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Cyprus

NATIONAL LEVEL ASSESSMENT REPORT



Cyprus National Level Assessment Report

Findings from the National Level Assessment on the level of awareness, gaps in knowledge, and barriers to participation amongst young people in civic democratic life and decision-making processes in Cyprus and Europe

Generation For Change CY



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The ParticipACTION Project

The **ParticipACTION** “*Building Inclusive Civic Engagement and Solidarity Among Diverse Young People in Europe*” project is co-funded by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Program (CERV-2023-CITIZENS-CIV).

The project’s core aims to enhance youth engagement in European decision-making processes and create opportunities for young people to connect with policymakers at local, national, and European levels through research initiatives, roundtables, workshops, and training sessions on policy and advocacy. The project targets young people aged 16 to 23. It seeks to involve not only European citizens but also young individuals with migratory backgrounds or coming from non-EU countries, with a special focus on women and girls. By bringing together these diverse groups of young people, the project aims to foster mutual understanding of shared experiences and barriers to democratic participation, ultimately promoting solidarity. The goal of the project is to equip young people with the tools to influence EU democratic processes, while promoting a bottom-up approach that ensures their lived realities are at the heart of policy decisions.

The ParticipACTION project is implemented in Italy, France, Cyprus and Lithuania by a consortium of five experienced partners. The project runs from October 1, 2024, to September 30, 2026.

Project Partners

IRC Italia – Fondazione International Rescue Committee Italia ETS – Coordinator (Italy)

G.F.C. - Generation For Change CY - (Cyprus)

PLACE - PLACE Network - (France)

GLOCAL FACTORY - GLOCAL FACTORY Società Cooperativa Sociale - (Italy)

MANO EUROPA – Asociacija Mano Europa - (Lithuania)

Executive Summary

As part of the ParticipACTION project, Generation for Change CY has conducted a National Level Assessment Report documenting the levels of young people's knowledge, participation and barriers to civic and democratic life in Cyprus, with particular attention to young women and young third-country nationals (TCNs). Using a mixed-method approach, the research findings revealed that while many young people are interested in civic and social issues, participation in formal politics remains low due to limited civic education opportunities, low trust in institutions, and legal and societal barriers, especially for migrant youth and young women. The research also highlights young people's active interest and engagement with advocacy, volunteering, and social movements, with social media playing a key role in information-sharing and mobilization across a diverse range of causes. Based on these insights, the report recommends policy efforts aimed at improving the quality and reach of civic education, creating more inclusive channels for youth involvement, and offering targeted support to marginalized and migrant youth. Emphasizing the importance of digital engagement and grassroots initiatives, the assessment calls for efforts to remove structural barriers and build stronger communication channels between young people of diverse backgrounds and decision-makers in Cyprus.

Author's note: In this document, the term "Cyprus" is used to refer to the territories under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC).

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1. Background

1.1 National Level Assessment Report overview

The National Level Assessment Report aims at combining the various research phases of the ParticipACTION project, including desk research, focus group discussions (FGD), survey, interviews, interactive seminars and national roundtables. It furthers the initial overview, elaborated in the desk research, of the level of awareness, gaps in knowledge and barriers to participation amongst young people from diverse backgrounds in civic democratic life and decision-making processes in Europe, with the original data collected by Generation for Change CY during WP1, WP2 and WP3. The National Level Assessment Report will also offer an overview of the suggested solutions to the obstacles that hinder youth participation, offered by the youth themselves.

1.2 The Cypriot context

Since its accession to the European Union (EU) in 2004, Cyprus, due to its location in the Eastern Mediterranean, has been used to bridge economic, cultural, and political relations between the EU and MENA (Messa, 2025). However, its longstanding political division continues to shape its domestic and international policy, with implications for social cohesion, identity, and participation. The intercommunal tensions remain a central theme in political discourse, dominating public debate and influencing institutional agendas. For young people, particularly young women and TCNs, this reality shapes not only which issues are deemed politically salient, and which are overshadowed, but also their sense of belonging, visibility, and ability to participate meaningfully in civic and democratic life.

1.2.1 Asylum seekers and other migrants

Cyprus' unique position within broader migratory dynamics significantly shapes the conditions for civic and democratic participation among young people, particularly young TCNs. Although Cyprus is often not the first choice for migrants aiming to reach the EU, the closing of alternative routes towards continental Europe has led to an increase in migratory flows towards Cyprus (Litzkow, 2024). Owing to the island's position as a crossroad between three continents, the island receives a considerably high number of asylum applications from a wide array of different countries (UNHCR, 2024).

Over the past decade, Cyprus has often welcomed the highest number of asylum seekers per capita among all EU Member States (Kantaros & Theodorou, 2022). It is therefore crucial to consider the significant proportion of asylum seekers and refugees within the broader TCN population when discussing migration in Cyprus. Out of approximately 170.000 TCNs residing in Cyprus, 23.500 are beneficiaries of international protection, 23.335 are under temporary protection (the majority

fleeing to the war in Ukraine), and around 18.800 have pending asylum applications (plus 7.000 appeals pending) (Eurostat, 2024, UNHCR, 2025).

Concerning the asylum process, under Cypriot law, a decision on an asylum application must be made within six months from the date of lodging. This period can be extended by up to nine months in exceptional circumstances, and for additional three months if necessary. In any event, the law states that the procedure should be concluded within 21 months from the lodging of the application (UNHCR, 2025).

Contrary to what was envisioned in legislation, the asylum seeker status on the island is, in most cases, not a short-term one. The average time taken for a decision on a well-founded application is around 2 to 3 years (UNHCR, 2024). If an applicant is rejected and subsequently submits an appeal, the appeal body will take an average of 6 to 18 months to issue a final decision (CyRC, 2024). Combined with the absence of social housing for asylum seekers in Cyprus and the limited capacity of reception centers (CyRC, 2024), this means that most asylum seekers live in the local communities and often become integral members of them.

Additionally, a significant number of people from Greece and Eastern Europe have also relocated to Cyprus for better job opportunities. For Greeks in particular, Cyprus has become a favored destination due to cultural and linguistic similarities (Messa, 2025). The island is also home to a large community of South Asian nationals working under various work visas, predominantly in the domestic and agricultural sectors (Messa, 2025).

2. Methodology

The research for this report was conducted by two researchers from the team of Generation for Change CY from November 2024 to May 2025. A mixed methods approach was employed, combining both primary and secondary research methodologies. Primary data collection included focus groups, a survey, feedback from awareness-raising seminars, insights from our Youth Empowerment Roundtable, and key-person interviews. Secondary research involved a review of grey literature, academic articles, and reports from civil society organizations.

As the lead organization for this work package (WP1), Generation for Change CY developed an overarching research guidelines document, which was integrated with comments and reviews from all partners and shared prior to the commencement of the research. This document served to ensure methodological coherence and consistency across all participating countries.

This section details the mixed-methods approach and methodology used for the various research phases, including FGDs, survey, desk research, interviews, interactive seminars, and national roundtables and gives an overview of participants' demographics.

2.1 Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs)

Generation for Change CY conducted three FGDs, with a total of 24 participants. The first focus group welcomed 6 young people, the second one 7, and the third and final one 12. Each session was facilitated by two staff members, one serving as the lead facilitator and the other as a support facilitator and note-taker. The FGDs employed a semi-structured format, where participants were presented with open-ended questions. This approach encouraged spontaneous contributions, peer-to-peer discussion, and the sharing of diverse perspectives. Facilitators moderated the discussions to maintain focus on the research themes while allowing for organic dialogue. FGDs lasted 2.5 hours each. To support the subsequent analysis, the FGDs were audio-recorded.

Participants were initially identified through an open call related to the ParticipACTION project, during which they were asked to indicate which project activities interested them. Researchers followed up with individuals who expressed interest in the focus groups. Additional participants were recruited through Generation for Change CY's network of beneficiaries, volunteers and supporters.

Each participant was offered a small token of appreciation (a notepad, pen, and/or water bottle), as well as refreshments (food and soft drinks) as an acknowledgement of their time and contributions.

The first focus group was composed exclusively of 6 TCN participants to ensure the inclusion of marginalized voices and to explore in greater depth the civic participation experiences of TCNs.

2.2 Survey

The survey was conducted online using the Microsoft Forms platform. In the survey, respondents were presented with the privacy notice of the ParticipACTION project as well as that of Generation for Change CY and asked to provide their informed consent to anonymously take part in the research. They were then requested to answer a total of 20 questions:¹

- 4 demographics questions to disaggregate data at the analysis stage (gender, country of origin, country of residence, age)
- 11 closed and open-ended questions on the topic of awareness of European institutions, action plans, and strategies
- 4 closed and open-ended questions on their participation in European civic democratic life
- 1 open-ended question on the topic of solidarity and the respondents' personal experiences with it

¹ The full text of the survey can be found in Annex 2.

The survey collected 61 responses, with an additional 7 deemed invalid due to either participants' age (15 and under or 24 and above) or refusal to provide informed consent. Participants were recruited through Generation for Change CY's network and through Meta advertisements (on Instagram and Facebook). The demographic composition of the respondent pool is presented below²:

- 59% (n = 36) of participants identified as women, 36% (n = 22) as men, 1.6% (n = 1) as non-binary, and 3.3% (n = 2) preferred not to disclose their gender identity (Fig. A).
- The average age of respondents was 19.8, and the most represented age group was 18-year-olds (n = 16).
- Almost half of the participants (n = 30) identified as TCNs from 23 unique countries. Cyprus had the largest share of participants from a single country (n = 28). Participants from EU countries besides Cyprus (n = 8) were disaggregated separately (Fig. B).

% of Survey Participants (n = 61) by Country of Origin

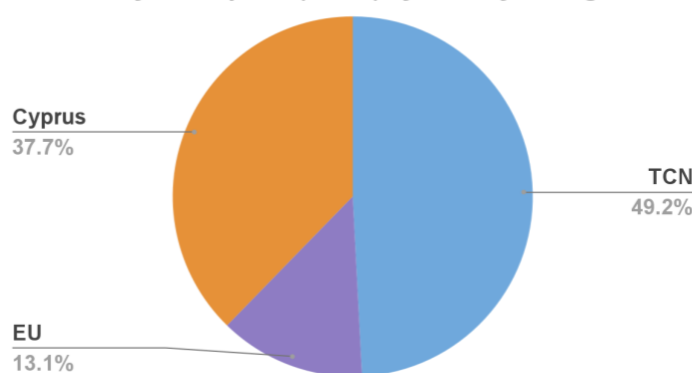


Fig. A³

% of Survey Participants (n = 61) by Gender Identity

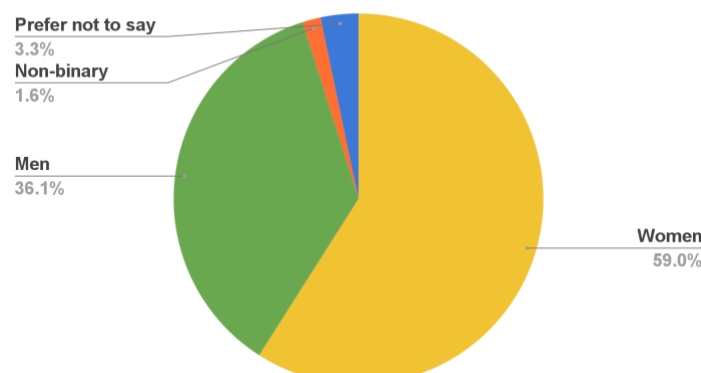


Fig. B⁴

Data for each question was disaggregated by the following categories:

- Gender (Man, Woman, Non-Binary, Prefer not to say)
- Nationality (Cypriot, EU, TCN)
- Gender and nationality (all possible combinations)

For questions where multiple options could be selected, a score system was created, with each selected option being worth one point, excluding the “None of these/Unsure” option. The scores were then averaged against the participant distribution of each disaggregation category.

² Percentages may not add up to 100% as the numbers have been rounded up or down to the nearest decimal point.

³ **Fig. A:** Pie chart showing the distribution of survey participants (n = 61) by gender identity

⁴ **Fig. B:** Pie chart showing the distribution of survey participants (n = 61) by country of origin. All non-EU countries are grouped under the “TCN” (Third Country Nationals) category. All EU countries, except the Republic of Cyprus, are grouped under the “EU” category.

Both researchers independently analyzed the final (solidarity-focused) open-ended question using inductive coding analysis. They then cross-referenced the results to ensure inter-coder reliability and finalized the codebook (Annex 3).

2.3 Desk research

Two members of Generation for Change CY team conducted the desk research between November 2024 and April 2025. They collaboratively analyzed sources available in Greek and English. The researchers employed an inductive approach, starting without predefined hypotheses but instead examining the available materials to identify emerging patterns, trends, and connections that could inform a deeper understanding of the topic.

The sources reviewed included European-level surveys, such as those conducted by the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) and the Eurobarometer surveys, as well as EU and national policy documents, news reports, and academic literature. The research was carried out through an intersectional lens, aiming to explore how various interconnected social categories, such as age, gender, race, class, and other dimensions of identity, interact to shape young individuals' lived experiences and their engagement with social structures at the national and EU levels.

Each subsection of the desk research was guided by a set of dedicated research questions, which are available in Annex 1. The desk research was compiled in a standalone report, disseminated in April 2025, and available on Generation for Change CY's website.⁵ The insights from the desk research informed the design and implementation of the focus groups (Section 2.1) and survey (Section 2.2).

2.4 Interviews

Two key stakeholder interviews were conducted to validate and complement the findings from the desk research. Generation for Change CY's network of organizations and stakeholders active in the field was employed to identify and recruit professionals with expertise in youth engagement in Cyprus.

The interviews lasted one hour and were conducted in English via videoconferencing. With the participants' informed consent, the audio was recorded for analysis purposes. Following each interview, a summary report of the findings was shared with the respective participant, providing them with the opportunity to amend, clarify, or remove any content. Neither participant requested any modifications to the report.

⁵<https://generationforchange.org/awareness-gaps-in-knowledge-and-barriers-to-civic-participation-among-young-people-in-cyprus/>

2.5 Interactive Seminars

On February 25th, 2025, as part of the project's WP2, an awareness-raising Interactive Seminar was held at the University of Nicosia. The event took place in lieu of a Sociology 101 class, in coordination with the professor, who found the activity to hold significant value for his students. The seminar was conducted in English by two members of Generation for Change CY's staff and had 28 young Cypriot and TCN participants.

The interactive seminar concluded with the engagement of the participants in the selection process of the key themes of the project via individual voting through Mentimeter, an online platform with voting functionality. During the seminar, the participants were familiarized with 5 possible project themes:

1. Gender equality
2. European democracy
3. Values, rights, rule of law & security
4. Migration
5. Education, culture, youth & sport

Each participant was then asked to rank the themes from 1 to 5 according to how important they believed each theme to be in the upcoming steps and actions of the project. All 28 participants voted.

The rankings were tallied and the resulting selection for Cyprus was: (1) education, culture, youth & sport; (2) values, rights, rule of law & security; and (3) gender equality. However, after incorporating votes from other participating countries and organizations, the final three selected themes guiding the overall project and around which the National Roundtable (2.6) centered are:

- **Education, culture, youth, and sport**
 - **Values, rights, rule of law & security**
 - **Migration**
- Gender equality (cross-cutting focus across all themes)

The selected themes informed the selection of stakeholder invitations for the National Roundtable.

2.6 National Roundtable

On May 26th, 2025, as part of the project's WP3, Generation for Change CY hosted a roundtable discussion in English featuring young people and high-level stakeholders to discuss the core themes selected during the interactive seminars. The event took place in the Jean Monnet

Auditorium at the University of Nicosia, and brought together a total of 42 participants, of which 6 were stakeholders, 5 Generation for Change CY staff, and the rest ($n = 31$) were young persons from diverse backgrounds interested in the discussion and project activities. The roundtable lasted 2.5 hours.

The stakeholders present represented the office of the Commissioner for Gender Equality of the Republic of Cyprus (with the Commissioner herself delivering a speech to the young people); the Ministry of Education, Sport, and Youth; and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Cyprus (UNHCR Cyprus).

The stakeholders gave brief speeches to present their expertise and activities, after which the young people were invited to network with them during the breaks and to pose questions in a panel discussion and Q&A in the second half of the event.

3. Challenges and limitations

Research on youth civic knowledge and participation in Cyprus, particularly among young women and TCNs, presents several unique challenges and limitations linked to the socio-political landscape and structural characteristics of the country.

3.1 Desk research limitations

The relatively small size of the island inherently limits the scope of available data and academic research. There is a notable lack of existing literature focusing specifically on youth civic engagement, especially among migrant and refugee populations, and even more so from an intersectional perspective. This gap in knowledge significantly constrained the breadth of the desk research and limited opportunities for comparative analysis.

Additionally, the ongoing political division of the island, commonly referred to as the Cyprus problem, often dominates public discourse and research agendas. As a result, issues such as racism, migration, and youth civic participation tend to receive less research and policy attention, which further exacerbates the scarcity of relevant data and institutional engagement with these topics.

3.2 Primary research limitations

The primary research efforts were constrained by limitations in time and scope of the project. While the research has yielded interesting insights, these limitations underscore the need for

continued, inclusive, and geographically balanced research efforts in Cyprus, with increased attention to intersectionality, linguistic diversity, and underrepresented youth voices.

3.2.1 Sample size

For the qualitative components of the research, such as focus groups and open-ended parts of the survey, the relatively small sample size affects the overall credibility and transferability of findings. While these methods offer rich, contextual insights, they are not intended to produce universally applicable conclusions. Rather, they highlight key themes and lived experiences that may resonate in similar settings.

For the quantitative component, particularly the survey, the limited sample size affects the validity of the results. The extent to which findings can be reliably extended to the broader population of young people in Cyprus is thus constrained. These methodological limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the research findings and drawing broader conclusions.

3.2.2 Self-selection bias

For both components, a self-selection bias of participants applies, as individuals who are already engaged in the EU project landscape and initiatives would be more likely to learn about and engage with the ParticipACTION project. This was confirmed by several participants who shared having taken part in similar initiatives in the past. Nonetheless, efforts were made to mitigate this through targeted outreach via the diverse audience within the network of Generation for Change CY.

3.2.3 Language barriers

Language barriers presented another practical limitation in research activities. FGDs were conducted primarily in English, with the opportunity for participants to ask for clarification in French or Greek. This may have restricted participation from individuals with limited proficiency in these languages, thereby excluding certain individuals and limiting the depth of engagement for others.

3.2.4 Geographic focus

The geographic focus of the research also introduced potential bias. As Generation for Change CY is based in Nicosia, much of the participant recruitment and data collection was centered around the capital city. While participants from other parts of the island joined project activities, the research's urban focus may have unintentionally limited the representation of youth from other municipalities of Cyprus and rural areas in light of the country's limited public transport infrastructure. These factors may have influenced the salience of certain themes in the findings.

4. Key findings

The synthesis of desk research, FGDs, surveys, interviews, and the national roundtable offers a detailed understanding of youth civic engagement in Cyprus, highlighting areas of knowledge (4.1), participation (4.2), and existing barriers (4.3).

4.1 Knowledge

This section examines how young people in Cyprus understand European institutions, policies, legislative actions, and strategies, as well as possible gaps in their knowledge and current attitudes toward the EU. It relies on the latest data available, policy reports, academic studies as well as testimonials from the youth participants to the ParticipACTION events and findings from the ParticipACTION survey.

4.1.1. Knowledge of European Institutions, Rule of Law and Fundamental Values of EU

According to the Fundamental Rights Survey (FRA, 2020), awareness of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in Cyprus is the lowest in the EU among all ages besides people older than 65. On a similar note, in the Flash Eurobarometer 502 (2022), Cypriot youth scored slightly below the European average for overall knowledge of available EU opportunities (e.g., EYE Events, Petitions to the EU Parliament, Charlemagne Youth Prize, Euroscola).

Generation for Change CY's primary research findings support the trend seen in the FRA and Flash Eurobarometer survey results, indicating a general landscape of limited political and institutional awareness among youth in Cyprus. Despite the potential influence of self-selection bias, most of our participants perceived EU institutions and policy processes as distant and opaque. They frequently struggled to differentiate between institutions and understand their specific roles. These findings resonate with the suggestions put forward by young people throughout the project, most notably the desire for expanded civic education opportunities in schools (see Section 5).

Lastly, a perceived sense of disconnect from EU affairs was often shared by TCNs and Turkish Cypriot participants, who frequently felt that their concerns were marginalized in EU discourse and action. This perceived exclusion appeared to further diminish their interest in engaging with or learning about EU institutions and opportunities.

4.1.1.1 European-level institutions

During the FGDs, participants were asked to name the EU institutions they were aware of. With varying levels of hesitancy, all participants identified the core EU bodies, including the European Commission, European Parliament, European Council, Council of the EU, European Central Bank, and Court of Justice of the EU. However, this name recognition almost never translated into a confident understanding of each institution's mandate or functions.

In the ParticipACTION survey, participants were asked about their awareness of the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the six key European values (Fig. C). For the latter, participants were asked both to self-assess their familiarity and attempt to name the six values. Scoring was based on the accuracy of their responses.

Notably, participants tended to overestimate their knowledge of the six European values by approximately 42.86%, indicating a significant gap between perceived and actual knowledge.

	European Presidencies (European Commission, European Parliament) (Scale: 0-2) ⁶	European Charter of Fundamental Rights (Scale: 0-2)	European Values (0-6)
All	0.6	0.3	4.3
Women	0.5	0.5	4
Men	0.8	0.8	4.3
TCN	0.4	0.4	4.2
Cypriot	0.7	0.7	4.25
TCN Women	1.7	1.7	4.67
Cypriot Women	1.7	0.7	1.5

Fig. C⁷

⁶ To calculate the average, each answer was assigned with a score at the analysis stage: 0 = “No” ; 1 = “Somewhat” , 2 = “Yes”. While the European Commission and European Parliament presidency were two separate questions, for the purposes of the analysis they have been compounded. The averages have been adjusted accordingly.

⁷ Average knowledge scores (European Values only for the respondents who answered “Some of them” or “Yes”) per disaggregation category. Note: for the categories “TCN Women” and “Cypriot Women”, the valid answers are n = 3, which is too low to draw conclusions, even for the size of the sample.

4.1.1.2 EU policies and Cyprus

As part of the survey, participants were asked about their familiarity with key EU policy areas, including recent developments in the domains of gender equality, migration, and opportunities in the fields of education, youth, culture, and sport.

Almost all survey participants ($n = 58$) had similar understandings of the notion of gender equality as the idea that everyone, regardless of gender, should have access to the same rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. As expressed by participants:

“Gender equality... I think it’s when they say what a man can do, a woman can do it too. Like never underestimate or discriminate nobody just based on their gender, e.g., when someone says we don’t want a woman as president, no woman can talk in front of men, and many more BS [sic] like this, it shows there’s no gender equality there.” (Survey respondent on gender equality)

“All genders, including male, female, and others, have equal rights and opportunities under the law and within society. Discrimination, racism, and hate at any level, including in areas such as employment and social life, are unacceptable and should not occur based on gender.” (Survey respondent on gender equality)

Beyond Erasmus+, most participants reported limited or no awareness of other EU initiatives in the domains of culture, youth, or sport. Some expressed skepticism about the visibility or impact of such policies in their own lives:

“I am not really familiar with these developments, but I am always happy to see them happening. In my national context, I feel like they wouldn’t have a big impact.” (Survey respondent on EU policy in the domains of culture, youth, and sport).

“No, am not familiar with any of these... I don’t see any impact where I am. Maybe others see them cause me am not even european to start with.” (Survey respondent on EU policy in the domains of culture, youth, and sport).

Lastly, regarding migration policy developments in the EU and Cyprus, the majority of participants reported little to no knowledge. This reflects broader trends of limited public knowledge of the dynamics of migration present within Cyprus (UNHCR, 2023). Among the participants who did respond ($n = 11$), answers tended to express concern, either about the political direction of the EU, the rise of xenophobia, or the capacity of Cyprus to manage migration effectively:

“Not very familiar with it, but the majority of Europe is leaning against immigration because they want to blame the immigrants for the bad economies, and Greeks [sic] specific has always been against it because they feel betrayed by the EU.” (Survey participant on migration)

I think they are planning to remove immigrants from all regions of Cyprus... I think it could lead to a wave of rage for some people [who] didn't have a choice but to come to our country and have adapted smoothly to our society. For others who haven't and have only caused trouble, [it] might be a good thing, but not all immigrants cause trouble and are bad as our society views them.” (Survey participant on migration)

“[I am] not informed [about] current migration changes. I can observe that the EU is not particularly helpful in how different country members deal with the issue. Due to our geographical location, Cyprus deals with the migration problem “alone”. Of course, funding from the EU is helpful, but not enough to deal with the issue comprehensively.” (Survey participant on migration)

4.1.2 Knowledge of Opportunities for Active Engagement of Young People

When asked about awareness of EU opportunities for youth, Erasmus+ mobility programs emerged as the most well-known and frequently accessed initiative. Participants commonly referenced the Erasmus+ program for higher education, which enables students to study abroad tuition-free while receiving a stipend to help cover living costs (European Commission, n.d.). This reflects desk review findings, which show that awareness and participation in Erasmus+ among young people in Cyprus are above the EU average.

4.2 Participation

In the European Commission's (2024) Youth and Democracy survey, youth in Cyprus scored the lowest in the EU for civic engagement participation, with a score of 31 out of 100, well below the EU average of 48. Nonetheless, certain trends can be identified in young people's modalities and preferences in participation. Overall, across the survey and interviews, Generation for Change CY found that young women in Cyprus tend to be more active than young men. However, the higher level of participation does not translate vertically in decision-making roles, which remain overwhelmingly held by men across the country's offices, as denoted by the country's 28.8 (out of 100) score in the domain of “Power” in EIGE's Gender Equality Index (EIGE, 2024). Other prominent trends are the lower participation rates of TCNs, mostly due to prominent legal and intangible barriers rather than a lack of willingness to do so otherwise (see Section 4.3).

4.2.1 Voting, parties, and representative structures

Primary research findings confirmed the initial desk review insights: traditional political participation does not resonate with young people in Cyprus. In the words of a young participant:

“You see the faces looking back at you from the posters...and I can differentiate the face of one old man from that of another old man, but I do not know who is advocating for what. It’s a massive lack of information in Cyprus, especially about European [Parliament] Candidates.”
(Cypriot Focus group participant)

In the findings of the survey, young women demonstrated slightly higher levels of participation than their male counterparts and were more likely to have voted in the past. In contrast, young men were more likely to report never having participated in any political or civic activity, though this response was the most commonly selected overall. Young TCNs scored slightly lower than their Cypriot counterparts, although this difference can be attributed to the existing landscape of legal barriers limiting the opportunities for traditional engagement. Notably, the option of reaching out to representatives⁸ was not selected by any respondents across all groups, testifying to a widespread sense that young people’s voices are unlikely to be heard by decision-makers.

Recent institutional efforts were directed towards countering low youth participation and “modernizing” the electoral system (Hazou, 2025). Most notably, starting from the 2028 parliamentary election, the new voting age threshold will be lowered to 17 (Hazou, 2025). When questioned during the focus group about this initiative, participants generally reacted in favor of this policy change.

4.2.1.1 Defeatism

Young people in Cyprus often express deep cynicism toward the effectiveness of political consultation mechanisms. Trust in individual politicians and political parties is generally low, and there is widespread skepticism about the impact of voting or civic participation on policymaking. Many adopt defeatist attitudes, perceiving that their voices are disregarded and that no one is willing to listen. As a result, they often question whether engaging in political processes is worth the effort. This is particularly prominent for TCN youth, among whom many feel sidelined, if not excluded, from political debate in Cyprus. In the words of the focus group participants:

“For me, [voting] is complicated. I get told that my voice does not count, that the choices have already been made by others.” (TCN focus group participant)

“[I would be more likely to support a candidate] if they planned to directly benefit us third-country nationals and not exclude us completely from their policies.” (TCN focus group participant)

⁸ “Reached out to a representative (email, phone call...)”

These statements underscore a perception among TCN youth that their concerns are routinely overlooked in political discourse and policymaking.

In the domain of European representative structures, defeatist attitudes appear less pronounced among young people; however, concerns persist regarding the effectiveness and relevance of the EU in addressing their needs (Eurobarometer, 2024). According to the 2024 Youth and Democracy Survey, the percentage of young people in Cyprus who believe the EU impacts their daily lives is lower than the EU average (17% CY, 25% EU). Young Cypriots' opinion of the EU is often intertwined with the division of the island and their weariness with the current impasse (Diez & Tocci, 2010).

Many interpret the recent election of MEP Fidias Panayiotou (Wong, 2024) as a testimony of young people in Cyprus's developing disillusionment with traditional political parties and established European institutions (Sotiropoulou, 2024). Concerns regarding Mr. Panayiotou's election emerged in one of the focus groups, with participants expressing outrage, stating that he has "no idea" about his role's responsibilities.

Intention to vote in the 2024 European elections among youth was reported as below the EU27 average (53% in CY vs. 64% in EU27) (Eurobarometer, 2024). Nonetheless, overall voter turnout in Cyprus (58.86%), although not disaggregated by age, has shown a remarkable increase since the 2019 elections (44.99%), and was above the EU average (50.74%) (EP, 2024).

4.2.2 Advocacy and non-electoral participation

While "traditional" political action does not resonate with youth in Cyprus, a cross-cutting aspect that emerged across project activities was the strong interest and affiliation with specific causes and movements. These were either global concerns (e.g., environmentalism, queer rights), anti-war (e.g., Russia's invasion of Ukraine), or national/regional grievances (e.g., the Tempi train crash scandal).

Despite young people's strong interest in movements and social causes, some participants indicated that, at times, young people feel overwhelmed by the number of causes and issues they are called upon to advocate for. In the words of one of the focus group participants:

*"Young people, we are bombarded with these morality questions [...] It is mental capitalism."
(Focus Group Participant)*

The discussion of methods in which participants could engage with the causes they care about revolved around protesting, boycotting, and social media.

4.2.2.1 Protests

Participants often expressed skepticism regarding the efficacy of protests as a tool for change. Across the focus groups, views were split. Some participants saw protest as an essential democratic instrument. In contrast, others preferred to “work within the system” to achieve change, and still others held the more pessimistic view that “nothing will change” either way.

Within the specific context of Cyprus, participants noted that the protest landscape is heavily dominated by the intercommunal conflict, with schools frequently encouraging youth participation in related demonstrations. Participants shared their perception that, consequently, other protesting topics are sidelined, receiving limited or very negative media coverage.

TCN participants shared that a significant factor explaining the low participation of TCNs in protest activities was the risk of police violence, and the heightened risk of legal retaliation, particularly for those with precarious legal statuses (e.g, asylum seekers, beneficiaries of international protection).

Participants also shared their frustration with the fact that, at times, peaceful protests they had participated in had been stopped by the police by the use of force. Despite the unpleasant incidents, participants who had protested before expressed interest and willingness in protesting again. They also found solace in the fact that the protests and incidents overlooked by the media were covered on social media.

4.2.2.2 Boycotts

Participants identified consumer boycotts as a more resonant and accessible form of political engagement compared to public protests. Boycotts were perceived as low-risk yet potentially high-impact strategies for expressing political views and fostering social or political change.

In all focus groups, participants cited their involvement in boycotting companies that are involved in Israel’s violations of Palestinian rights in support of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Others referred to the deliberate avoidance of fast fashion brands as a protest against exploitative labor practices and the environmental impact associated with the fashion industry.

However, participants noted that they often struggled to identify which brands or products were linked to boycotted companies, citing a lack of transparency in corporate ownership and marketing as a key obstacle to effective participation in such campaigns.

4.2.2.3 The Complex Role of Social Media

Across all focus groups, social media emerged as the most frequently mentioned, debated, and utilized tool for political engagement. Participants engaged in lively discussions about its significance, utility, and limitations in facilitating political action. Two recurring themes appeared in their discussion:

- **Social media as a multiplier:** Participants emphasized that social media offers a distinct set of bottom-up opportunities to increase visibility, mobilize support, and translate online engagement into offline action. It was widely acknowledged as a uniquely accessible platform for learning, disseminating information, political education, and community-building. The capacity to reach large audiences with minimal resources was seen as one of its key strengths.
- **Social media as a double-edged sword:** Despite its potential, participants expressed concerns regarding the limitations and risks associated with political activism on social media. Many noted that online political discourse often circulates within ideologically homogenous networks, so-called “echo chambers”, limiting its capacity to change minds or foster dialogue among opposing sides. Furthermore, participants highlighted that social media algorithms tend to prioritize polarizing content to maximize engagement, rather than safeguard the principles of democratic debate. In the absence of traditional media gatekeepers and journalistic standards, the risk of spreading misinformation and disinformation was also a commonly raised issue. These platforms, designed to provoke emotional responses, were seen as potentially undermining critical reflection and reasoned deliberation.

Despite these concerns, participants broadly agreed that social media remains a powerful and uniquely accessible tool for political action and advocacy.

“Everything stems from social media. If we want to fix appointments, if we want to protest... we have to start on social media. You can have a WhatsApp group, Facebook... For me, I think it’s the key [to] the voice.” (Focus Group Participant)

4.2.3 Volunteering and solidarity

In line with the initial desk research insights, community-based and local-level participation opportunities resonated strongly with research participants, though it is important to note that non-engagement remained the most frequently reported response (EP, 2024, focus groups, survey).

4.2.3.1 Volunteering

In the ParticipACTION survey, volunteering in local organizations ranked as the second most common form of civic participation, selected by 39% of respondents, only surpassed by social

media activism, which received one additional vote. Young people reported engaging in volunteering activities across a wide range of missions. Among the most prominent were:

- Ecological conservation (e.g., beach cleanups)
- Provision of material support (food, clothing, medicine) for vulnerable persons (elderly people, persons with disabilities, victims of natural disasters)
- Animal shelters
- Blood donation

Participants consistently described their experiences with volunteering as positive. One important factor that encouraged involvement was having friends already engaged or starting the activity with them. This social aspect made volunteering more enjoyable and helped participants maintain their commitment over time.

4.2.3.2 Solidarity

For the final question of the survey, participants were prompted to discuss their experiences of solidarity with the question:

If you ever have, who or what has inspired you to get civically or politically involved in your community or express solidarity with others?

Similarly to other forms of participation, never having participated in solidarity activities was the most prominent (individual) answer in the survey (32% of participants, $n = 19$), and the most prominent reason was a lack of free time to dedicate to such activities (90% of this subgroup, 29% of all overall participants). The results reflected three levels of motivation, split across the **micro**, **meso**, and **macro** domains:

1. **Personal motivation (micro-level):** engagement inspired by the participant's identity, experiences, emotions, and/or personal reflections. Example answers include:
 - a. "I needed to help. I have not been in a good place, so I wanted others not to feel that way." (Code: *Negative Experiences*)
 - b. "[M]y character and personality". (Code: *Innate Personality*)
 - c. "I've been in several EU countries, and became friends with people of vulnerable populations like LGBTQ, and I want to learn and help these people." (Code: *Desire for Personal Improvement*)
2. **Interpersonal motivation (meso-level):** engagement inspired by the participant's social environment (family, friends, school, community). Example answers include:
 - a. "From a young age, my parents taught me about the fundamental value of equality in our society." (Code: *Family*)

- b. “I’ve been inspired by people in my community who take action to help others and stand up for what’s right. Seeing their efforts made me want to get involved and do my part.” (*Code: Community*)
 - c. “However, in high school, my teacher introduced me to the EU and taught me everything I know today, and helped me participate in so many things in order to change our society to a better place.” (*Code: School*)
3. **Ideological motivation (macro-level):** engagement motivated by dissatisfaction with political structures, practices, or systemic injustice, including both domestic and international grievances. Example answers include:
- a. “The situation in Palestine... I started a boycott and sharing posts on my social media to raise awareness, as well as the Black Lives Matter movement.” (*Code: Political Movements*)
 - b. “The experience of living in an authoritarian state in Russia” (*Code: Political Landscape in Country of Origin*)
 - c. “What inspires me is what I see around me, all the injustice and the wrongs that are happening around me, and how many young people don’t have the opportunity to speak up.” (*Code: Structural Injustice*)

Given the open-ended structure of the question, participants could mention multiple causes and “motivation” factors. As such, these three categories should be understood as being interrelated and overlapping, rather than three isolated response types. Similar response patterns emerged in the FGDs, although one macro-level aspect that did not emerge at all in the survey was also present there: the EU as a solidarity mechanism. Participants in two out of three focus groups discussed the asylum and temporary protection systems as solidarity, with particular attention to the EU’s support of Ukraine.

Due to the limited sample size of the research conducted, further in-depth research is required to examine in detail the specific particularities of the mobilization factors for youth in Cyprus at the micro-meso-macro levels.

4.2.4 Political-economic instability and low participation

Among the structural and discursive barriers hindering young people’s ability to participate in civic and democratic life in Cyprus (see Section 4.3), the research uncovered a pervasive sense of skepticism about the impact and value of participation. This widespread doubt about the usefulness of engaging in community and political activities significantly contributes to young people’s reluctance to be active citizens. This disengagement is further reinforced by low institutional trust and ongoing political and economic instability on the island.

According to the 6th Youth Barometer conducted by the Youth Board of Cyprus (2024), on a scale from 1 to 10, the average level of trust reported by young people in local political parties was 3.26.

This was the lowest trust score given to any institution included in the barometer. Several young Cypriot participants lamented that political parties are “in it for themselves” and “see Cyprus as a business.” At the same time, TCN participants expressed their disappointment at the scarcity of policies that directly benefit TCNs, further discouraging them from engaging with political institutions.

Furthermore, the Cyprus problem continues to shape young people’s perception of political (in)stability. This ongoing division not only affects national identity and governance but also contributes to a broader sense of uncertainty regarding their future among youth. In parallel to the ongoing political challenges, Cyprus continues to face economic instability. Although the country has made remarkable progress in recovering from the 2013 financial crisis, significant risks remain due to high levels of private debt and the economy’s heavy reliance on the services sectors, particularly tourism, shipping, and real estate (Allianz Trade, 2025). One of the interviewees highlighted that Turkish Cypriot youth tend to face greater economic and political precarity as a result of this instability.

Across interviews and focus groups, participants explained that these overlapping political and economic challenges discourage young people from investing, whether economically or through political engagement, in Cyprus, leading many to consider emigrating to other EU countries in search of better opportunities and stability.

4.3 Barriers

Numerous barriers consistently limit young people’s ability and willingness to engage with the EU in Cyprus, particularly among marginalized groups, here divided as tangible and intangible barriers.

4.3.1 Tangible barriers

4.3.1.1 Legal and systemic barriers for migrants

In Cyprus, there is no overarching anti-discrimination, antiracism, or migrant integration program (EC, 2025). MIPEX (2020) characterized Cyprus’s approach as “immigration without integration.” The country scored 41 out of 100 points on the MIPEX 2020 scale, with an average score of 49.

4.3.1.1.1 Access to nationality

According to Eurostat (2024b), TCNs represent around 13.8% of the population of Cyprus, which is the 3rd-highest percentage in the EU after Malta and Estonia. However, migrants in Cyprus rarely gain citizenship, and therefore voting rights, which severely limits their ability to engage with the democratic process.

In 2023, naturalization and long-term residence requirements in Cyprus were amended, making the process significantly more difficult to access. Notably, the required years of residence for both have been increased from 5 to 8 years, and the years as an applicant for international protection, holder of subsidiary protection, or temporary protection are not counted towards this requirement. In addition, under the amended law, entry through irregular means is considered a contraindication of “good character,” which can be used to justify the denial of long-term residence and eventual naturalization for many beneficiaries of international protection (CyRC, 2024).

Moreover, there is a backlog of thousands of citizenship applications “stuck in limbo”, with the average wait time for migrants applying for citizenship based on their years of residence in Cyprus reported to be three years (Kathimerini, 2025).

4.3.1.1.2 Education

Access to education often requires documents that may be unobtainable for asylum seekers and refugees (MIPEX, 2020). As for asylum seeker and refugee children, they are usually placed in ordinary school classes based on age, disregarding their previous knowledge and skills, and without preparatory Greek language classes. This is a significant obstacle to their integration and achievements in school settings (CyRC, 2024).

In Cyprus, students who attend lyceum, which encompasses grades 10 to 12 of the education system, must choose one out of six available “directions” (Ministry of Education, Sport, and Youth, 2025). This decision determines what majors they will be eligible to study at public universities. During our roundtable event, young people shared that Modern Greek is a required lesson for all lyceum directions, placing migrant youth at a disadvantage due to the limited resources available to support their Greek language acquisition. Particularly, Greek as a second language programs in schools only reach up to level B1 of the CEFR⁹ (MOESY, 2024). Currently, there are no official programs providing additional support for students aiming to reach B2 or higher proficiency, often necessary for university-level studies, thereby limiting the ability of students with a migratory background to confidently pursue higher education. Furthermore, participants also pointed out that history, which is a mandatory lesson in the arts direction, is especially difficult for TCN students, as it focuses on Greek history, with which they are usually less familiar.

4.3.1.1.3 Labor market mobility

Access to the labor market in Cyprus is tightly regulated for TCNs. Although the government and organizations involved in migrant labor recognize the local economy’s need for growth and foreign workers, policies primarily emphasize controlling and limiting access (MPF, 2024).

⁹ Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Priority is given to skilled, white-collar migrants who speak Greek or English. While naturalization requirements were amended in 2023, where the required years of residence were increased from 5 to 8 years, for “high-skilled” migrant workers who receive a minimum gross monthly salary of €2500, the years of residence were instead reduced to 3 or 4 years, depending on their level of Greek. These “high-skilled” applicants also have the option of applying for an “accelerated examination” of their application by paying 5,000€ (Cypriot Ministry of Interior, 2023).

As outlined in Section 1.2.1, “asylum seeker” represents a long-term status in Cyprus, as applications usually take several years to be processed. However, within this long wait times, asylum applicants are only permitted access to the labor market nine months after submitting their application. The employment can only be within a limited list of permitted roles for asylum applicants, which is mainly composed of low-skill or “undesirable” jobs such as “animal husbandry laborer”, “poultry slaughterhouse night-shift laborer”, and “kitchen aide, cleaner”. (CyRC, 2024). These restrictions result in socioeconomic marginalization and skill depreciation for asylum seekers with other skills and qualifications, hindering their labor market mobility even when they are eventually granted refugee status (Fasani et al., 2020).

4.3.1.2 Barriers to accessibility

According to AccessibleEU (2024), no aggregated data is available on the levels of accessibility of programs and services for persons with disabilities in Cyprus. Furthermore, there are no key public measures to incentivize providers of goods and services to enhance accessibility. The limited accessibility in Cyprus was highlighted by one of our interviewees, who shared that, by EU standards, accessibility provisions in Cyprus are “not a given”.

4.3.1.3 Urban-rural divide

Our interviewees described a large gap between urban and rural areas in Cyprus for cultural, civic, and democratic initiatives. They also attested to a notable difference in available work and education opportunities between Nicosia and the other cities. This urban-rural divide is especially impactful in Cyprus due to the severe limitations of the public transport infrastructure, such as the absence of trains and metro systems, and the limited reach of the existing public transport bus service (CyprusMail, 2022).

4.3.1.4 Linguistic barriers

While the official languages of the Republic of Cyprus are Greek and Turkish, Turkish is often sidelined. For example, in the education domain, the University of Cyprus adopted Greek and Turkish as languages of instruction through Law 144/1989 (Karyolemou, 2002). However, Greek

serves as the primary language of instruction in most departments, while Turkish is utilized exclusively in the Turkish and Middle Eastern Studies Department (Hadjioannou et al., 2011).

There is also a deficiency in the linguistic accessibility of government services, such as the District Administration and the Citizen Service Center (Psara, 2025). The websites and services are usually only available in Greek and English, which restricts access for Turkish Cypriots and TCNs who do not speak these languages fluently.

These linguistic barriers were further confirmed by our interviewees, who attested that linguistic diversity is sidelined in Cyprus in favor of Greek, English, and, only occasionally, Turkish.

4.3.2 Intangible Barriers

Discursive structures, and in particular the prominence of hate speech in Cyprus, act as barriers to the inclusion of migrants, refugees, Turkish Cypriots, and women in civic and public life. These barriers can be identified under three axes: intercommunal, xenophobia, and gendered expectations.

4.3.2.1 Intercommunal: Greek Cypriot vs. Turkish Cypriot

Due to the history of conflict on the island, one of the most prominent discursive narratives in political discursive is the opposition and irreconcilability of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot identities (Dilmaç et al., 2021).

Within this framework, the Turkish Cypriot community is considered to be Turkey's extended arm and the subservient mouthpiece of its policies. Individual Turkish Cypriots are stereotyped as being unreliable and untrustworthy, and the "Turkish side" is grouped with the "Turks" as the "eternal enemy" of the Greeks and Greek Cypriots. This narrative relies on a perception of existential threat, as it argues that Turkey's greater plan is to gradually settle the whole island and wipe out the Greek Cypriot identity (Dilmaç et al., 2021). Greek Cypriots who are pro-solution and anti-nationalist are often seen as Turkey's agents, "enemy collaborators", and "anti-Greeks", facilitating Turkey's interests in taking over the country (Dilmaç et al., 2021).

This narrative is perpetuated not only in nationalistic media but also partly through the educational system. Students are often presented with emotionally loaded and graphic depictions of suffering, such as the ubiquitous "I will not forget" (Δεν ξεχνώ) symbol, which depicts Cyprus with its Northern regions covered in blood, perpetuating a narrative of victimhood and endangerment (Saville, 2024). Furthermore, young Greek and Turkish Cypriots report not being taught sufficient information about the "other" group, further hindering efforts at challenging the dominating nationalistic narrative on either side of the green line (Saville, 2024).

The prominence of this narrative often translates into the marginalization of young people of Turkish Cypriot background in Cyprus. In one of the ParticipACTION FGDs, a Turkish Cypriot participant detailed the harassment she received as a representative of her department with the university chapter of a major Cypriot political party. While she held this position, she reported receiving several instances hate mail from Greek Cypriot students attacking her for her Turkish Cypriot background.

4.3.2.2 Xenophobia

The absolute prominence of the intercommunal conflict in political discourse often intersects with narratives and debate surrounding migrants and refugees on the island. A recurring narrative found in the discussion of migration aligns with the Great Replacement conspiracy theory (Cleaver, 2024). This theory, often found in alt-right material, suggests that the “elites,” which in the Cypriot case are found in the leadership of the Turkish side, use migrants as a Trojan horse to undermine the culture and religion of the nation by demographically (and thus culturally) replacing the native population (Baider & Sini, 2021). Furthermore, conservative and nationalist media often use migrants as scapegoats for economic and social problems on the island, further reinforcing widespread xenophobic attitudes (Evagorou et al., 2015).

In particular, the prevalent xenophobic sentiment was documented in the latest UNHCR poll on Cypriots’ perceptions of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants (2023). According to the findings, 28.54% of respondents held a “clear xenophobic stance”, expressing strong views against migration and integration.

5.3.2.2.1 Religion

In Cypriot public schools, it is customary to begin the school day with Orthodox Christian prayer. This routine religious ritual in the classroom has been argued to discourage integration by marginalizing students of different religious creeds (Elerian et al., 2023). Criticism of this practice, even when originating from students themselves, is routinely met with backlash and accusations of anti-Hellenism (Kathimerini, 2020), since religious creed is narratively tied to Greek/Turkish Cypriot ethnic membership.

The Orthodox Church’s public discourse often targets not only Turkish Cypriots, who are deemed “uncivilized” and “intruders,” but also refugees (including asylum seekers), migrants, and other minorities, such as the LGBT community (Dilmaç et al., 2021). In one notable instance in 2017, Archbishop Chrysostomos stated that refugees were “a threat to the nation”, stating that (Muslim) refugees are “sent by Turkey [...] to alter [Cyprus’] cultural identity” (Andreou, 2017).

4.3.2.3 Gender

The European Institute for Gender Equality's *Gender Equality Index* gives Cyprus a score of 60.9 out of 100, considerably lower than the EU's 71 out of 100 (EIGE, 2024).

Due to the unresolved intercommunal conflict, Cypriot society continues to prioritize the “Greek Cypriot” and “Turkish Cypriot” labels above all other identity signifiers, including gender (Joannidis, 2012). Within this context, women are often expected to demonstrate loyalty to the institutions of their respective communities, which has historically sidelined the pursuit of gender equality. As a result, feminist movements and institutional gender equality provisions in Cyprus have remained comparatively underdeveloped (Hadjipavlou, 2006, 2010; Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001). Recent institutional efforts, such as the establishment of the Commissioner for Gender Equality and the National Machinery for Women's Rights, aim to address these gaps. However, further measures are still needed, particularly in the domain of targeted support for migrant women (UNHCR, 2025b).

Cross-cutting themes

Across the various ParticipACTION efforts, several cross-cutting themes emerged as sources of concern or interest to youth:

Invisibility or Exclusion of TCN youth: One of the most prominent issues on the island is the ongoing paradox which sees a very high presence of TCNs and youth of migratory background on the island, yet an almost complete lack of inclusive or responsive policy efforts. TCNs effectively disappear from public discourse, which remains solely focused on the intercommunal issue or migration-as-a-threat narratives, leaving little space for discussions about the needs and realities of migrant youth. The limited institutional recognition granted to TCNs often results in a marked imbalance in opportunities available to young people depending on their background. Youth from all backgrounds have voiced their dissatisfaction with this reality, expressing a strong desire for more inclusive institutional efforts that acknowledge the island's diversity and the different needs of its youth to thrive.

Education and Inclusion efforts: While youth across the project called for stronger civic education, many also pointed to school practices that actively undermine inclusion and trust, such as politicized curricula, limited language support, and default religious expectations. Despite institutional commitments to equality and civic development, participants noted that the way civic values are modeled in schools often contradicts the democratic and inclusive ideals. Though presented as neutral, these practices were seen as implicitly framing TCN youth, Turkish Cypriots, and other minorities who do not identify with the dominant Greek Cypriot culture as outsiders. Without addressing these contradictions, formal education runs the risk of reinforcing exclusion rather than fostering genuine engagement and belonging among youth.

Disconnect between institutional outreach and evolving forms of civic engagement: A key cross-cutting theme that emerged throughout the ParticipACTION activities is the dual challenge faced by young people in Cyprus: on one hand, a lack of access to or awareness of existing civic participation opportunities, and on the other, a growing disconnect between institutional expectations and the actual modalities of youth engagement. Many young people, especially those of migratory background, described encountering legal, linguistic, or informational barriers that prevent them from participating in traditional forms of civic life, such as elections, consultations, or youth councils. Interviewees and focus group participants noted that institutional outreach tends to target a narrow group of already-engaged individuals, leaving the majority of youth unaware of or excluded from civic opportunities. Simultaneously, there appears to have been a shift in how young people choose to engage civically, with the rise in prominence of digital activism and issue-based mobilization (e.g., environmental justice). Despite their prevalence and impact, these forms of participation are often not formally acknowledged or supported by institutional actors, despite their key role in enabling young people in Cyprus to express solidarity and political agency.

5. Focus Areas and Solutions

5.1 Youth Proposals to foster solidarity and civic participation

Throughout the project activities, participants were given the opportunity to discuss potential solutions to their concerns and share ideas to better support young people in Cyprus, particularly TCNs youth and young women.

The following recommendations, intended for national and EU-level policymakers, emerged from discussions held with young people during the FGDs, seminar, and roundtable, and aim to strengthen solidarity and civic engagement across Europe:

- **Enhanced (both in quality and quantity) civic education in schools:** Participants consistently highlighted the need for more comprehensive and engaging civic education, integrated systematically across the school curriculum. At the same time, participants expressed concerns regarding impartiality, as they had past experience with educators who filtered the educational material through their personal beliefs.
- **Early and sustained civic engagement opportunities:** Young people expressed a desire for structured opportunities to engage with civic life from an early age, including school-based initiatives and extracurricular activities supported by educators and youth workers.
- **Targeted support for migrant youth:** Participants, both Cypriots and TCNs, stressed the importance of strengthening integration pathways for TCN youth, including increased access to Greek language classes and educational pathways (e.g., via scholarships).

- **Social media campaigns:** Participants widely acknowledged social media as a powerful tool for outreach, engagement, and mobilizing young people. They emphasized that platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube remain central to how youth consume information, connect with causes, and build community. While some participants expressed concern over the risks associated with social media, such as misinformation and polarization, there was a strong consensus on its status as the most effective medium for raising awareness, promoting civic values, and encouraging participation among young people in Cyprus.

6. Conclusion

Cyprus's civic and democratic environment is shaped by its complex political history, EU membership, and growing demographic diversity. While youth engagement in formal politics remains limited, its causes appear to be more rooted in structural barriers and political dissatisfaction than political apathy. Key obstacles for youth include gaps in civic education, low trust in institutions, and legal and cultural barriers, particularly affecting TCNs and young women. Additionally, national narratives focused on ethnic identity and a perceived limited impact of EU policies contribute to a sense of distance from institutions for many young people.

Outside of electoral political participation, the research unveiled a vibrant landscape of youth participation in activism and advocacy for a broad range of causes, from environmentalism to anti-war movements. For this, social media stands out as an invaluable tool for information-sharing, mobilization, and community-building, although young people remain keenly aware of the risks it entails (e.g., misinformation and disinformation).

Throughout the research efforts, youth across all backgrounds expressed a clear desire for more inclusive civic education, accessible institutional communication, and targeted support for migrant youth. To better support youth participation, policies should expand beyond traditional political engagement and acknowledge the diverse ways young people are active on the island, particularly through digital platforms and grassroots activism. Addressing structural barriers and creating safe, supportive spaces for these new forms of participation is thus essential to bridging the gap between institutions and young people in Cyprus.

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Annex 1: Desk Research Questions

1. Knowledge

- What are the documented levels of awareness among the target audience regarding EU institutions, policies, legislation, and strategies?
- Are there any documented gaps in young persons' knowledge of national and EU processes?
 - Are the gaps in knowledge cross-cutting, or is there any documented relationship that emerges between specific identities (i.e., gender, socio-economic background, migratory background...) and levels of awareness and knowledge (or lack thereof) of political, civic, and solidarity mechanisms at the national and/or EU levels?
- What is the current climate regarding Euroscepticism, particularly among young people?

2. Participation

- What is the level of youth political and civic participation in the country? Does this level vary between national processes and EU processes? Consider activities such as voting, candidacy, holding office, campaigning, political membership, protests, boycotts, and involvement in policymaking.
- Are there any national policy documents and action plans related to youth democratic participation and political engagement? Include specific records related to the involvement of young TCNs and women and girls.
- Identify any national bodies that focus on youth democratic participation.

3. Barriers

- Are any laws, regulations, or policies supporting or hindering TCNs' participation in civic democratic life?
- Identify practical (non-legal) barriers, such as racism, xenophobia, racial profiling, gendered expectations, and socio-economic obstacles. Are there any stereotypes correlated with political and civic participation (or lack thereof)?
- Are any groups particularly discouraged from engaging in public life due to stereotypes and expectations (i.e., gendered expectations of “calm/nurturing” rather than assertive behavior for women, migrants and stereotypes of being “unqualified” or “uncooperative”, young people and the stereotype of “political apathy”)?

Annex 2: Survey Questions

Demographic Questions:

- **Age:**
 - 16
 - 17
 - 18
 - 19
 - 20
 - 21
 - 22
 - 23

- **What gender do you identify as?**
 - Male
 - Female
 - Non-binary
 - Other: _____
 - Prefer not to say

- **What is your country of residence (i.e., in what country do you live?)**

- **What is your country of origin?**

- 1. Which of the following institutions, opportunities, and policies are you familiar with? By familiar, we mean you believe you could somewhat confidently describe their role, duties, or content in the EU. (Multiple Selection Possible)**
 - European Commission
 - European Parliament
 - European Youth Strategy 2019-2027/European Youth Goals
 - Erasmus +
 - European Solidarity Corps
 - Council of Europe
 - Court of Justice of the European Union
 - European Court of Human Rights
 - None of these/Unsure

2. Below are some ways people can get involved in the work of the European Union. Which, if any, have you heard of? (Multiple Selection Possible)

- Petitions to the European Parliament
- Opportunities to visit the European Parliament
- Events organised by the European Parliament Liaison Office
- Contacting an MEP about an issue
- The European Youth Event (EYE)/EYE Online
- Events or online activities organized by together.eu
- The Charlemagne Youth Prize
- Euroscola
- None of these/Unsure

3. Do you know how the president of the European Commission or the European Parliament is appointed?

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat

4. Are you aware of the six core values of the European Union?

- Yes
- No
- Some of them

4.1 If you chose “Yes” or “Some of them”, can you try to name (some of) them?

5. Are you aware of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights?

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat

5.1 If you chose “Yes” or “Somewhat”, can you try to briefly talk about what it is/what it is about?

6. What is your understanding of the term “Gender Equality”?

7. What is your understanding of the term “European Democracy”?

8. Are you familiar with recent developments, policies, plans or decisions of the EU related to migration? What impact do these have in your national/local context?

8.1 Are you familiar with developments, policies, and plans, of the EU related to promoting Education, Culture, Youth, and Sports? What impact do these have in your national/local context?

9. In what ways do you think the EU or your State could promote civic and political participation of young people (EU citizens and third-country nationals) at the local, national, and European levels?

- Broadening electoral eligibility
- Provide greater protection for the right to protest
- Increase civic education opportunities across all educational levels
- Stronger social media campaigns
- Finance local engagement activities
- Cultural events and festivals
- Other: _____

For the European Union, solidarity is a fundamental principle based on sharing the advantages, i.e., prosperity, and the burdens equally and justly among members ([Eurofund, 2011](#)).

10. In what ways do you believe your country or the EU could support you in expressing more acts of solidarity towards those most vulnerable in your daily life?

- More volunteering opportunities
- Awareness campaigns
- Funding for local initiatives
- More discussion of solidarity and participation opportunities in schools and public spaces
- Other: _____

11. On a scale of 1 to 5, do you think there are enough online opportunities to participate and engage in civic and political action in the EU?

- 1 - No, there are not enough
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 - Yes, there are enough
- I don't know

**12. Select all of the activities in which you have taken part in the last year (12 months):
(Multiple Selection Possible)**



Co-funded by
the European Union



- Volunteered Abroad/In EU projects
- Volunteered at a local organization
- Participated in a Protest or Boycott
- Reached out to a representative (email, phone call...)
- Ran for office
- Took part in a political campaign
- Used social media to post/share/create content about a political issue you cared about
- Voted in the last local, national, or European election
- None of them/Unsure
- Other

13. If you ever have, who or what has inspired you to get civically or politically involved in your community or express solidarity with others?

Annex 3: Codebook

	CODE	EXPLANATION	EXAMPLE QUOTE
(THEME 1) Personal Motivation: Engagement inspired by the participant's identity, experiences, emotions, and/or personal reflections	Negative Experiences	Participants' negative lived experiences prompted them to engage in solidarity actions.	"I needed to help. I have not been in a good place, so I wanted others not to feel that way."
	Innate Personality	The participant attributes their willingness to engage in solidarity to innate aspects of their identity and personality.	"[M]y character and personality"
	Desire for personal improvement	The participant perceives solidarity actions as an opportunity to become a better person and/or to learn.	"[I] became friends with people of vulnerable populations like LGBTQ, and I want to learn and help these people."
(THEME 2) Interpersonal Motivation: Engagement inspired by the participant's social environment (family, friends, school, community)	Family	Participant was encouraged to engage in or taught about the importance of solidarity by family members.	"From a young age, my parents taught me about the fundamental value of equality in our society."
	Friends	Participant was motivated to engage in solidarity efforts from his friends, or because of witnessing their friends' struggles.	"[M]ost of the people that inspired me is the people around me, my friends."
	Community and Local Organizations	Participant was motivated to engage in solidarity efforts by their community (not school, not family).	"I've been inspired by people in my community who take action to help others and stand up for what's right. Seeing their efforts made me want to get involved and do my part." / "The Center for Social Innovation (CSI)"
	School	Participant was encouraged or inspired to participate in solidarity efforts from teacher or opportunities identified via the educational institution.	"In high school, my teacher introduced me to the EU and taught me everything I know today, and helped me participate in so many things in order to change our society to a better place." / "The activity our school has created, which was our own MUN called MUNKY"



(THEME 3) Ideological Motivation Engagement motivated by dissatisfaction with political structures, practices, or systemic injustice, including both domestic and international grievances.	Political Movements	Participants mentioned specific international political movements that prompted them to mobilize.	"The situation in Palestine... I started a boycott and sharing posts on my social media to raise awareness, as well as the Black Lives Matter movement."
	Political Landscape in Country of Origin	Participants of migrant backgrounds being prompted to act by the (negative) experiences with the political landscape in their countries of origin	"The experience of living in an authoritarian state in Russia"
	Structural Injustice	Participant was motivated to engage in solidarity efforts after witnessing structural injustices.	"What inspires me is what I see around me, all the injustice and the wrongs that are happening around me, and how many young people don't have the opportunity to speak up."
	Political Dissatisfaction	Participant was motivated to engage in solidarity efforts from their dissatisfaction with the current political status quo.	"Because every vote is needed to change things, you can't complain about something if you did nothing to change it."