



ParticipACTION

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



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LITHUANIA

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 Lithuania and Europe. Conducted by Mano Europa.



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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 Mano Europa 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 Lithuania and Europe. The present national-level review serves as a foundational analysis of youth engagement in Lithuania 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 (TCNs hereafter) 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

2.1 Desk Research Focus

Mano Europa conducted a national-level desk review of grey literature, academic articles and policy documents examining young people's civic knowledge and engagement. This includes assessing the intersectional impact of identity factors (such as migration status, gender and socio-economic background) on knowledge, awareness, and participation in democratic life and decision-making processes.

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

To understand how aware Lithuanian youth are of EU institutions, policies, laws, and strategies, we examine and provide a brief analysis of several identified studies and surveys.

The European Commission's Eurobarometer surveys regularly assess public opinion across EU Member states, including Lithuania. The Standard [Eurobarometer 96](#), conducted in 2021, revealed that 55% of Lithuanians had a positive image of the EU, while 34% felt neutral. Additionally, 70% of Lithuanian respondents expressed trust in the EU, significantly higher than the EU average of

49%. These figures suggest a relatively high level of awareness and trust in EU institutions among Lithuanians.

Focusing on younger demographics, a 2023 study by the Lithuanian Youth Council reported that 75% of respondents aged 18-25 were aware of major EU strategies, such as the European Green Deal and the Digital Strategy. This high level of awareness among youth suggests effective dissemination of information regarding EU initiatives. While large portion of youth is aware of major EU strategies, there was a big lack of understanding these strategies and how they impact their life. The [“Youth knowledge on the European Parliament and youth political engagement”](#) study done in 2023 by Mano Europa organization on a sample of 274 young people aged 18-30 identified that a significant portion of respondents lack familiarity with the activities of the EU Parliament, with only 25% of Lithuanian respondents being acquainted with its operations, compared to 40% who are not. Additionally, just 30% of Lithuanian respondents believe that the *“European Union takes care of young people and has adequate policies towards young people”*. Furthermore, the study highlights that confidence in EU politicians is notably low, with only 10% of Lithuanian respondents expressing trust in them.

The role of media in shaping public awareness cannot be understated. A 2021 analysis by the Vilnius University Institute of International Relations and Political Science highlighted that 80% of Lithuanians frequently accessed news about the EU through national television and online news portals. This widespread media consumption contributes to the public's understanding of EU institutions and their functions.

In summary, documented levels of awareness among Lithuanians regarding EU institutions, policies, legislation, and strategies are relatively high, influenced by national surveys, youth engagement, and media coverage. However, while there is a relatively high awareness of Lithuanian youth there is a gap in understanding the EU institutions, policies, legislation, and strategies.

2.1 Knowledge Gaps Among Youth Regarding National and EU Processes

Throughout 2023, Mano Europa organization conducted a study research, involving young people aged 18 to 30. The study, which covered 274 young respondents from all over Lithuania, revealed that many participants felt they lacked sufficient information about EU political processes and perceived limited opportunities and understanding to influence decision-making at local, national, and European levels.

Only 15% of respondents from Lithuania believe that local and national public policy has a very strong or extreme influence on the quality of life of young people while 20% of them believe this for EU policy. A considerable number of respondents think that local (39%), national (40%) and EU policies (42%) have slightly or no influence at all on the quality of life of young people.

The 2023 study showed the main obstacles to greater involvement of young people in democratic processes to be following:

"What do you recognize as obstacles to greater involvement of young people in democratic processes? (multiple choice)"	
1. Lack of knowledge and skills necessary for active participation in democratic processes.	63%
2. Young people do not feel that their opinion is important, so they do not get involved.	46%
3. Young people do not feel that they can change something.	45%
4. Lack of adequate mechanisms for involving young people.	43%
5. Lack of trust in political institutions.	43%
6. General dissatisfaction with political leaders and the policies they advocate.	38%
7. Existing mechanisms do not reflect the attitudes and needs of young people.	22%

The research analyzed below indicates that gaps in political and civic knowledge among Lithuanian youth are influenced by specific demographic factors, including socioeconomic background and gender. For instance, the OECD's "Skills Strategy Lithuania" report highlights that Lithuanian students from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to have lower educational performance compared to their advantaged peers. This disparity suggests that socioeconomic status influences access to quality education, which in turn affects awareness of political and civic processes. The educational system in Lithuania, while making strides, still faces challenges in addressing disparities caused by socioeconomic differences. These disparities often lead to lower political and civic awareness among students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore, these systemic inequalities within the educational system reinforce the gap in both academic achievement and civic engagement. Addressing these issues would require comprehensive educational reforms that ensure equal access to quality education for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

A 2019 report by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions notes inequalities in young people's access to information and support services across



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Europe. Although not specific to Lithuania, these findings imply that socioeconomic disparities can limit access to resources necessary for understanding national and EU processes. The inequality referenced in the report involves various dimensions but mainly socioeconomic inequality, with young people from lower-income backgrounds may face challenges accessing information and support services due to financial barriers, or educational inequality, with young people in lower-performing schools or without access to specialized educational programs may be less equipped to engage with complex issues related to national and EU processes. Research on migrant youth in Europe indicates that those with migratory backgrounds may face challenges in accessing information about political and civic processes due to language barriers and integration issues. Although specific studies on Lithuania are scarce, similar patterns may exist, affecting awareness levels among migrant youth.

While specific data on gender differences in political knowledge among Lithuanian youth is limited, broader European studies suggest that young women often exhibit higher levels of civic engagement than young men. This trend may influence their awareness and understanding of political and civic mechanisms.

In summary, socioeconomic background appears to be a significant factor influencing gaps in political and civic knowledge among Lithuanian youth. While direct data on gender and migratory background is limited, existing research suggests these factors may also play a role in shaping awareness and understanding of national and EU processes.

2.4 Current Climate of Euroscepticism Among Young People

The 2023 research report conducted in the framework of the “Youth2Europe” reveals that 88% of young people in Lithuania view the EU as a positive political union, reflecting generally low levels of Euroscepticism among this group. When asked about their perceptions of the EU's core values, the most common responses highlight democracy, dignity, freedom, equality, human rights, and justice. Other frequently mentioned values include solidarity, anti-discrimination, active citizenship, and tolerance. A smaller proportion of respondents also referred to values such as integrity, innovation, and cooperation.

While Euroscepticism is generally low, the Youth2Europe research showed that regarding participation in the EU elections 2024, 35% of young respondents say that they will participate in EU elections, the same number say they will not, while 30% do not know. Eurosceptic political parties have minimal influence in Lithuania. The country's major political parties generally support EU membership and integration, reflecting the broader public sentiment.

In summary, Euroscepticism in Lithuania is low, with both the general population and young people exhibiting trust and positive attitudes toward the EU. This favorable climate is reflected in the country's political landscape, where pro-EU sentiments prevail.

3. Participation

3.1 Assessing Youth Engagement in Politics

Youth political and civic participation in Lithuania has been experiencing notable changes in recent years. Below is an outline of the current state of [Youth Policy in Lithuania](#) (2024). Youth policy in Lithuanian law focuses on addressing youth challenges, fostering personal growth, and helping young people integrate into society. It also aims to promote understanding and tolerance toward youth within the community. This policy encompasses various systems and measures designed to support young individuals in their personal development and prepare them for independent living, complementing their efforts and those of their families

The political activity of young people is growing every year. In 2012, only 18% of voters between the ages of 18 and 29 participated in the elections. However, the 2019 presidential election saw a significant increase, with almost 40% of young voters participating. Data on youth representation and the age of parliamentarians, as well as mechanisms and structures that encourage or enhance the participation of young people in national Parliaments, are documented. The 2024 Lithuanian parliamentary elections, held on October 13 and 27, led to the formation of the new Seimas (Lithuanian Parliament). The age distribution of the new parliamentarians indicates that 56 members are aged 45 or younger, while 85 members are over 45, reflecting a parliament with a majority of members above this age threshold. In April 2022, the Seimas amended the constitution to lower the minimum age for parliamentary candidates from 25 to 21, however, currently the Parliament involves only two male members that are between 21–30 years. In terms of gender representation, women hold only 28% of the Parliament seats.

Research indicates that young people in Lithuania exhibit a higher level of participation in voluntary organizations compared to older demographics. They are also more active in civic activities that utilize e-participation platforms. Young Lithuanians generally have a stronger belief in their ability to influence political processes, reflecting a positive outlook on civic engagement.

Despite the positive trends, there has been a decline in the youth civic participation index, as reflected in the Lithuanian civic power index. The index value for youth decreased from 42.4 in 2019 to 38.4 points in 2022, indicating areas needing attention.

In summary, while Lithuanian youth are increasingly engaging in political and civic activities, challenges remain in sustaining and enhancing this participation. Continued efforts are necessary to address these issues and promote active involvement among young people.

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

Lithuania has implemented several policies and initiatives to promote youth democratic participation and political engagement, including efforts to involve young TCNs, women, and girls.

Established in 2013, public election committees allow non-partisan groups to participate in local and European Parliament elections. These committees have increased political engagement among various demographics, including women. In the 2023 local elections, 11 mayors and 183 municipal council members were elected from public election committees. Notably, in Kaunas, the "Vieningas Kaunas" committee has been influential since 2015.

Lithuania actively engages in regional efforts to enhance youth participation. The Community of Democratic Choice Youth Forum, founded in 2006, includes Lithuanian youth among its members. This forum aims to promote democracy, human rights, and the rule of law through youth engagement across several countries.

While specific national policies targeting young TCNs' political engagement are limited, Lithuania's commitment to democratic values provides a foundation for their inclusion. Initiatives under the European Union's Eastern Partnership program, such as the Community of Democratic Choice Youth Forum, offer platforms for youth from various backgrounds, including third-country nationals, to engage in democratic processes and dialogues. Also, in 2012 Lithuania launched a program named Kurk Lietuvai ("Create Lithuania") which invites Lithuanians from the diaspora and abroad to contribute to public sector projects in Lithuania. While primarily targeting Lithuanians with experience abroad, it is open to all, including TCNs. Participants work on projects across various sectors, including education, gender equality and immigration, fostering a deeper understanding of Lithuania's democratic processes.

Lithuania has several organizations dedicated to empowering women and girls in the political sphere. The Lithuanian Liberal Youth (LLJ), established in 1991, is a political youth organization that, while independent, has members who actively participate in politics.

These policies and initiatives collectively contribute to fostering an inclusive political environment in Lithuania, encouraging the active participation of youth, including young TCNs, women, and girls.

3.3 National Bodies Focusing on Youth Democratic Participation

LiJOT (Lithuanian Youth Council) plays a significant role in promoting youth democratic participation in Lithuania by providing a platform for young people to engage in decision-making processes. Through advocacy and lobbying, they ensure that youth issues are addressed at local, national, and European levels. LiJOT organizes educational programs, seminars, and debates to foster awareness of civic rights and responsibilities among young people. Additionally, they encourage youth to actively participate in elections, volunteering, and community projects, helping to cultivate a strong sense of civic duty. Their work empowers young individuals to take leadership roles and contribute to the shaping of a democratic society.

Jaunimo reikalų agentūra (Youth Affairs Agency) in Lithuania supports youth democratic participation by creating opportunities for young people to engage in policy-making and decision-making processes. They offer grants and programs that encourage youth to participate in community development, activism, and social entrepreneurship. The agency organizes educational initiatives, such as workshops and training, focused on civic engagement and youth rights. Additionally, they work to strengthen youth organizations and promote youth-led projects that address local and national issues. By providing resources and platforms for youth involvement, the agency fosters an environment where young people can actively shape their communities and the democratic landscape.

The Youth and Sports Department under the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport in Lithuania supports youth democratic participation by creating policies and programs that promote active civic engagement and participation in decision-making processes. They provide funding and support for youth organizations and initiatives that encourage young people to get involved in community development, social issues, and political processes. The department organizes various events, educational activities, and campaigns that raise awareness of youth rights, responsibilities, and the importance of democratic participation. Additionally, they collaborate with local and international partners to offer opportunities for youth leadership and advocacy. By empowering youth to become active citizens, the department helps foster a more inclusive and democratic society.

4. Barriers

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

In Lithuania, TCNs with permanent residency enjoy certain rights to participate in local civic and democratic processes. For instance, permanent residents aged 18 and over have the right to vote in municipal council elections. This inclusion allows TCNs to influence decisions affecting their local communities (European Website on Integration, 2014). Foreigners aged over 20 with permanent residence permits are eligible to stand as candidates for municipal council membership. However, individuals whose electoral rights are restricted by a court decision in their country of origin are barred from holding such positions (ibid.). Lithuania signed the [Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level](#) in 2001 but has not ratified it. This Convention aims to enhance the participation of foreign residents in public life at the local level.

In summary, Lithuanian laws and policies generally support the participation of TCNs in local civic and democratic life, particularly for those with permanent residency. However, certain restrictions, especially concerning national-level participation and specific eligibility criteria, limit full engagement in all aspects of civic life.

4.2 Barriers to Political and Civic Participation

In Lithuania, there are several non-legal barriers to political and civic participation, some of which are tied to stereotypes and expectations that discourage certain groups from engaging fully in public life.

As identified by the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) Report on Lithuania (2020), ethnic minorities, particularly non-Lithuanian residents such as Russians, Polish, and migrants from outside the EU, often face discrimination that can discourage their involvement in civic life. Stereotypes such as "unqualified" or "uncooperative" are sometimes applied to migrants, creating barriers to their engagement in political processes. For instance, migrants may feel alienated or unwelcome, which affects their participation in public debates or decision-making.

Women in Lithuania, like in many other countries, face gendered expectations that can limit their participation in public life. Women are often expected to fulfill nurturing or care roles, which clashes with the more assertive behaviors typically valued in political spaces. These gendered stereotypes contribute to fewer women in leadership positions or engaging in political activism. Lithuania ranks relatively well in terms of gender equality in the workplace, but when it comes to political participation, women are still underrepresented. According to the 2021 World Economic

Forum Global Gender Gap Report, women in Lithuania face significant barriers to entering political leadership roles. The report noted that traditional gender expectations, such as the assumption that women should be nurturing and caretaking, hinder their engagement in more assertive and public political roles. These gendered stereotypes continue to shape their involvement in decision-making at all levels (WEF, 2021).

Low-income individuals or those from rural areas face significant obstacles to participating in political and civic life. According to the European Commission's Eurobarometer survey (2021), young people in rural areas or those with lower socio-economic status in Lithuania are less likely to engage in political and civic activities. The survey found that youth in rural areas often experience exclusion due to geographical isolation, fewer opportunities for political education, and financial barriers to attending civic events or organizing. These socio-economic challenges contribute to political apathy, particularly among low-income groups.

5. Scan of EU Policies

As part of the ParticipACTION project, Mano Europa hosted an interactive awareness-raising seminar in Kaunas (Lithuania). During the session, participants engaged in interactive discussions about the current status in Lithuania and in the EU on the five core themes of the project and were asked to discuss and vote on the three themes they deemed most relevant and most interesting to them. "European Democracy", "Values and Rights, Rule of Law, Security" and "Education, Culture, Youth, and Sport" were selected as priority topics by participants. Scans of existing EU policy and their influence on Lithuania were thus conducted by Mano Europa on these three topics.

5.1 European Democracy

The EU promotes democratic values and active citizenship through mechanisms like the European Citizens' Initiative, which allows citizens to directly influence EU policy-making, and the Rule of Law Mechanism, which ensures democratic principles are respected across Member States. Lithuania has embraced EU democratic standards, especially after its EU accession in 2004. The EU's push for transparency and anti-corruption reforms has led Lithuania to enhance its democratic institutions, including strengthening its judicial independence and electoral systems. At the local level, Lithuania has developed projects that encourage youth participation in democracy, such as national programs for youth parliaments.

5.2 Values and Rights, Rule of Law, Security

The EU is committed to upholding fundamental rights, ensuring the rule of law and enhancing internal security through mechanisms like the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and Cohesion Policy, which fosters solidarity among EU Member States. The Justice and Home Affairs area includes policies on judicial cooperation, counterterrorism, and migration management. Lithuania has made significant strides in aligning with EU standards on human rights, such as the protection of minorities and gender equality. Regarding security, Lithuania has been an active participant in EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and has implemented EU policies on cybersecurity and border management. Locally, Lithuania's National Human Rights Action Plan mirrors EU efforts to safeguard rights and the country has supported EU-wide responses to issues like migration and terrorism.

5.3 Education, Culture, Youth and Sport

The EU promotes cooperation in education, culture, and youth through programs like Erasmus+, which supports educational mobility, and Creative Europe, which fosters cultural exchange. The European Youth Strategy and EU Sports Policy focus on enhancing the role of youth and sports in building social cohesion and promoting active citizenship. Lithuania benefits greatly from EU education and youth policies. The Erasmus+ program has allowed Lithuanian students and professionals to participate in educational exchanges across Europe. At a local level, Lithuania has developed national youth strategies, fostering EU integration while focusing on empowering young people in decision-making processes. In sports, Lithuania, with its strong basketball tradition, aligns with EU policies that promote physical activity and integration through sports.

6. Conclusion

In summary, the EU's policies and solidarity mechanisms are actively shaping Lithuania's democracy, human rights, security, and educational systems. These policies are tailored at the national level through various mechanisms and local manifestations, promoting EU values while reflecting Lithuania's unique cultural and political landscape.

Lithuanian youth generally demonstrate high awareness of EU institutions and policies though there is a gap in understanding their impact. Studies highlight a lack of knowledge about the European Parliament, with only 25% of young people familiar with its activities. Media plays a crucial role in shaping public understanding, as 80% of Lithuanians regularly access EU-related news. Socioeconomic background significantly affects political knowledge, with disadvantaged youth often having lower civic engagement. Gender and migratory background also influence participation, with young women more engaged in civic activities and migrant youth facing



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integration challenges. Euroscepticism is low, with 88% of youth viewing the EU positively. Youth political participation is increasing but challenges persist, such as declining civic participation scores. National policies and youth organizations promote democratic engagement, however, practical barriers like racism, xenophobia and gendered expectations also hinder full participation, particularly for marginalized groups. Socio-economic factors further limit political engagement, especially in rural areas.



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