



ParticipACTION

Desk review findings on the level of awareness, gaps in knowledge and barriers to civic participation among young people in **Italy**



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ITALY

Findings from the Desk Review on the level of awareness, gaps in knowledge, and barriers to participation amongst young people in civic democratic life and decision-making processes in Italy and Europe. Conducted by the International Rescue Committee Italy (IRC) and Glocal Factory (GF).



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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)

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1. Introduction

This desk review report (D1.1) has been conducted building on the analysis at the proposal stage by IRC Italy and GF on 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 Italy and Europe. The present national-level review serves as a foundational analysis of youth engagement in Italy concerning EU institutions, policies, and democratic processes. It includes a scan of the EU policies available and any existing solidarity mechanisms in the EU related to the three themes selected by young people in WP2.

By systematically mapping existing knowledge, participation levels, and the barriers encountered by young people, including Third Country Nationals, this desk review establishes the groundwork for the subsequent phases of ParticipACTION. The findings presented herein will be supplemented by primary data gathered from Focus Group Discussions and Surveys (D1.3) and findings from the national roundtables conducted in WP3 and will result in the National Level Assessment reports (D3.1).

2. Knowledge

This section examines how young people in Italy understand European institutions, policies, legislative actions, and strategies, as well as possible gaps in their knowledge and current attitudes toward the European Union (EU). It relies on the latest data available, policy reports, and academic studies.

2.1 Awareness of EU Institutions, Policies, Legislation, and Strategies Among the Target Audience

Knowledge of Institutions

As per the latest census by the European Commission, people aged 15 to 24 comprise about 9.5% of Italy's total population, while the ratio of gender in the youth population amounts to 52% male to 48% female (European Commission, 2025). When it comes to their knowledge of European institutions, a survey conducted with the support of the Europe for Citizens Program discovered that there is a significant knowledge gap amongst this cohort regarding European institutions and their activities (Federazione Italiana Diritti Umani, 2021). The largest knowledge gap seems to be in secondary schools, where over 40% of respondents reported having no clear knowledge or information about European institutions (Ibid.). Furthermore, the survey found that more than 47% of participants were uncertain or not well-informed about the responsibilities of the European

Parliament, the European Commission, and the Council of the EU (Ibid.). Furthermore, findings from the study *"You(th) and the 2024 European elections: A survey to understand the concerns of young Europeans"* reveal that when asked about their knowledge of the functions of European institutions, most participants demonstrate considerable uncertainty, mistaking, for example, the European Parliament for an NGO, indicating significant gaps in understanding within this age group (Blokker et al., 2024).

Knowledge of Policies

The Eurobarometer summer survey of 2022 on *"Public Opinion in the European Union"* suggests that the free movement of EU citizens within the EU borders was one of the main areas of European policy intervention with the highest support amongst Italians (84%). This area was followed by the Common Defence and Security Policy (77%) and the Common Energy Policy (75%) (Europe Direct Lombardy, 2023). No study specifically addressed the target group of 16–23-year-old Italians; however, the data presented here, although applicable to Italians of all ages, still provide valuable insights into the general support for these policies.

Additionally, the 2024 Eurobarometer survey on *"Young People and Democracy"* highlights young Italians' knowledge of how to engage in policy advocacy. Notably, a high percentage of respondents (64%) had volunteered with an organization in 2023, while 48% sought social change by staying informed through social media, signing petitions, joining demonstrations, and contacting politicians (Rappresentanza in Italia, 2024). Youth activism in Italy is increasingly influenced by social media and digital platforms, promoting informal methods for acquiring knowledge about current European policies and advocating for them (Eures Ricerche Economiche e Sociali, 2024). Lastly, the Istituto Nazionale di Statistica notes that advocacy through these methods is especially prevalent among 16 to 24-year-olds in Italy (Ibid.).

Knowledge of Legislation

Although there is no specific data for the target age group of 16-23, available survey data on Italy from the *"Special Eurobarometer 553 - Rule of Law"* found that only 37% of Italians feel informed about the European rule of law and only 40% feel informed about the EU's fundamental values (European Commission, 2024).

Knowledge of EU Strategies

Specific data regarding Italian youth's awareness of European strategies remains deficient, with some data suggesting that only 25.7% of people born between 1997 and 2012 are aware of the Next Generation EU program (Sozzi, 2024). In contrast, it appears that young individuals in Italy have a strong understanding of European connectivity strategies, particularly those related to the Erasmus+ program. Notably, the number of Italian students participating in the Erasmus+ mobility

programs rose over the past decade, with a total of 357,000 students studying abroad between 2014 and 2024 (Macchi, 2024).

2.2 Knowledge Gaps Among Youth Regarding National and EU Processes

When it comes to the knowledge of European processes, further analysis of *"You(th) and the 2024 European elections: A survey to understand the concerns of young Europeans"* revealed that 30% of youth respondents view the European Citizens' Initiative as the most effective means of participating in the EU, while online campaigns attract 23% of the support, and street protests account for 18% (Blokker et al., 2024). Despite these preferences and the knowledge of how to advocate for legislative change, a notable disconnect exists between young people's concerns—such as education, climate change, and social inclusion—and their awareness of EU programs specifically designed to address these critical issues (Blokker et al., 2024; Sozzi, 2024).

Additionally, 55% of respondents aged 15-24 expressed a desire for greater leadership and involvement from the European Parliament in governance matters (European Parliament, 2025). However, many remain unaware of how to actively participate in EU decision-making processes, indicating a knowledge gap (Ibid.). Lastly, research findings also suggest that many youths perceive the EU as a vital protective force for their future. Yet, their understanding of how EU policies directly affect their lives remains limited (Sozzi, 2024).

2.3 The Intersection of Identity and Political Awareness

Studies attribute some gaps in civic and political knowledge to various factors in individuals' personal backgrounds, including socio-economic background, migration experience, and access to education. These factors can create disparities in the civic engagement of individuals, and while it may be challenging, policymakers and civil society can intervene to address these disparities (OECD, 2019). Research has shown that individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds or with limited access to educational resources are less likely to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for active civic participation (Ibid.). Moreover, migrant communities may face additional barriers, such as limited access to information about political processes or lack of integration into local political systems, which can hinder their ability to fully participate in democratic life (European Commission, 2021). It is, therefore, important to consider the intersectional dimensions of civic and political knowledge of young Europeans. The 2022 study, *"Flash Eurobarometer 502 (Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth)"*, conducted by Ipsos on behalf of the European Commission, and surveyed 26,178 individuals aged 15 to 30, found that 67% believe the EU impacts their daily lives, 49% recognize the opportunities provided by Erasmus+ for students, 19% express little interest in politics, and 13% show apathy towards voting (Ibid.).

Based on the findings, it appears that the inability to engage fully in democratic processes primarily stems from disinterest in politics, distrust in institutions, challenges in accessing information, and socio-economic obstacles—such as low-income limiting access to educational resources and social networks essential for understanding democratic systems—and the absence of role models along with migratory backgrounds. In this context, both uncertain legal status and Italy's citizenship law can restrict participation in voting and civic decision-making at local, national, or European levels, as young people born in Italy to foreign parents do not automatically receive citizenship and, therefore, cannot vote. Similar conclusions are drawn in the 2019 report *“Youth and Political Participation in Europe”* by the European Youth Forum, which investigates young people's views on politics and civic engagement across Europe. The study gathered data through surveys and interviews targeting individuals aged 16 to 30, as well as insights from youth organizations sharing experiences and stories of participation and exclusion. The findings reveal low participation in traditional political avenues and a preference for non-institutional forms of participation (European Youth Forum, 2019). This is accompanied by widespread distrust in political institutions perceived as unrepresentative, resulting in significant barriers to inclusion. The report also indicates that young people with migration backgrounds or those experiencing socio-economic challenges often feel isolated and marginalized, with many unaware of civic involvement opportunities (Ibid.)

Political Participation Barriers for Women

Concerning the political and civic participation of marginalized populations, women around the world continue to be underrepresented in positions of political power. According to the UN Women report *“Progress of the World's Women 2021,”* women hold only 25% of the seats in national parliaments globally. Italy ranks 13th in the EU on the 2023 Gender Equality Index with a score of 68.2. Although there has been a significant increase of 14.9 points since 2010, mainly due to improvements in the power domain (+37.5 points), Italy still faces challenges related to gender inequality, particularly in terms of political and civic participation. Furthermore, Italy's performance in the work domain (65.0 points) highlights ongoing disparities, underscoring the need for continued efforts to enhance women's political engagement (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023).

Political Participation Barriers of the LGBTQIA+ Community

Numerous studies have highlighted the difficulties that the LGBTQIA+ community faces in accessing political decision-making processes, both at the national and European levels. The *Annual Report on the Human Rights of LGBTIQ People*, conducted by ILGA-Europe (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association - European Region) and published in 2022, shows how hostility and violence, legal problems, rigid cultural and social norms are a disincentive to the public and political exposure of these subjectivities (ILGA, 2021).

There is still too much political and verbal violence against LGBTQIA+ people, even by politicians and extremist groups. Threats of violence and social pressure are one of the obstacles, together with discriminatory laws and a lack of comprehensive protection at the macro and micro levels (Ibid.).

Therefore, it is necessary to improve access to information regarding national and other civic participation, strengthen trust in institutions, mitigate socio-economic and legal obstacles as much as possible, implement new electoral reforms and invest in inclusive public policies that have a real intersectional approach, in order to fully ensure the participation of young people and marginalized groups living in vulnerable conditions, in democratic and civic life at both national and European level.

2.4 Current Climate of Euroscepticism Among Young People

The sentiment of Euroscepticism, particularly among young people, is a very relevant topic within the Italian public debate. According to various studies and reports, Euroscepticism appears to have increased in recent years, coinciding with a rise in feelings of disaffection towards local and national politics. This is due to several complex factors, including the spread of economic crises and migration policies.

Euroscepticism Among Italian Youth

The sentiment of Euroscepticism is a relevant topic also within the Italian public debate for complex reasons, including the struggle with the EU's economic governance, which has often been perceived as prioritizing austerity measures over the country's economic recovery and a political landscape which witnessed the rise of populist and right-wing parties that openly challenge European integration, tapping into the frustrations of young people who feel disconnected from both national and European decision-making processes. For instance, the 2019 European Parliament elections saw significant support for Eurosceptic parties, such as the League (Lega) and Fratelli d'Italia, both of which gained substantial traction by criticizing the EU's influence on Italian politics and economic policies. This has contributed to a broader climate of disillusionment, particularly among young Italians who feel that the EU has not adequately addressed their concerns, especially regarding unemployment and economic instability (European Commission, 2021). Moreover, youth organizations in Italy have pointed out that young people's perceptions of the EU are increasingly shaped by a sense of alienation from political institutions that seem out of touch with their everyday struggles (European Youth Forum, 2019). In this sense, Euroscepticism in Italy is also fueled by the perception of a disconnection between EU policies and the country's actual needs, as highlighted by several studies on the European elections and the political preferences of young Italians (Eurobarometer, 2022).

The increasing impact of right-wing leaders on young Italians has resulted in a notable shift in Italy's political scene, with important consequences for youth attitudes toward the EU. This transformation is exemplified by figures such as Giorgia Meloni, whose growing popularity has fueled Euroscepticism among the younger population, prompting them to question established political frameworks and altering how young Italians perceive both national and European politics. As portrayed by the 2024 special Eurobarometer survey, which revealed that while 67% of Italians under 30 intended to vote in the European elections, their primary concerns centered on environmental issues and calls for peace, rather than EU-specific topics (Bonini, 2024). This suggests a more nuanced perspective, where young Italians are engaged in the electoral process but may not fully align with traditional pro-EU sentiments (Ibid.).

Impact of Right-Wing Politicians on Youth

The far-right political scene, led by figures such as Giorgia Meloni of the Brothers of Italy (FdI), has had a significant influence on Italian youth. Meloni's leadership has propelled the FdI to prominence, attracting younger demographics with nationalistic and Eurosceptic appeals. Her party's focus on national sovereignty and conservative values resonates with young people who feel disconnected from mainstream politics (Biancalana, 2024).

However, this influence is met with resistance. In 2024, widespread student protests erupted across Italy, notably in Turin, where clashes with police highlighted opposition to Meloni's policies. These demonstrations underscore a generational divide, with youths actively challenging the government's direction (Zampano, 2024). This division has deepened as Meloni's government pushes for a stronger European defense, a move seen by many young protesters as a shift toward militarization that conflicts with their vision of a more peaceful, socially progressive Europe. To advocate against European rearmament, Rome and other Italian cities hosted a rally on March 15, 2025, called "*Una Piazza per l'Europa*". Journalist Michele Serra, who initiated the event, emphasized its non-partisan spirit, describing it as "*a large demonstration of citizens supporting Europe, its unity, and its freedom,*" marked only by European flags. His powerful slogan, "*Here we make Europe, or we die,*" captured the rally's symbolic urgency and the growing public resistance to militarization (AP news, 2025).

Broader European Context

Italy's youth sentiment reflects broader European trends, where right-wing populism is gaining traction among younger voters seeking alternatives to traditional political structures. This shift reflects a complex interplay of national identity, economic uncertainty, and skepticism toward supranational entities like the EU (Youngs, 2024).

Instead, the influence of migration policies on perceptions of Euroscepticism can be explored by analyzing the global report "*Global Trends in Migration and the Role of the EU*", conducted by the World Economic Forum (WEF) and published in 2021, which has a focus on migration trends

and analyses EU policies in response to these challenges. The study suggests that Euroscepticism among the younger generation is also fueled by a negative perception of how EU migration policies are implemented. The lack of solidarity between Member States in managing migration crises, inequalities, and the difficulty of welcoming and integrating migrants are all elements that make up a feeling of skepticism towards the European Union. Moreover, in countries where there has been a growth in the migrant population and a widespread perception that the EU doesn't manage resources properly, such as in Italy's case, this has contributed to a negative view of the EU, even among young people.

The European Youth Forum's 2021 study, titled *“Youth and the European Union: A Survey on the Attitudes and Perceptions of Young People in Europe,”* examined the attitudes and perceptions of young people towards the EU, focusing on those aged 18 to 30. It revealed that 30% of the young people interviewed felt distant from European institutions and considered it difficult to establish a connection with them (European Youth Forum, 2021). Another 30% of young people were in favor of greater youth participation in decision-making processes, with the aim of ensuring more representative European policies that align with the aspirations of younger generations. Undoubtedly, this is a symptom of a desire for change and renewal (Ibid.). Moreover, the 2022 *“Flash Eurobarometer”* report highlighted that young individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 showed more negative feelings about the EU than older generations. With respect to Euroscepticism, this increases when young people feel a lack of involvement, as they do not believe they can play an active part in European decision-making processes. However, it is essential to note that, despite growing mistrust, not all young people are opposed to the European Union. The growth of Euroscepticism does not diminish support for certain European programs, such as Erasmus+, which continue to receive enthusiasm, as demonstrated by the European Commission's *“Youth and the European Union – 2021”* report.

3. Participation

3.1 Assessing Youth Engagement in Politics: A Comparison of Italian and EU Participation

The level of youth political and civic participation in Italy is relatively low, as evidenced by limited voter turnout, low candidacy rates, and a general distrust in institutions among young people. In terms of voting, a post-election survey of the 2019 European Parliament elections showed that the turnout of young people between 18 and 24 years old was 43,60%, the lowest among all age groups, as illustrated in the table below (European Parliament, 2019):¹

¹ Please note that data disaggregated by age was not available at the time of the research.

TURNOUT IN THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 2019 BREAKDOWN BY AGE

Country	Total Turnout ^{NB}	18-24 years ^{NB}	25-39 years ^{NB}	40-54 years ^{NB}	55 years + ^{NB}
IT	54.50%	43.60%	57.20%	63.10%	49.50%

Overall (*i.e.*, considering the whole population with voting rights), the total turnout for Italy in the 2019 EU elections was 54,50%, while the total turnout in the most recent national election in 2022 was 72,94% (Ibid.).

According to data from 2020, young people in Italy appeared to distrust institutions. This resulted in a lack of participation in public discussions on political issues, affecting approximately 30% of young people aged 18 to 34 and nearly 50% of children aged 14 to 18 (Open Government, n.d.).

In terms of candidacy, in the 2022 national elections in Italy, out of almost 5,000 candidates, only 15% were under 40 years old, and less than 3% were under 30 years old (Dipartimento per gli Affari Interni e Territoriali, 2022). This may be partly attributed to the age limits outlined by the Italian Constitution for becoming a Member of Parliament: the minimum age to stand as a Member of Parliament is 25 years for the Chamber of Deputies and 40 years for the Senate (Senato della Repubblica, n.d). During the 2024 EU elections, among 867 Italian candidates (434 men and 433 women), the most represented age group was those aged 46 to 55 years (258), followed by those aged 56 to 64 years old (178), whereas young people between 18 and 35 years old were only 76 (Nesticò, 2024). Out of the elected candidates, a total of 6 MEPs were elected under the age of 35 (8%), while the youngest elected was 29 years old. (Pagella Politica, 2024).

When it comes to holding office, data indicates a limited presence of young people as political representatives in Italy (European Commission, 2024). As of March 2023, the age distribution of the Members of Parliament was as follows:

Composition of the Chamber of Deputies by age group (Camera dei Deputati, n.d.)

Age Group	Total	Percentage
25-29	1	0.25
30-39	44	10.81
40-49	135	33.17
50-59	136	33.41

60 and above	91	22.37
TOTAL	407	100

Composition of the Senate by age group (Senato della Repubblica, 2025)

Age Group	Total	Percentage
40-49	40	19.51
50-59	96	46.83
60-69	52	25.37
70 and above	17	8.29
TOTAL	205	100

In terms of political membership, in Italy, the minimum age to join a political party varies from 14 to 16 years, depending on the internal regulations of each party, and there are no dedicated quotas or specific arrangements in favor of young candidates (Dipartimento per le Politiche Giovanili e il Servizio Civile Universale, n.d.).

Overall, Italy suffers from a perceived distrust of institutions among young people, which results in low engagement in political discussions. This distrust affects approximately 30% of those aged 18 to 34 and nearly 50% of those aged 14 to 18 (Istat, Report 2020). This erosion of trust has weakened social cohesion and, in turn, diminished motivation for civic engagement and participation (Open Government, n.d.).

3.2 National Policy Documents and Action Plans on Youth Democratic Participation and Political Engagement

In 2018, Italy enacted [Law 145/2018](#), which established a specific youth representation body, the National Youth Council (Consiglio Nazionale Giovani), to ensure and increase the participation of young people in civil and political life. This law serves as a strategic tool designed to promote and enhance youth participation. In October 2024, the National Youth Council has also adopted the [National Youth Plan 2025](#) document, which is the result of collaborative work by the Presidency's Council, the thematic Committees, the Legislative Bureau, and the National Youth Council's Study Center, presents a comprehensive overview of the proposals derived from listening activities, gathering feedback from young Italians and youth associations, as well as evaluations and studies of previous economic measures. In this context, the National Youth Plan 2025 serves as a strategic and far-reaching document designed to offer proposals and

recommendations to policymakers, with the exclusive aim of benefiting young and future generations.

Italy has also adopted a *national strategy to increase youth participation* (Dipartimento per le Politiche Giovanili e il Servizio Civile Universale, n.d.), which has been designed through the collaboration of the government, the Regions as well as actors such as ANCI (*Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani*, National Association of Italian Municipalities) and UPI (*Unione delle province d'Italia*, Union of the Provinces of Italy). The strategy serves as a framework for institutional dialogue between the government and local authorities, outlining financial resources, objectives, and priorities for youth policies. Every year, during the so-called “*Unified Conference*,” the Government, regions, and autonomous provinces sign a formal agreement, establishing the terms of reference for the objectives to be achieved and the projects dedicated to young people to be developed. This includes activities that promote their participation in political and social life. In addition, the [Department for Youth Policies and the Universal Civil Service](#) have signed Collaboration Agreements with each Italian Region, regulating the objectives to be achieved, the procedures for monitoring the interventions proposed by local administrations, and the transfer of resources from the National Fund for Youth Policies. Regions, in particular, play a crucial role in fostering youth participation through the instruments provided by various regional laws. Additionally, many municipalities have implemented local initiatives, such as Municipal Youth Councils, to engage more young people in public life.

Other relevant policy documents related to youth democratic participation and political engagement include:

- Actions targeting young people in the [National Recovery and Resilience Plan \(NRRP\)](#) (e.g. in Mission 1 - Digitization, innovation, competitiveness, culture; Mission 4 - Education and research; Mission 5 - Cohesion and inclusion; and Investment 2.1 - Universal Civil Service);
- The mention of “young people” as a [crosscutting priority](#) for the implementation of the NRRP;
- The [Youth Portal 2030](#) of the Department for Youth Policies and the Universal Civil Service;
- The creation of the [National Youth Card](#), a digital tool for young people aged 18 to 35 residing in Italy, offering facilitated access to goods, services, experiences, and opportunities;
- The plan to promote youth active citizenship pathways for 40,000 young people in 3 years through the Universal Civil Service.

3.3 National Bodies Focusing on Youth Democratic Participation

Several national bodies in Italy are dedicated to promoting youth democratic participation, playing a key role in engaging young people in political and civic life. The [National Youth Council](#) (*Consiglio Nazionale Giovani*), which in 2019 replaced the National Youth Forum, is the most important advisory and representative national body for young people. Its advisory role consists in being heard at the request of ministers responsible for policy issues impacting the younger generation (Consiglio Nazionale dei Giovani, 2019). The National Youth Council is made up of Italian youth associations with at least 300 members, 70% of whom are under the age of 36 (European Commission, 2024). The Council is a member of the European Youth Forum, which represents the interests of young Europeans in international institutions. The law establishing the National Youth Council has provided this body with the right to promote dialogue between institutions, youth organizations and young people, as well as to overcome the obstacles to the participation of young people in the mechanisms of representative and direct democracy. Furthermore, the Council collaborates with public administrations by elaborating studies and preparing reports on the condition of youth that are useful for defining policies for young people, expressing opinions, and formulating proposals on the legislative acts initiated by the Government that affect young people. Now, however, there is no obligation on the part of the government to consult young people on specific issues that concern them. Therefore, in 2020 the National Youth Council initiated a dialogue with the then Minister for Youth Policies and Sport to define formal consultation mechanisms (European Commission, 2024).

The landscape is varied at a regional and local level, as some Regions have promoted the set-up of Fora, Councils and other youth representation bodies (Ibid.). Finally, youth associations are important actors for the expression and exercise of youth participation, and are therefore often involved by public, regional and municipal administrations, through selection calls for the development of project ideas (European Commission, 2024).

4. Barriers

4.1 The Legal Framework of Third-Country Nationals' Participation in Civic Democratic Life

There are several legal and regulatory agreements that can influence the political, social, and civic participation of people from Third-Country Nationals (TCNs). To understand how these elements support or hinder their participation in civic and democratic life, it is very useful to start by examining the regulations regarding the integration of migrants. Many EU Member States have policies aimed at fostering the integration of migrants (including TCNs), but these programs are often limited and not always effective in ensuring full civic and political participation. There are specific national laws that limit the political participation of TCNs. In many Member States, TCNs are typically unable to participate in the electoral process, except in local elections, after a

prolonged period of residence, resulting in limited direct political participation. Restrictions on voting rights seem to be one of the main barriers.

On the other hand, the EU's directive on the right of residence and participation, specifically the European Council Directive 2003/109/EC, concerning long-term resident status, allows third-country nationals who have been legally residing in the EU for five years to enjoy rights almost equivalent to those of EU citizens. However, this does not give them the right to participate in national or EU elections. Political participation remains limited by citizenship: participation in political decision-making processes is generally only granted to EU citizens, which represents a significant obstacle for non-EU citizens in perceiving themselves as part of the collective. Another legal barrier to consider is that TCNs are not eligible to run for political office, creating a gap between their civic participation and that of EU citizens.

Naturalization and Residency Requirements

Under Italian law, a TCN must have legally resided in Italy for at least 10 years before applying for citizenship. This residency period is significantly longer compared to that of many other EU countries, which typically require residence periods ranging from 5 to 7 years (for example, Spain and Germany). This lengthy naturalization process is a substantial barrier to political integration for TCNs, as it limits their ability to participate in democratic processes until they acquire Italian citizenship. Furthermore, during this long period, TCNs are not allowed to vote or stand for national elections, creating a significant gap between Italian citizens and non-citizens (Law 91/1992, 1992).

Residency Policies and Civic Participation Barriers

Italian residency policies can also negatively impact the participation of TCNs in civic and political life. Although some TCNs may vote and run for local elections, depending on bilateral agreements with countries such as some EU member states or non-EU countries like Morocco, political participation is generally restricted to Italian citizens. As a result, TCNs who are not Italian citizens do not have full political rights, excluding them from influencing national policy decisions. This exclusion is compounded by the fact that TCNs cannot stand for political office unless they are citizens, thus preventing them from having a direct say in the political outcomes that affect their lives (Law 81/1996, 1996).

Political Candidacy and Representation

Another major limitation is that without Italian citizenship, TCNs are ineligible to run for political office, either at the national or local level. This prevents them from having political representation, thereby perpetuating a divide between Italian citizens and non-citizens. The lack of opportunities to run for office leads to underrepresentation of migrants and TCNs in political institutions, thereby

sidelining their specific needs and concerns from political discourse (Constitution of Italy, 1947, Art. 48).

Complex Bureaucratic Procedures for Naturalization

The bureaucratic processes involved in acquiring Italian citizenship pose a considerable obstacle. The naturalization procedure is well known for being complicated and time-consuming, requiring numerous stages, including language and cultural examinations, which can be challenging for many TCNs. Extended waiting times and administrative challenges, along with stringent residency criteria, frequently deter TCNs from pursuing citizenship, leading them to remain non-citizens for prolonged durations. This situation also impacts young individuals born in Italy to immigrant parents who, despite having grown up in the country, are unable to secure citizenship and, therefore, cannot exercise their voting rights. These individuals find themselves in a state of limbo, often restricted from fully engaging in society due to the same bureaucratic obstacles they face in obtaining citizenship (Law 91/1992, 1992, Art. 4).

Systemic Discrimination and Exclusion in Italy

In Italy, systemic discrimination against migrants and ethnic minorities is prevalent, particularly in areas like employment, housing, and access to public services, which indirectly affect their ability to engage in the democratic process. Migrants who are not yet citizens face significant barriers in accessing civic education programs or political participation opportunities. This exclusion leaves many TCNs with limited resources to engage meaningfully in political and social matters. Such barriers are often compounded by discriminatory attitudes that associate migrants with marginalization or "*otherness*," making it harder for them to participate in mainstream political activities. A study from the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights highlights how migrants in Italy, particularly those from non-EU countries, experience a lack of access to political education and are often excluded from discussions on civic engagement (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020). This exclusion is due to both structural inequalities and the societal stigma that migrants face in a country where citizenship and voting rights are tightly linked to national identity. As such, TCNs are effectively sidelined from broader discussions about policy decisions and democratic processes that affect them (Ibid.).

Ethnic and Racial Discrimination

Additionally, ethnic and racial discrimination in Italy intersects with migration status, limiting the opportunities for TCNs to engage in civic and political life. As a study by the Migrant Integration Policy Index points out, Italy has some of the weakest integration policies for migrants in Europe, particularly for TCNs, which leads to their disenfranchisement in various areas of public life, including political participation (MIPEX, 2020). Racial and ethnic discrimination in Italy is also widespread in labor markets, where migrants often experience barriers to employment based on

their ethnicity or nationality. These systemic inequalities create additional obstacles for TCNs to acquire the political and social capital necessary to participate in democratic processes (Ibid.).

4.2 Barriers to Political and Civic Participation

Various research publications point to the existence of practical barriers to participation in democratic life. These non-legal barriers intersect with the previously mentioned legal barriers, limiting civic participation by contributing to a sense of perceived isolation among certain groups. These barriers are linked to stereotypes and discrimination against various groups that can be summarized as follows: racism and xenophobia (marginalization of migrants, difficulties in integration), gender expectations, limits to women's participation due to stereotypical behaviors, youth stereotypes (attitudes of political apathy associated with youth), and socio-economic barriers (poverty and economic inequality hinder participation).

Regarding youth stereotypes, young people are often seen as apathetic with respect to politics. The dominant narrative portrays them as disinterested or “*uninformed*”. Although the reality is that many young people are passionate about social and political issues, they feel disconnected from the system and prefer, as seen earlier, non-traditional forms of political participation. This trend is also reflected in the Eurobarometer 2022 report, which shows that 18–24-year-olds have a lower level of trust in political institutions than older generations. However, this is often attributed to a lack of connection and information, rather than genuine disinterest, which creates a psychological and practical barrier to participation.

Racial profiling, instead, prevents many migrants and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOCs) from accessing political and civic opportunities. Racial profiling can be perpetrated in various contexts, from police forces to public spaces, and contributes to reduced trust in institutional mechanisms. A report by the European Parliament titled “*Racial justice, non-discrimination and anti-racism in the EU*,” published in 2022, points out how racial discrimination is one of the main causes of the low participation of ethnic minority groups in democratic processes.

Women face barriers related to gender stereotypes that portray them as less “*assertive*” and more “*nurturing*” or “*calm*”. These barriers limit their ability to participate in politics and civic life. In fact, these stereotypes can dissuade women from running for office or taking part in political discussions while also increasing their social pressure to adopt conformist behaviors. According to the UN report, “*Progress of the World's Women 2021: Pathways to Justice*”, published in 2021, only 25 per cent of women globally hold high-level political positions, and although gender quotas have been implemented in some countries to encourage greater representation of women, the report

suggests that stronger policies are required to overcome social resistance and ensure equal opportunity, consequently, gender expectations remain a barrier to equal participation.

According to data from the Commission on Equal Opportunities and the Centro Studi Internazionali (Ce.S.I.) (2022), women make up about 30% of Italy's Parliament, still a long way from gender parity. Female representation in Italian institutions has grown in recent years, but the numbers remain insufficient, especially in high-level political roles. For example, in the 2022 national elections, women made up about 33% of the members of the Chamber of Deputies and 27% of the Senate.

In Italy, the gender quota law (Law no. 215/2012) mandates that at least 40% of candidates on electoral lists must be women, a measure that has increased their presence in political institutions. However, social and cultural resistance persists, limiting the effectiveness of such policies, as highlighted in the annual report by the Fondazione Nilde Iotti (2020), which explores the low rate of female participation in local and national politics, particularly in decision-making positions.

Civically, women's participation in Italy shows mixed results. While there is strong female involvement in social sectors and non-governmental organizations, their engagement in political decisions and institutional roles remains limited. A 2019 study by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) found that women are underrepresented in leadership roles within political and civic organizations, with only 20% of women holding power positions in local administrations.

Despite the introduction of gender quotas, cultural resistance and gender stereotypes continue to be significant barriers, making full participation in Italian politics and civic life difficult for women.

5. Scan of EU Policies

IRC Italy and Glocal Factory have not yet organized all the interactive seminars where young people will choose the three themes on which they would like the project to focus on. Thus, the subsequent chapter will assess the current state of European Policies and Solidarity Mechanisms pertaining to all the five core themes of the project, *Gender Equality; Education, Culture, Youth, and Sport; and Values, Rights, Rule of Law, and Security*.

5.1 Gender Equality

The current directives under the EU Gender Equality Strategy include the Pay Transparency Directive, adopted in May 2023, the Directive to Combat Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, adopted in May 2024, and the Directive on Gender Balance in Corporate Boards, which companies must meet by 30 June 2026 (European Commission, n.d./ European Commission,

2020). Additionally, as of August 2022, the Directive on EU-wide work-life balance rights for parents and carers started applying (Ibid.). Lastly, in October 2023, the Commission became a party to the Istanbul Convention, which binds the EU to prevent and combat violence against women, encompassing European obligations in funding, policy, and legislative measures (European Commission, n.d.; European Commission, 2020).

Meanwhile, the Council of Europe's Youth sector has integrated gender dimensions into its policy, educational approaches, and practices (Council of Europe, n.d.). The Commission's European Institute for Gender Equality, in collaboration with civil society organizations such as the European Women's Lobby, aims to promote gender equality through lobbying and policy advice (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022).

Italy's current goal is to increase its ranking by 5 points by 2026 in the European Institute for Gender Equality Index. The main focus areas include creating a fairer labor market, reducing gender pay gaps, ensuring equal opportunities in skills development and in the expression of individual talents in all fields of knowledge, promoting equal sharing of unpaid care, and supporting an equitable gender distribution in top leadership roles (Department for Equal Opportunities, 2021).

5.2 Education, Culture, Youth and Sport

The Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport, and Culture (DG EAC) oversees EU policy and funding for education, youth, sport, and culture. In light of this, the EU has implemented policies across various education levels, including the EU Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care, the European Vocational Skills Week, and the European Agenda for Adult Learning (Directorate-General for Communication, n.d.). Its solidarity mechanisms include the EU Youth Strategy, which fosters collaboration among Member States, and the Erasmus+ program, which provides study, training and development opportunities for students, trainees and education professionals. Additionally, the European Solidarity Corps offers volunteer opportunities for young people to contribute to communities across Europe (Ibid.).

The DG EAC's cultural policies and key initiatives include the 2021-2027 Creative Europe Program, which promotes European cultural diversity and enhances the economic potential of these sectors (European Commission, 2023). The European Heritage Labels, launched in 2021, promotes key European values and contributes to Europe's history and culture, offering educational opportunities for younger audiences (European Commission, 2024). As well as the European Capitals of Culture initiative, which showcases Europe's culture and fosters a sense of belonging among citizens (European Commission, 2025).

Lastly, DG EAC initiatives in the field of sport include the Erasmus+ fund's partnerships between sports organizations, non-profit events and research to strengthen policymaking and the European Week of Sport (European Commission, n.d.).

In the context of Italy, the Good School Reform (La Buona Scuola), focuses on enhancing educational outcomes by increasing school autonomy, teacher numbers, and merit-based pay (Cedefop, n.d.). Additionally, since September 2024, civic education in Italian schools has been made mandatory (Eurydice, 2025). Furthermore, Italy is an active participant in the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+ initiatives (European Commission, 2025).

5.3 Values and Rights, Rule of Law and Security

The EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights outlines the values and rights of EU citizens, including Human Dignity, Freedom, Equality, Solidarity, Citizens' Rights, Justice, and General Provisions (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, n.d.), while the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Program (CERV), which was launched in 2021, supports civil society organizations at various levels in their efforts to enhance citizen participation, ensure equality, and promote EU values (European Commission, n.d.).

Moreover, the EU's values and rights are upheld and enforced through mechanisms such as the EU's rule of law toolbox, which helps safeguard the rule of law within its member states and external partners (Council of the European Union, 2025). Additionally, the introduction of the EU Rule of Law Report in 2020 offers a comprehensive analysis of the state of the rule of law within all EU member countries. The European Judicial Training Network serves as a platform for states to share best practices through training initiatives (Ibid.). Ultimately, Article 7 of the Treaty on the EU empowers the EU to suspend a Member State's rights if it consistently or seriously violates the EU's fundamental principles. Lastly, the European Commission is authorized to take legal action against member states infringing on the rule of law and to refer such matters to the Court of Justice of the EU (Council of the European Union, n.d.).

In terms of security within the Schengen area, EU citizens benefit from free movement across participating EU nations (Council of the European Union, n.d.), while the EU's collective migration and asylum policy addresses challenges related to individuals seeking international protection (Ibid.). Additionally, the EU and its member states have established regulations and tools to protect victims and punish offenders to combat both online and offline crimes, such as such as the EU Strategy on Victims' Rights, the Digital Services Act, the Regulation to Prevent and Combat Child Sexual Abuse, the European Cyber Resilience Act, and the establishment of the European Cybercrime Centre (Ibid.).

Under Article 29(4) of Law 234/2012 the Italian Government commits itself to transform EU directives into national law and to align its domestic laws with EU standards (Chamber of Deputies, Italian Republic, n.d.). Additionally, Italy's Regions contribute to shaping the national position on EU draft regulations and ensure compliance with EU directives (Regione Emilia-Romagna, n.d.). While EU legislation enforcement falls under the Italian Parliament's oversight,

including handling infringement procedures and EU court decisions, it is also updated by the government on EU-related matters (Chamber of Deputies, Italian Republic, n.d.).

5.4 Migration

On May 14, 2024, the European Council approved a new Migration and Asylum Pact (Council of the European Union, 2025). This pact builds upon and revises earlier reform proposals to create a comprehensive approach to migration within the EU (European Commission, 2024). Key policies include new screening regulations designed to establish standardized procedures for identifying migrants, conducting security checks, and performing health evaluations at borders (Council of the European Union, 2024). The updated Eurodac rules aim to improve data collection on migrants across the EU, while the asylum procedure regulation introduces a mandatory border process that seeks to simplify the asylum procedure. Additionally, a return border procedure has been established for individuals whose asylum applications have been denied (Ibid.).

The asylum and migration management regulation clarifies the processing responsibilities for international protection applications among member states, thus fostering shared responsibility. The qualification regulation and reception conditions directive set uniform standards for international protection and the treatment of asylum seekers (Ibid.). The resettlement regulation facilitates safe avenues for humanitarian admissions and resettlement into the EU (Ibid.). Additionally, a new mechanism has been introduced to ensure a fair distribution of responsibilities among Member States regarding solidarity. This mechanism allows for different types of contributions, such as relocation or financial support, based on the receiving country's consent (Council of the European Union, 2024). During emergencies, Member States may temporarily exempt themselves from certain regulations to strengthen solidarity within the EU. The crisis mechanism is only activated in exceptional circumstances and requires Council approval for limited durations (Council of the European Union, 2024).

Member States are expected to implement these new regulations by mid-2026, while the EU's Technical Support Instrument (TSI) provides specialized expertise to aid in the execution of these reforms (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2024). Notably, Italy, along with other EU states, sought assistance in 2024 and received focused guidance from TSI aimed at optimizing asylum procedures, managing migration, and effectively utilizing EU funds (Ibid.).

5.5 Democracy

The European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP) for 2020-2024, later extended to 2027, aims to promote fair elections and press freedom while addressing disinformation (European Commission, n.d.). This plan includes measures for transparency in political advertising and financing for political parties, as well as the European Media Freedom Act, which was implemented in May

2024 and aims to protect media independence and pluralism in the EU (Ibid.). This Act supports cross-border media operations and establishes the European Board for Media Services to enhance collaboration among media authorities by August 8, 2025 (Ibid.). In 2022, the Commission initiated protections against Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), with a Directive effective from May 2024 focused on cross-border civil cases (European Commission, n.d.). A Recommendation was also made urging Member States to align regulations and enhance training to combat SLAPPs. Moreover, a 2021 Recommendation aimed to ensure the safety of journalists, emphasizing national support services and protection during protests (Ibid.). Following the Commission's guidance, a revised Code of Practice on Disinformation was agreed upon in June 2022, bringing together online platforms, advertisers, and researchers (European Commission, n.d.). This Code includes commitments to transparency and a monitoring framework, aligning with the Digital Services Act, which states that large platforms assess and report on systemic risks related to disinformation campaigns.

The EU's strategy for democracy also encompasses various initiatives such as financing efforts to ensure election integrity, enhancing citizen participation, and fostering civic engagement and trust in democracy through support from programs like Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values, Creative Europe, Erasmus+, and Horizon Europe, as well as Cohesion funds (European Commission, n.d.). It aims to bolster financial support for news media organizations both within the EU and internationally (Ibid.). Additionally, the strategy aims to combat disinformation by promoting media literacy and helping citizens identify false information, supported by funding from Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps.

Meanwhile, Law 234/2012 regulates Italy's participation in EU policymaking, ensuring that the government provides detailed reports to Parliament on EU legislative proposals and involves regional authorities in the process (Italian Chamber of Deputies, n.d.).

6. Conclusion

This desk review examines the primary socio-economic and policy challenges faced by Italian youth aged 16 to 23, focusing on their awareness, knowledge gaps, and barriers to civic engagement and decision-making at the European level. The key findings include:

- Institutional barriers contribute to a significant knowledge gap between school students and university students in Italy, limiting early engagement with European policies.
- Fragmented policies, bureaucratic inefficiencies and restricted access to resources hinder Italian youth's, particularly concerning TCNs, social inclusion and integration efforts.
- A widening disconnect between youth and the policymaking process highlights the importance of this project in fostering engagement and equipping young individuals with the tools to understand and influence European policies.

- TCNs continue to face major obstacles in social mobility and legal recognition, while gender disparities persist, particularly in labor market access and political participation.
- While existing European strategies provide a solid foundation for youth engagement in Italy, additional initiatives are needed to ensure young people fully understand the impact of European Directives, Regulations, and Laws on their daily lives and how they can actively participate in shaping them.
- The review underscores the need for further research into youth perceptions of European processes, the barriers they face, and effective methods to enhance their engagement.

The next phase of this review will integrate insights from IRC Italy and GFs' focus group discussions and interactive seminars, which were conducted between January and early April 2025. These discussions will form the basis for the next stage of the project, where stakeholders and participants will collaborate to develop concrete policy recommendations based on the three key themes previously identified among participants. These policy proposals will be presented by the participants to the European Commission in late 2026, aiming to drive more inclusive and sustainable policies that reflect the needs and aspirations of young people in Italy.

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