have real relevance to their lives, enabling them to draw on their knowledge, skills, and abilities. Young people should also be given the opportunity to identify for themselves what issues they deem relevant and important.

Respectful:

Young people are not 'citizens-in-the-making' but fully realised

individuals, citizens, and stakeholders in society, whose views have value. They should be provided opportunities to propose and initiate ideas or activities themselves, and their views should be treated with respect and valued.

Safe and sensitive to risk:

Expressing views openly and honestly may involve risks. In an open society that respects human dignity, freedom, and democracy, people should be able to hold opinions and receive and share information and ideas without fear of physical retribution, punishment, or harm. Steps should be taken to minimise this risk to young people during their participation, from public authorities and/or other people.

Young people-friendly:

Spaces, environments, and working methods should be adapted to suit the needs of the target group of young people likely to be engaged, to motivate them, to ensure they feel confident, and to reduce any barriers to participation. This entails providing sufficient time and

resources so that they are adequately prepared to participate meaningfully. Some young people may need additional support or forms of involvement according to their age and individual capacities.

Inclusive and accessible:

All young people should feel genuinely welcome and able to participate, contribute their input, and feel valued. However, some young people cannot benefit equally from these opportunities because they face various barriers. Participation activities should avoid replicating existing patterns of discrimination and inequality by encouraging opportunities for young people from marginalised backgrounds. Young people are not a homogeneous group, and youth participation should provide equality of opportunity for all, without discrimination on any grounds. This means ensuring that participation activities are accessible to all young people, removing financial, language, cultural, and physical barriers in their design.

Supported through learning and training:

Project implementers need the appropriate preparation, skills, and resources to promote the learning and development of young participants to support youth participation and young people's leadership. Young people themselves can create and develop opportunities for participation and need access to training and support to help them take on these leadership roles.

Voluntary:

All participation should be voluntary, as participation is a right, not an obligation. Young people are entitled to choose whether to express their views or contribute to decision-making. They should not be compelled or pressured to participate, and they can withdraw their participation at any time without penalty.

