

JOINT ASSESSMENT REPORT

OCTOBER 2025



Final results 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
FRANCE
CYPRUS
LITHUANIA**



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ParticipACTION

Joint Assessment Report

Final results 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, France, Cyprus and Lithuania

Glocal Factory



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GLOCAL FACTORY



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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

This Joint Assessment Report explores the current state of youth civic knowledge and engagement in Italy, France, Cyprus and Lithuania within the framework of the ParticipACTION project.

More than 600 young people, aged 16 to 23, both EU nationals and Third-Country Nationals, as well as stakeholders from migrant-, women- and youth-led organisations, local and national institutions and consortium partners actively contributed to this assessment by responding to a multi-country survey, and/or taking part in 21 Focus Groups Discussions, eight interactive seminars, and seven national roundtables held in Italy, France, Cyprus and Lithuania in 2024-2025 and transnational workshops online and in person in Verona. These were organized in Italy by IRC Italia and Glocal Factory in France by PLACE Network, in Cyprus by Generation For Change and in Lithuania by MANO Europa. This Report analyzes all the data and insights collected and analyzed and complements it with desk research results. This Report also includes recommendations from young people from four EU countries on how to increase youth civic engagement at a national and EU level. During the subsequent phases of the project, young participants will further shine a light on their proposed solutions for improving access, inclusivity, and representation in democratic decision-making processes.

Through this methodology, the ParticipACTION project critically analyzes the specific areas the European Union and Member States can concentrate on to dramatically improve civic engagement and democratic knowledge amongst its youth. The findings from this report reveal a twofold picture of youth civic engagement in Europe, one of both the enthusiasm and persistent challenges. While young people show strong motivation to contribute to democratic life, many still face barriers such as limited civic education and unequal access to opportunities. Limited and fragmented civic education, feelings of exclusion, and distrust in institutions particularly affect youth from marginalized or migrant backgrounds, weakening their sense of belonging and representation. At the same time new, flexible forms of activism are emerging, driven by solidarity and shared values, with social media which play a dual role as both an entry point and a constraint. Building inclusive and sustained pathways for participation is essential to strengthen democracy and ensure that all young people's voices are heard.

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1. Background

1.1 Joint Assessment Report Overview

The Joint Assessment Report aims at blending together the various research phases of the ParticipACTION project, including desk research, Focus Group Discussions, a quantitative survey, Key Informant Interviews, and findings from ParticipACTION events, mainly Interactive Seminars (WP2) and National Roundtables (WP3) for all four partner countries. 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 IRC Italia and Glocal Factory (Italy), PLACE Network (France), Generation For Change (Cyprus), and MANO Europa (Lithuania) during the initial phases (WP1, WP2 and WP3) of the ParticipACTION project. The Joint Assessment Report also includes recommendations to increase youth active civic engagement elaborated by youth participants during the subsequent phases of the project (WP4 and WP5).

The report is structured in several sections to ensure a coherent and comprehensive presentation of the findings. The **Background** section introduces the purpose of the report and provides contextual information on the four countries, focusing on demographic trends, particularly the share of youth, and on the asylum and migration context, in line with the ParticipACTION project's focus on Third Country Nationals (TCNs). The **Methodology** section outlines the approach adopted for data collection and analysis across the participating countries. The **Key Findings** section is divided into three main areas: **Knowledge**, which explores how young people in Italy, France, Cyprus, and Lithuania understand European institutions, policies, and opportunities for engagement; **Participation**, which examines how they take part in civic and democratic life at both EU and national levels; and **Barriers**, which identifies the main challenges that limit young people's ability and willingness to engage, particularly among marginalized groups. The **Recommendations** section presents the outcomes of the participatory work carried out by young people within the project, offering practical proposals to enhance youth inclusion and participation. Finally, the **Conclusions** summarize the key insights and point to future directions for policy and practice.

1.2 ParticipACTION countries contexts: Italy, France, Cyprus and Lithuania

1.2.1 The Italian Context

Italy faces persistent challenges related to youth civic engagement and complex migration dynamics. As a founding member of the European Union (“EU”) in 1993 and key player in the Eurozone, Italy has long experienced both outward and inward mobility, becoming a hub for migration while also seeing many of its young citizens seek opportunities abroad. These mobility trends, combined with demographic decline, economic uncertainty, and institutional distrust, have contributed to persistently low youth participation in civic and political life.

As of 2025, approximately **58.9 million people live in Italy** making it the third most populous country in the EU (Eurostat, 2025a). From 2002 to 2023, the number of Italians aged 18-34 fell by nearly 23%, while the 65+ population rose by over 54%, pushing the median age close to 50, (48.7 years), well above the EU average of 44.7 (Macchi, 2025). The population aged 15 to 19 years old specifically represents **5.0%** out of the total (Eurostat, 2025a). This dramatic demographic shift has earned Italy a reputation as the **oldest country in Europe** and fifth-oldest population in the world, with a shrinking youth population and growing elderly majority (Population Reference Bureau, 2020). These trends place significant pressure on public services and policymaking and have direct implications for youth civic participation, as younger generations often feel sidelined in a society increasingly shaped by older voters. Youth unemployment (under 25s) remains high, with nearly **one in five young Italians being unemployed**, nearly twice the rate of many EU counterparts, driving disillusionment and emigration among young professionals in search of better prospects abroad (Eurostat, 2025b). Italy is experiencing a **significant brain drain**, with the number of **Italians aged 25-34** that have left the country recorded at approximately **156,000 in 2024**. Many of them are university graduates, seeking work opportunities abroad (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2025). At the same time, Italy has been at the forefront of the EU refugee crisis as one of Europe’s southernmost nations and primary entry point for migrants arriving from North Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe, often via dangerous Mediterranean crossings and Balkan Route. Balancing its obligations as an EU Member State with domestic pressures, Italy continues to grapple with integrating newcomers while addressing the socioeconomic forces contributing to youth disengagement and population decline.

As of 2024, Third Country Nationals (“TCNs”) - defined as non-EU citizens residing in an EU Member State - make up a significant portion of Italy’s population. According to Eurostat’s Migration and migrant population statistics, there were approximately **over 5 million TCNs, representing 8.6% of the population**, and another almost 1.6 EU citizens (2.7%) living in Italy at the time (Eurostat, 2025c). The largest TCN communities include individuals from Albania, Morocco, China, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Ukraine.

In 2022, family reunification accounted for 38.9% of residence permits issued in Italy, followed by work-related permits at 19.8%, and study permits at 7.5%. Regarding naturalization, 194,071 TCNs acquired Italian citizenship in 2022, a significant increase compared to 109,561 in 2021 and 118,513 in 2020 (European Migration Network, 2024).

The **TCN population in Italy is notably younger compared to the native population**, with the proportion of individuals aged 15-64 being almost 26 percentage points higher in the foreign-born population than in the native-born population, highlighting the importance of engaging this demographic in civic and political life (Eurostat, 2025c). However, their participation remains low due to a combination of legal, structural, and cultural barriers, including **lack of voting rights, limited access to political representation** (see Section 4.3) **and discouraging integration policies**.

In terms of newly arrived migrants in Italy, since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, over **200,000 individuals** fleeing the conflict have applied for **temporary protection status** in Italy (Dipartimento della Protezione Civile). As of **July 2025, 36,545 migrants** have arrived in Italy by sea - an **11% increase** compared to the **same period in 2024** (33,035 arrivals). However, these figures remain significantly **lower than 2023**, when **88,464 sea arrivals** were recorded by the end of July (Ministero dell'Interno, 2025). The Italian government led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has made it publicly known that she will continue to lead the country towards implementing more restrictive policies for migrants. The most notable and controversial policy is the Italy-Albania Agreement that aims to externalize migration management by transferring migrants intercepted on their journey to Italy to reception centers in Albania, a non-EU member state. Many human rights activists have publicly criticized this agreement claiming it will lead to major human rights and international law violations (Institute of New Europe, 2025).

1.2.2 The French Context

As one of the EU's founding members, France has long shaped the direction of European integration while grappling with domestic challenges linked to migration, social inequality, and political representation. French society is marked by an enduring commitment to republican values and civic participation, yet recent years have seen growing youth disaffection with traditional political structures. Economic precarity, environmental concerns, and perceived institutional rigidity have contributed to shifting forms of engagement among younger generations, often expressed through activism, protest movements, and digital participation rather than formal politics.

In France, as of **January 1, 2024, 12.0 million people** residing in the country are aged **15 to 29**, representing **17.6% of the total population**. The population aged 15 to 19 years old specifically represents **6.2%** out of the total (above the EU average of 5.3%) (Eurostat, 2025a). Among people aged 15 to 29, approximately **3.8 million live in rural areas**, accounting for **32% of 15-29-year-olds**. Projections for 2050 estimate that this age group will number **10.9 million**, representing **15.7% of the total population**, indicating a slight relative decline in the share of young people in

France. (Institut national de la jeunesse et de l'éducation populaire [INJEP], 2024). The median age of the population was of **42.5 years** in 2024.

France, as the oldest immigration country in Europe, has long been shaped by successive waves of migration that continue to influence its social fabric and political life. From the late 19th century onward, the country relied on immigration to compensate for labour shortages, with large inflows from neighbouring Germany and Belgium, later joined by Italians and Poles in the interwar years to support the rebuilding of the country and sustain industries like mining, construction, and metallurgy. Post-World War II migration diversified further, with workers arriving from Spain, Portugal, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, and later Sub-Saharan Africa. The colonial past and the decision to stop labour migration in 1974 gave rise to family reunification and settlement of many non-European migrants.

Today, France's migration landscape continues to evolve, with new arrivals from Latin America, Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Near East alongside established communities. Nonetheless, the history of colonialism and earlier migration waves still shape demographics: nearly half of immigrants in France today come from just seven countries, predominantly Algeria (12.7%), Morocco (12%), and Portugal (8.6%). Differently from Italy, France foreign-born population is not younger than the native born one: it is one of the few countries in the EU where the proportion of individuals over 65 years of age is higher in the foreign-born population than in the native-born population (Eurostat, 2025c).

In recent years, while overall entries remain high, they showed a slight decrease in 2023 compared to 2021. Specifically, **347,000 immigrants entered France in 2023**, down from 375,000 in 2021. The majority of these new arrivals originate from Africa and Europe: **46% were born in Africa and 28% in Europe**. The most frequent countries of birth were Algeria (8.6%), Morocco (7.3%), and Tunisia (4.9%). Regarding the overall migratory balance, departures of immigrants have been relatively modest compared to arrivals. On average between 2006 and 2021, approximately **three immigrants entered for everyone who left**, often due to the end of professional or academic stays or retirement. For example, in 2021, 283,000 immigrants entered France while 123,000 left, resulting in a **positive migratory balance of +159,000 people**.

1.2.3 The Cypriot Context

Since its accession to the 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.

In Cyprus, young people aged 15–24 represent approximately **10.3% of the total population**, amounting to around **99,500 individuals** according to data from the Statistical Service of Cyprus (Cyprus Statistical Service, n.d.). The population aged 15 to 19 years specifically old represents **4.8%** out of the total (Eurostat, 2025a). While relatively small in proportion compared to older age groups, this cohort reflects important demographic and social trends shaping the island's future. The youth population has gradually declined as a share of the total, influenced by low fertility rates, outward mobility, and an ageing demographic structure. The median age of the population went from 34.7 years old in 2004 to **40.6 in 2024** (Eurostat, 2025a). These patterns raise questions about long-term sustainability, intergenerational balance, and opportunities for civic and economic participation among young Cypriots, particularly in a context marked by regional mobility and evolving ties with the EU.

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). Similarly to Italy, the foreign-born population in Cyprus is younger: among people aged 15–64, foreign-born residents make up 21.3 percentage points more than in the native population, while among those aged 65 and older, they account for 16.9 percentage points less (Eurostat, 2025c).

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).

1.2.4 The Lithuanian Context

In Lithuania, the civic and political participation of young people, particularly those from vulnerable or underrepresented groups such as TCNs and young women and girls, is shaped by a combination of socio-cultural, institutional and policy-related factors. Despite being an EU Member State with established democratic institutions and youth policies, Lithuania continues to face challenges in fostering inclusive youth engagement in civic and political life.

As of early 2024, Lithuania's resident population was approximately **2,886,000**, up by about 28,600 persons compared with the beginning of 2023 (The State Data Agency, 2024). The change was influenced by positive net international migration (largely driven by returns and arrivals from abroad) and a negative natural population change (i.e., more deaths than births) (The State Data Agency, 2023). The population aged 15-24 years is estimated at **around 9.5%** of the total population (as of December 2024). The population aged 15 to 19 years specifically old represents **4.8%** out of the total (Eurostat, 2025a). This relatively small share of young people reflects broader demographic trends of an ageing population, low fertility, and population decline. The median age of the population went from 37.7 in 2004 to **44.2 years old in 2024** (Eurostat, 2025a).

Lithuania, though not traditionally a major destination for international migration compared to some Western European countries, has experienced significant shifts in its migration and population dynamics in recent years.

Since its accession to the EU and the opening of its borders, Lithuania has faced long-term emigration. Between 1990 and 2023, an estimated **1,166,000** Lithuanian citizens emigrated, while over **670,000** people settled in Lithuania, resulting in a net negative migration of about **496,000** people (Hyndle-Hussein, 2024). This was driven largely by economic restructuring after the Soviet era and the search for better opportunities abroad. However, since about 2019, Lithuania has observed a reversal of this trend: net international migration has turned positive, meaning more people have been arriving or returning than leaving (European Migration Network 2022). For instance, in 2023 some **66,682** people immigrated to Lithuania, while **21,688** emigrated (The State Data Agency, 2024). In 2022, immigration stood at **87,367** while emigration was only **15,270** (The State Data Agency, 2023).

By 1 January 2025, there were 217,290 foreigners legally residing in Lithuania, slightly down from 221,848 at the start of 2024 (Migracijos Departamentas, 2025). Among the major were workers from Belarus (approx. 41,400), Ukraine (23,300), Uzbekistan (8,900), Tajikistan (6,500) and Kyrgyzstan (5,200) - reflecting Lithuania's increasing role as a destination for labour migration (Migracijos Departamentas, 2025). In terms of foreign-born population, in 2023 around 8.5% of Lithuania's population was born abroad (~0.2 million), representing a 65% increase since 2013. The main countries of origin among the foreign-born were Russia (27%), Ukraine (25%) and Belarus (23%) (OECD, 2024). Similarly to France, the proportion of individuals over 65 years of age higher in the foreign-born population than in the native-born population, in this case of 4 percentage points (Eurostat, 2025c).

The evolution of migratory flows is a key factor for understanding Lithuania's current demographic and labour market situation. Though natural change remains negative, immigration and return migration have helped stabilize the population decline. For example, in 2023 the number of emigrants (about 22,000) was significantly lower than the number of immigrants (66,900) - giving a net migration gain of roughly 45,000 (Valstibes Duomenu Agentura, 2024).

2. Methodology

The research for this Report was conducted from November 2024 to May 2025. A **mixed methods approach** was employed, combining both primary and secondary research methodologies. Primary data collection included Focus Group Discussions ("FGDs"), a quantitative survey, insights from ParticipACTION in person events (Awareness Raising Interactive Seminars and National Roundtable), and Key Informant Interviews ("KII"). Secondary research involved a review of grey literature, academic articles, and reports from civil society organizations.

This section details the mixed-methods approach and methodology used for the various research phases, and gives an overview of participants' demographics.

2.1 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

The FGDs were designed to explore in greater depth the lived experiences, perceptions, and proposals of young people regarding civic and political participation. These discussions allowed participants to express their perspectives in their own words and engage in collective reflection, offering rich qualitative insights that complemented the findings of the desk review.

A total of 21 FGDs were carried out in the four partner countries by the respective organizations: 13 in Italy, 4 in France, 3 in Cyprus, and 1 in Lithuania. Across all countries, a consistently high level of engagement from girls and young women was observed (**65%**), highlighting strong female participation. The overall representation of TCNs youth was at **41%**. The sessions had an approximate duration of two hours and were audio-recorded when possible, accompanied with

written notes. Mixed and non-mixed FGDs in terms of nationality and country of origin were conducted with the selected participants aged 16-23.

The sessions were semi-structured and based on open-ended questions¹ that encourage peer reflection and personal storytelling, covering three themes:

- **Knowledge** of EU institutions and strategies
- **Participation** in civic or political life (e.g., voting, protests, volunteering)
- **Proposed solutions** to encourage solidarity and youth engagement.

2.2 Quantitative Survey

An online anonymous survey was conducted between December 2024 and February 2025 to investigate the level of awareness of youth on the EU, its institutions and policies among young people aged 16-23 residing in Cyprus, France, Italy and Lithuania.

Respondents were requested to answer a total of 20 questions:²

1. 4 **demographics questions** to disaggregate data at the analysis stage (gender, country of origin, country of residence, age)
2. 11 closed and open-ended questions on the topic of **awareness of European institutions, action plans, and strategies**
3. 4 closed and open-ended questions on their **participation in European civic democratic life**
4. 1 open-ended question on the topic of **solidarity** and the respondents' **personal experiences** with it

The survey could be completed in either the national language of the partner country or English to address potential language barriers of people with diverse backgrounds. Survey respondents were a total of 240 youth aged 16-23, of which 169 were female, 66 were male, 2 were non-binary and 3 preferred not to disclose their gender (Fig.A). While all respondents resided in EU countries, their countries of origin were very diverse: most respondents listed Italy (24%), France (12%), Cyprus (10%) and Lithuania (15%), while the remaining **39%** were either from other European countries or were **TCNs** originating from a diverse range of countries such as **Ukraine, Tunisia, Nigeria, Morocco, Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire**, and the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, among others (Fig. B). This may refer either to people born abroad who later moved to Europe, or to those born in Europe to parents of foreign origin.

¹ The full text of FGDs template can be found in Annex 1.

² The full text of the survey can be found in Annex 3.

other CSOs with expertise in youth engagement - in Italy (2), France (2), Cyprus (2) and Lithuania (2).

The primary aim of these interviews was to gather expert insights from **individuals working directly with young people**, in order to either confirm or challenge the findings that had emerged from FGDs and survey. The interviews explored the stakeholders' perspectives on the level of **knowledge young people possess regarding the three selected project themes** (Migration; Values, Rights, Rule of Law and Security; and Education, Culture, Youth and Sport) as well as their level of engagement in civic and democratic activities and potential barriers. Additionally, the discussions aimed to assess whether any noticeable **changes in these areas had been observed over recent years**. Interviews provided valuable context and contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of youth engagement across the four countries.

2.4 Insights from ParticipACTION Awareness Raising Interactive Seminars

From February to April 2025, consortium partners organized eight **Awareness Raising Interactive Seminars** (three in Italy, two in France, one in Cyprus and two in Lithuania) with a total of **148** young people aged 16-23 from diverse backgrounds attending the events (out of the 148, nine were consortium staff members, three from IRC Italy and two from PLACE Network, Generation for Change and Mano Europa respectively). Across all countries, a consistently high level of engagement from girls and young women was observed (**70%**), highlighting strong female participation. The overall representation of Third Country Nationals (TCNs) youth is at **33%**.

The seminars were organized using **a structured approach designed to engage young people in a participatory way**. The first part focused on a general introduction of the event and the presentation of the overall project and its goals. This was followed by an overview of the EU's institutions, core values, and the various opportunities available for youth participation. In the second part of the seminar, the five key themes of the ParticipACTION project - **Gender Equality; European Democracy; Values and Rights, Rule of Law, and Security; Migration; and Education, Culture, Youth and Sport** - were introduced through interactive and context-specific methods tailored for each group attending. Participants engaged in dynamic, hands-on activities such as individual and group work, role-playing, live scenarios, and debates, all designed to enhance active listening and foster meaningful dialogue. After in-depth discussions on each theme, participants were invited to vote on the three themes they considered most important for the project to focus on.

The most voted themes across the four countries were:

- **Migration**
- **Values, Rights, Rule of Law & Security**

● Education, Culture, Youth and Sport

Gender equality (cross-cutting focus across all themes)

These themes were selected to guide the overall project, and the National Roundtables (2.5) were built around them.

2.5 Insights from ParticipACTION National Roundtables

As part of the project's WP3, **seven national roundtables** were hosted in Italy (4), France (1), Cyprus (1) and Lithuania (1) featuring young people, both nationals and TCNs, and high-level stakeholders from both local and national levels to discuss the core three themes of the project (**Migration; Values, Rights, Rule of Law & Security; Education, Culture, Youth and Sport**). The Roundtables aimed to encourage participants to brainstorm ideas on how to improve youth engagement and knowledge on the selected themes. Participants were divided into thematic discussion tables, focusing on key topics such as youth participation and inclusive coexistence of differences. The discussions explored ways to enhance the participation of young people, particularly those from marginalised communities, and the challenges they face. These events brought together a total of 103 participants aged 16 to 23 from diverse backgrounds, alongside 47 key local and national stakeholders. Stakeholders represented migrant-led organisations, women-led organisations, youth-led organisations and local and national institutions. The roundtables were supported by 16 staff members from the consortium. Across all countries, a consistently high level of engagement from girls and women was observed, accounting for 61% of participants. This strong female presence highlights a positive trend in engagement. The overall representation of TCN youth reached 38%.

2.6 Desk Research

The sources used for compiling the desk research for each partner country consisted mostly of **grey literature provided by national and European institutions, academic articles, and policy documents**. The main factors considered when examining the obstacles hindering youth participation in civic and political life at a European level were **migratory background and gender**, including LGBTQIA+ background.

Each subsection of the desk research was guided by a set of dedicated research questions, which are available in Annex 2. The desk research was compiled in a standalone report, disseminated in April 2025, and available on the four partner organisations' websites. The insights from the desk research informed the design and implementation of the FGDs (Section 2.1) and Survey (Section 2.2).

2.7 Challenges and Limitations

Research on youth civic knowledge and participation in Italy, France, Cyprus and Lithuania - particularly among TCNs - presents several challenges and limitations unique to the **socio-political landscape** and **structural characteristics of the four countries**.

2.7.1 Desk Research Limitations

The main limitation of the desk research stage of the project was the **lack of existing data and academic literature** on the subject of youth civic engagement, especially in Italy and Cyprus among young people with a migratory background. This gap in knowledge constrained the volume of desk research and significantly limited opportunities for in-depth comparative analysis between the two target populations. Additionally, for Cyprus the ongoing political division of the island, commonly referred to as the Cyprus problem, often dominates public discourse and research agendas, and 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.

2.7.2 Primary Research Limitations

The primary research efforts were constrained by the **limited duration of the project** activities and relatively narrow age range of the target group. While the research has yielded interesting insights, these limitations underscore the need for continued, inclusive, and geographically balanced research efforts, with increased attention to intersectionality, linguistic diversity, and underrepresented youth voices.

2.7.2.1 Outreach and sample size limitations

Challenges were primarily linked to the recruitment of participants due to the relatively **limited time to conduct outreach and research activities** as well as difficulties in establishing effective engagement with schools and universities or other youth centers. Additionally, **finding times and days** convenient for all participants proved particularly challenging, especially during exam sessions. During these periods, participation rates dropped significantly, requiring some activities to be repeated in order to ensure that all interested individuals had the opportunity to take part in them. This added an extra layer of complexity to the planning and implementation phases. As a result of these programmatic challenges, the small sample size of FGDs and the survey limits the generalisability of findings.

2.7.2.2 Self-Selection Bias

A self-selection bias of participants applies to the primary research, as individuals already **engaged in previous EU projects and/or initiatives were more likely to learn about and thus take part in the ParticipACTION project**, as reflected in their prior experiences and expressed interests. To reduce this potential bias, staff made efforts to connect with more diverse groups of youth by targeted outreach at youth centers and schools; introduce the research topics through everyday,

local concerns and personal experiences, rather than relying on institutional language that might create further distance or alienation; when travel posed a barrier, central and easily accessible locations were chosen and, where possible, transport was provided. In the particular case of Lithuania ensuring adequate representation of TCNs was especially difficult. Despite targeted outreach efforts, including direct contact with schools and organizations that specifically work with TCN youth, engagement from these groups remained limited.

2.7.2.3 Language Barriers

Language barriers were addressed by offering respondents the possibility to **answer the survey either in English or in the national language** (Italian, French, Greek, or Lithuanian). This was also the case with the different activities of the project (FGDs, Awareness-Raising Interactive Seminars, National Roundtables). However, for participants whose native language was neither English nor the national language, engaging in discussions in a less familiar language may have limited the depth and quality of their interactions.

2.7.2.4 Geographic Focus

The geographic focus of the research also introduced potential bias. Since IRC Italia and Glocal Factory are headquartered in Milan and Verona respectively, much of the participant **recruitment and data collection regarding Italy was carried out in the northern part of the country**, with additional participants based in Parma and Turin. Similarly, as Generation for Change CY is based in Nicosia, much of the participant recruitment and data collection regarding Cyprus 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. For France, the geographic focus of the research was similarly influenced by the location of PLACE, which is based in Paris, as a result, most of the participants we were able to reach were young people from the Île-de-France region. Same for Mano Europa which involved participants for the research coming from Kaunas mainly. This disproportionate geographic representation limits the perspectives of youth from other regions and rural areas. These factors may have influenced the salience of certain themes in the findings.

3. Key Findings

The synthesis of desk research, FGDs, surveys, KIIs, Awareness Raising Interactive Seminars and the National Roundtables offers a detailed understanding of youth civic engagement in Italy, France, Cyprus and Lithuania, highlighting areas of **knowledge (3.1), participation (3.2), and existing barriers (3.3)**.

3.1. Knowledge

This section examines how young people in Italy, France, Cyprus and Lithuania **understand European institutions, policies, legislative actions, and strategies, as well as possible gaps in**

their knowledge and current attitudes toward the EU. It also explores the awareness of young people on **initiatives and opportunities for their active engagement at the EU** and national level. It relies on the latest data available, policy reports, academic studies as well as testimonials from the youth who joined the ParticipACTION events and findings from the ParticipACTION survey and FGDs.

3.1.1 Knowledge of European Institutions, Rule of Law and Fundamental Values of EU

Across Italy, Cyprus, France and Lithuania, data reveals significant gaps in young people's understanding of European institutions, rule of law, and EU fundamental values, which impedes their active participation in European civic life.

The ParticipACTION survey shows that a substantial portion of youth lack basic knowledge about the EU, with only a minority able to identify key institutions or grasp their roles. About **14%** of all respondents were **unable to name any EU institution, opportunity, or policy** when asked which ones they were familiar with, defined as being able to *somewhat confidently describe their role, duties, or content* within the EU. Among respondents who were able to identify at least one EU institution or initiative, the **Erasmus+ programme** emerged as the most widely recognized (**84%**), followed by the **European Parliament (70.5%)** and the **European Commission (45.9%)**. However, more than half (50.4%) of survey respondents across all countries did not know how the President of the European Commission or the European Parliament were appointed and 27% has just a vague idea. The **European Solidarity Corps** and the **European Youth Strategy 2019–2027/European Youth Goals** were the initiatives far less familiar, cited by only **17%** of respondents who were able to identify at least one initiative.

Furthermore, the survey registered a serious gap in young people's knowledge of the **core values of the EU**. A large majority of respondents (**66%**) reported being unaware of the EU's six fundamental values, while **23%** said they knew some of them and only **12%** stated that they were familiar with all six. Similar results were shown in relation to awareness of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights: a majority of respondents (**66%**) reported being unaware of the Charter, **14%** indicated they were somewhat familiar with it, and only **20%** stated that they knew about it.

This is also confirmed by the desk research conducted in the four countries: in **Italy**, according to a survey conducted with the support of the Europe for Citizens Program, between 27% and 40% of respondents in primary and secondary school and between 26% and 31% in higher education in several European countries had no information at all about the EU (Federazione Italiana Diritti Umani 2021). Furthermore, the *You(th) and the 2024 European elections: A survey to understand the concerns of young Europeans* showed that, when asked about their knowledge of the functions of European institutions, in particular the European Parliament, most respondents (aged 16-35 years old, half of whom were Italian citizens) showed uncertainty, with 21% of them admitting

they have no firm idea of what the European Parliament does (INDIRE/Erasmus Agency Italy, 2024).

As for **Cyprus**, the situation is similarly concerning. 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. The research findings of the ParticipACTION survey supports this: young people demonstrate limited awareness of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and key policies, such as gender equality, migration, and youth initiatives like Erasmus+. Whilst in the FGDs it emerged that Cypriot youth, alongside TCNs, often feel disconnected from EU affairs, viewing institutions as distant and irrelevant.

In **France**, young people show a similar trend: while institutions like the European Parliament and Erasmus+ are recognized, the understanding of their functions is limited. Moreover, significant gaps exist in knowledge about the European Court of Justice, the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and EU policies related to migration and youth, as evident from the survey. Although awareness of EU values such as liberty, equality, and democracy is somewhat higher, the depth of understanding remains shallow, with many young people unable to articulate how EU institutions impact their daily lives. Desk research confirms this mixed level of awareness, noting that while most young French people are aware of the EU's existence, their understanding of the specific roles and concrete impact of key institutions like the European Parliament, European Commission, and the Council of the European Union is limited. According to Eurobarometer 93, around 58% of young French people report a basic knowledge of EU institutions, but far fewer can explain their concrete impact on national policymaking (European Commission, 2021).

Lithuania's youth, while generally aware of EU institutions and strategies, face similar knowledge gaps. From the ParticipACTION survey emerges that though many recognize key institutions and programs like Erasmus+, few have a comprehensive understanding of EU values, rights, and democratic processes. Despite this, programs such as the EU Youth Strategy and the European Year of Youth have shown potential in raising awareness and fostering engagement. 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. However, even if a large portion of youth is aware of major EU strategies, there is a big lack of understanding these strategies and how they impact their life.

Across all countries, FGDs highlight a **general lack of accessible and meaningful civic education**, which leads to fragmented and superficial knowledge. In particular, **young people from marginalized communities** often lack even basic awareness of EU institutions, further contributing to a **sense of disconnection and disengagement**. In the four countries, this knowledge gap is exacerbated by inconsistent educational quality and teaching, where exposure to EU topics varies greatly depending on the teacher or institution. Stakeholders interviewed across these countries agree that fostering a deeper, more inclusive understanding of the EU through

early, comprehensive civic education and engagement is crucial to empowering young people to become informed, active participants in European democracy.

3.1.2 Knowledge of Opportunities for Active Engagement of Young People

Awareness and participation in EU initiatives among young people across Italy, Cyprus, Lithuania and France reflect a **fragmented landscape shaped by access to information, socio-economic factors, and the role of educational institutions**. While programs like Erasmus+ enjoy relatively high visibility, especially among students and those with higher education backgrounds, broader engagement with the EU remains limited and uneven.

As noted above, respondents to the ParticipACTION survey cite Erasmus + mobility programs as the EU initiative they are more familiar with. Moreover, when asked which opportunities to engage with the work of the EU they had heard of, respondents demonstrated uneven levels of awareness across different initiatives. A significant portion of respondents (**29.2%**) reported that **they had not heard of any of these opportunities** or were unsure of what they entailed. Among respondents who were able to identify at least one avenue, the most widely recognized opportunity was **visiting the European Parliament (76.5%)**, followed by **petitions to the European Parliament (47.1%)** and **contacting a Member of the European Parliament (36.5%)**. Awareness of youth-oriented events was notably lower: **27.1%** had heard of the **European Youth Event (EYE/EYE Online)**, **14.1%** were familiar with activities organized by the **European Parliament Liaison Office**, and **11.2%** knew of events promoted through **together.eu**. Only very few mentioned the **Charlemagne Youth Prize (10.6%)** or **Euroscola (1.2%)**.

In **Italy**, findings from ParticipACTION survey and FGDs confirm that many young people have a limited understanding of how to engage with the EU. The desk research further reveals that only 25.7% of young Italians 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. 55% of young people (15-30) in Italy confirms having heard of the Erasmus + initiatives, particularly Erasmus for students (18+ years old), slightly above the EU average of 49%. In contrast, awareness of other EU programs is significantly lower: only 9% had heard of DiscoverEU and 7% of the European Solidarity Corps. Young women are more likely to be aware of EU-funded opportunities for young people to stay in another EU country than their male peers and the higher young people's level of education, the more likely they are informed of Erasmus+ opportunities for students (European Commission, 2024).

These gaps in knowledge are echoed in FGDs, where participants often cited **universities and schools**, particularly individual professors, as their primary, if not sole, sources of information on EU initiatives. Those who had firsthand experience with EU programs, such as Erasmus+, generally reported a stronger sense of connection, trust, and belonging to the EU. However, the limited structural support for civic education in Italy hampers more widespread understanding.

Young women and individuals with higher educational attainment were more likely to be informed about mobility programs, underscoring the influence of both gender and educational background on access to EU opportunities.

A similar pattern is observed in **Cyprus**, where Erasmus+ mobility programs are also the most widely known and accessed EU initiative among youth. However, this does not necessarily translate into broader knowledge of other EU initiatives or a comprehensive understanding of civic engagement at the EU level. 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).

In **France**, deeper structural barriers further complicate youth engagement with EU programs. One key issue is the widespread misconception that EU initiatives are only accessible to EU citizens, discouraging many young people, particularly TCNs, from applying. Additionally, socio-economic background plays a significant role in shaping access to EU-related knowledge. Youth from higher socio-economic groups benefit from better civic education, cultural exposure and mobility, resulting in more favorable perceptions and higher levels of engagement. In contrast, marginalized youth face systemic obstacles: limited access to information, fewer engagement opportunities, and greater skepticism about institutional relevance. Stakeholders have emphasized that simply providing information is not enough; **structured engagement opportunities** and **direct exposure** are essential for fostering genuine participation, particularly among disadvantaged groups. Grassroots outreach and partnerships with local associations were identified as critical channels for reaching these populations.

In **Lithuania**, young people demonstrate a mixed pattern of awareness and engagement with EU level institutions and youth opportunities. Desk research for Lithuania reveals that while programmes such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps are reasonably well known among youth, many still report only limited understanding of the broader EU institutional framework and their opportunities for participation (Civitta, 2024). FGDs and surveys suggest that young Lithuanians often feel the EU is “distant and overly complex”, and that their ability to influence decision-making at European level is low, with enhanced challenges faced by TCNs. Schools and youth organisations may serve as the main hubs of information, but structural civic education remains underdelivered. Access to EU mobility programmes appears higher among those with greater educational attainment and from urban settings, reinforcing internal disparities in youth engagement.

Across all four countries, the evidence points to a shared conclusion: **while programs like Erasmus+ have achieved strong visibility, overall awareness and broader engagement of EU youth opportunities is limited and unevenly distributed**. Education systems, social networks, and proactive outreach efforts play a decisive role in shaping young people's understanding and engagement. To foster inclusive and effective youth participation at the EU level, strategies must

go beyond visibility and address **structural inequalities in access, perception, and trust, particularly for marginalized groups**, including TCNs and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

3.2 Participation

This section examines how young people in Italy, France, Cyprus and Lithuania **engage in forms of active participation in civic and democratic life at the EU and national level**. It relies on the latest data available, policy reports, academic studies as well as testimonials from the youth who joined the ParticipACTION events and findings from the ParticipACTION survey.

When respondents to the ParticipACTION survey were asked to select all the **activities in which they had taken part over the last twelve months**, **23%** of the total respondents reported that they had **not engaged in any** of the listed forms of participation (among the following options: *participated in a protest or boycott; ran for office; reached out to a representative – by email, phone call, etc.; took part in a political campaign; used social media to post, share, or create content about a political issue they cared about; volunteered abroad or in EU projects; volunteered at a local organization; voted in the last local, national, or European election; other*). Among those who did participate, the most common activity was **using social media to post, share, or create content** related to political or social issues, selected by **45%** of respondents. This suggests that digital platforms continue to play a central role in how young people express opinions and engage with public debates. Other frequently mentioned forms of participation included **volunteering at a local organization** and **voting in the last local, national, or European election** (both at **36.3%**), as well as **participating in protests or boycotts (35.8%)**. In contrast, **more formal or structured forms of political involvement** were far less common: only **3.8%** reported taking part in a political campaign, and **2.9%** had **run for office**.

Moreover, most young people think there are not enough online opportunities to participate and engage in civic and political action in the EU. When asked “*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?*”, respondents expressed generally mixed but overall critical views. Most participants selected the midpoint of the scale (**43.5% chose 3**), indicating a neutral stance toward the adequacy of online participation opportunities. However, a considerable share (**40%**) rated the situation as poor (**1 or 2**), suggesting that many young people feel that existing digital spaces for civic and political engagement are **limited or insufficient**. Only **16.5%** of respondents (**4 or 5**) believed there are **enough or extensive online opportunities** available.

These findings highlight a clear preference among young people for **informal and issue-based engagement** over traditional political participation, now analysed in detail in the following sections. While many are active online or in community settings, relatively few are directly involved in institutional political processes, reflecting a broader trend across Europe toward alternative and less hierarchical forms of civic engagement.

3.2.1 Voting, Parties and Representative Structures

Across Italy, France, Cyprus, and Lithuania, young people's engagement with voting, political parties, and representative structures reveals a deep and consistent trend: traditional forms of political participation, particularly voting, are increasingly perceived as ineffective, outdated, or inaccessible. While there is no shortage of political awareness or interest among youth, their participation in formal democratic processes remains low, influenced by distrust in political systems, lack of representation, inadequate civic education, and structural or legal barriers.

In **Italy**, youth voter turnout remains among the lowest in the EU. **In the 2024 European Parliament elections, 54.1% of Italians aged 18–27 abstained from voting** - the highest abstention rate among all age groups (Ipsos, 2024). Discussions with young Italians confirmed a widespread sense of detachment, with participants citing a lack of ideological clarity in politics, polarization of discourse, and the belief that voting has little tangible impact. Many expressed frustration over a political landscape where older generations dominate decision-making, leaving younger voices unheard. These sentiments are reinforced by data on political representation: only 6 out of 76 Italian candidates aged 18–35 were elected in the 2024 EU elections, and constitutional age limits - 25 to run for the Chamber of Deputies and 40 for the Senate - restrict young people's ability to represent their peers in Italian parliament. There are also no legal quotas or incentives to promote youth candidacy, further marginalizing young Italians within representative institutions.

At the same time, Italy has established mechanisms aimed at supporting youth participation. The **National Youth Council** (Consiglio Nazionale Giovani, CNG), established by Law 145/2018, is Italy's main advisory and representative body for youth, promoting their participation in civil and political life. It is composed of youth associations with at least 300 members, 70% of whom are under 36, and replaced the National Youth Forum in 2019. The Council provides opinions on government legislation, prepares studies on youth conditions, and facilitates dialogue to overcome barriers to participation. It also contributes to strategic documents like the National Youth Plan 2025 and represents Italian youth interests in European institutions through the European Youth Forum.

Similar patterns of disillusionment are evident in **France**, where young people, despite expressing higher-than-average support for the EU, continue to show limited engagement in electoral politics. However, in France, youth engagement in European elections showed a notable shift in 2024: voter turnout among French citizens aged 18–24 in the 2024 European elections reached **53%**, reflecting a significant increase compared to previous elections of around 30% (Ipsos, 2024b). Alongside this, young people are increasingly active in **non-conventional forms of engagement**, such as activism, protests, and volunteering, avenues they perceive as more direct and impactful than traditional party politics. This trend suggests that political interest among French youth remains strong, but is increasingly **channeled through alternative forms of participation** that are seen as more responsive and meaningful.

To support youth participation and representation, France has established the **Conseil National de la Jeunesse** by Décret n°2013-1355 of 30 December 2013, which reorganized youth representation bodies and formalized youth participation in public decision-making. It is France's main advisory body for youth, composed of national youth associations and acting as a liaison between young people and public authorities. It provides opinions on government policies affecting youth, participates in formal consultations, and promotes civic engagement. The CNJ also organizes thematic committees and projects to strengthen youth participation in political and social life.

In **Cyprus**, traditional political participation is similarly met with skepticism, particularly among young men and TCNs. ParticipACTION survey and FGDs findings show that a **significant number of young people have never engaged in civic or political activities, and none reported ever reaching out to a political representative**, highlighting a profound disconnect from institutions. Trust in politicians and political parties is low, and many young Cypriots, especially TCNs, feel that their voices are systematically ignored. However, a notable policy shift, the lowering of the voting age to 17, to be implemented in the 2028 parliamentary elections, was met with cautious optimism by youth participants, signaling that institutional reforms could help rebuild trust if paired with meaningful outreach and inclusion.

Cypriot youth also exhibit **ambivalence toward the EU**. Only 17% believe the EU significantly impacts their daily lives, well below the EU average of 25% (Eurobarometer, 2024). This skepticism is often linked to broader political issues, such as the island's division and frustration over the lack of progress. The election of influencer Fidias Panayiotou as an MEP in 2024 further illustrates young people's growing disillusionment with established political parties. His candidacy sparked controversy among FGDs participants, who questioned his qualifications and saw his election as a sign of protest rather than genuine political endorsement. Despite these challenges, **voter turnout in Cyprus for the election of EU Parliament reached 58.86% in 2024** - up from 44.99% in 2019 - though intention to vote among youth remained below the EU27 average.

In terms of youth representative bodies, the **Youth Board of Cyprus** is a government-established body that coordinates registered youth associations and promotes initiatives for civic, cultural, and social participation. It provides recommendations to policymakers and supports local youth projects. Unlike Italy's CNG, it operates primarily as a state agency rather than an independent network of associations. The Youth Board of Cyprus was established under the Youth Board of Cyprus Law (Νόμος 142(I)/1993).

In **Lithuania**, FGDs revealed that many 16–17-year-olds would be willing to vote if allowed, indicating a latent interest in political participation. However, among those who were eligible, actual voter turnout was low. The reasons cited included lack of interest, uncertainty about political preferences, and, notably, insufficient education to understand political systems or make informed choices. This knowledge gap underscores the broader issue of civic education, or the lack thereof, as a barrier to youth participation, not only in Lithuania but across all four countries studied.

Quantitative data support these findings: studies show that **age strongly influences voter abstention** in Lithuania. For the 18–24 age group, the probability of not voting is estimated at around **31%**, nearly double that of older cohorts (Danilevičius & Gudžinskas, 2024). Increasing age appears to have a positive relationship with voter turnout as younger generations are continuously more likely to abstain from elections. Analyses also suggest that higher educational attainment correlates positively with voter turnout: young people with low or medium levels of education are significantly more likely to abstain compared to those with higher education. Socio-economic status further compounds these disparities, as individuals from upper or lower-grade service classes vote more frequently than those from working-class backgrounds. By contrast, **gender differences** appear statistically insignificant, with no clear patterns distinguishing male and female participation rates (Danilevičius & Gudžinskas, 2024). According to the Eurobarometer survey, there was a particularly low turnout in Lithuania among young people for the election of the European Parliament in 2024 (12% for the age group 15-24 and 25% among 25-39) (European Commission, 2024c). Among the reasons, in the younger age group, Lithuania show the lowest levels of distrust, suggesting higher levels of faith in political institutions or processes among young people in these countries (Lavizzari, 2025).

At the institutional level, youth representation and engagement are supported through the **Lithuanian Youth Council (LiJOT)** which represents youth organizations at the national level and facilitates dialogue between young people and government institutions. It advises on youth policies, coordinates national initiatives, and promotes active civic and political participation. LiJOT is also a member of the European Youth Forum, linking Lithuanian youth with broader European networks. It was established under the Law on Youth Policy (2003, with subsequent amendments), which defines youth associations and mechanisms for consultation with government institutions.

Taken together, these findings point to a **shared European challenge**: young people are not disengaged from politics, but they are increasingly disengaged from traditional political systems they view as unresponsive, unrepresentative, and ill-suited to their priorities. A 2024 report commissioned by the European Union–Council of Europe Youth Partnership found that in general across Europe youth turnout has historically lagged behind older age groups. While overall participation saw a decline compared to 2019, falling by **6% among voters aged 15–24** and by **1% among those aged 25–39**, many young Europeans remain **actively engaged through alternative forms of participation**, from protests to digital activism (Lavizzari, 2025).

Education continues to play a decisive role: **72%** of respondents with post-secondary education said they voted, compared to **55%** of those with only secondary education or less (European Commission, 2024). At the same time, the European political landscape is becoming increasingly **polarised among youth voters**. While many young people continue to support progressive or green parties, a growing share has turned to far-right movements. Analysts (Azmanova, 2024) link this trend to overlapping crises, the lingering economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising

living and housing costs, inflation, energy insecurity, and growing mental health concerns. The war in Ukraine and heightened geopolitical instability have further deepened young Europeans' sense of vulnerability, especially in Eastern Europe. These combined pressures are fuelling a stronger appetite for **radical political alternatives**, both on the left and right, signalling an evolving and complex terrain for youth engagement in European politics (Lavizzari, 2025).

Despite these challenges, the outlook is not entirely pessimistic. **Post-election Eurobarometer data** show that **68% of young people aged 15–24** and **66% of those aged 25–39** remain optimistic about the future of the EU, indicating that hope, rather than apathy, defines much of their political outlook (European Commission, 2024c). Encouragingly, evidence from countries such as **Austria, Malta, Germany, and Belgium**, which have **lowered the voting age**, suggests that early enfranchisement can foster **lifelong political engagement**, especially when paired with comprehensive civic education and youth-oriented outreach (Lavizzari, 2025).

Enhancing youth **representation in political decision-making** is equally crucial. Increasing the presence of young candidates on party lists and in elected office can inject new perspectives into policy debates and ensure that long-term decisions reflect the interests of future generations. As young Europeans continue to confront economic precarity, the climate crisis, and rising social inequality, understanding what drives, or deters, them from political participation is essential for building more inclusive and responsive democracies (Lavizzari, 2025).

Ultimately, **while structural reforms, such as lowering voting ages or expanding access to candidacy, may help, they must be accompanied by improved civic education, more inclusive representation, and alternative pathways for engagement.** Without these efforts, the generational divide in political participation may continue to widen, weakening the democratic legitimacy and responsiveness of both national and European institutions.

3.2.2 Youth Engagement: Evolving Practices and Diverse Expressions

Across Italy, France, Cyprus, and Lithuania, young people are **actively engaging in civic and political life through a variety of non-electoral means**, even as traditional forms of participation, such as voting or contacting elected officials, remain less prevalent among many. While electoral participation still holds weight, alternative and more flexible forms of activism are becoming increasingly prominent.

As found in the ParticipACTION survey, in **Italy**, youth engagement often manifests through protest (34%), social media (31%), and volunteering (21%). The 2024 Eurobarometer found that over half of Italian youth had taken some form of civic action to create societal change, with causes such as climate change, equal rights, and human rights leading the way (Bonini 2024). Similarly, the ParticipACTION survey showed that in **France**, 65% of respondents reported engaging with political content on social media and half had participated in protests or boycotts. Only a minority had contacted politicians or run for office. In **Cyprus** and **Lithuania**, young people tend to lean toward cause-based advocacy, whether related to global issues such as the invasion of Ukraine or

domestic injustices, though in both countries, overall levels of participation remain modest, especially in traditional political spaces.

A notable trend across all countries is the **disparity in civic engagement among young people from migrant backgrounds**, who often participate at lower rates, hindered by barriers such as language, lack of information, legal insecurity, or social exclusion (see Section 3.3). In Italy, for example, youth with migrant backgrounds are significantly less politically active than their native peers (69.2 vs 45.8%, respectively), and as, a consequence, less active in terms of political engagement (30.3% among youths of foreign origin vs 51.3% among natives) and political participation (1.5 vs 14.5%) (Riniolo, 2021). However, one notable observation stemming from the FGDs in Italy is that Italian nationals tended to have greater knowledge about the EU and European institutions overall, but showed lower levels of informal political engagement, with limited involvement in activism or participation. In contrast, TCNs had on average more limited knowledge, yet displayed a deeper sense of political and civic consciousness, as certain issues affected them more directly. Participants noted that both cultural background and country of origin significantly influence these dynamics. Levels of participation and the nature of obstacles vary widely among different communities. This is confirmed also by secondary research: a broader analysis (Gatti, Buonomo & Strozza, 2021) confirms that political engagement among immigrants in Italy varies significantly by country of origin, reflecting cultural, social, and structural differences.

In terms of forms of informal political participation, some youth see **protests** as essential, while others feel disillusioned or fearful, especially among TCNs, who may face legal risks or police violence. In this context, protests related to intercommunal conflict often dominate public space, pushing other causes into the margins.

Boycotts are gaining prominence as a low-risk yet symbolically powerful form of engagement. In **Cyprus, Italy and France**, many participants actively boycotted companies linked to Israel's treatment of Palestinians or protested fast fashion due to labor exploitation and environmental harm. However, identifying targets for boycotts can be challenging due to opaque corporate ownership and branding.

Volunteering emerges as a consistently valued form of civic engagement across all four countries. In Lithuania, youth were heavily involved in NGOs and student unions. In Cyprus, Italy, and France, youth participated in volunteering through ecological work, aid to vulnerable communities, or cultural initiatives. These activities were often enabled or sustained by social connections, starting with friends or being encouraged by schools or family networks. In France, initiatives like the **Service Civique** was identified as effective mechanisms for strengthening youth civic identity and participation.

3.2.2.1 The Role of Social Media: Catalyst and Constraint

Social media plays a complex and highly ambivalent role in youth political engagement. On the one hand, it is an accessible, low-barrier platform for raising awareness, expressing solidarity, and

disseminating information. Across all countries, significant numbers of youth use platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to share political messages or follow activism-related content. In Italy over 30% of ParticipACTION survey respondents reported using social media as a political tool, in Cyprus and in Lithuania this percentage was the 42% and in France, engagement with political content reached 65%. In Lithuania, many youth considered "liking" or "sharing" posts a valid form of participation, while others questioned the depth and impact of such actions.

Concerns about the superficial nature of online political discourse are widely shared. Youth from all four countries noted that social media often functions within ideological echo chambers, lacks opportunities for genuine debate, and may reinforce pre-existing beliefs. The pressure to perform, the spread of disinformation, and the emotionally charged nature of algorithmic content were also cited as significant drawbacks.

One stakeholder interview revealed that the trend of informal information gathering, developed during the COVID-19 pandemic amongst youth through social media like Youtube, TikTok, and Instagram persist. Interestingly, the youth possessed a sense of 'hopelessness' that from the stakeholder's perspective is accredited to the pandemic which inhibits the youth's ability to physically mobilize in person.

Still, social media remains a key enabler, particularly in contexts where formal avenues are inaccessible or unwelcoming. For marginalized youth, digital platforms offer an alternative route to visibility, connection, and agency.

3.2.3 Motivations: From Personal Values to Political Awakening

The motivations driving youth civic participation are wide-ranging and span from personal experiences and emotional needs to community solidarity and broader ideological convictions. In **Italy** and **France**, young people often cite a **desire to contribute to societal improvement**, develop personally, or engage in meaningful discussions with like-minded peers. Many are motivated by values such as solidarity, justice, and equality.

In **Cyprus**, youth motivations reflected **three interrelated levels: personal (micro), interpersonal (meso), and ideological (macro)**. Personal struggles or identity-based reflections often drive youth to act out of empathy or healing, while encouragement from teachers, families, or communities acts as a strong interpersonal catalyst. On the ideological level, political dissatisfaction, ranging from the situation in Palestine to experiences of authoritarianism in countries of origin, fuels activism and solidarity-based efforts. Notably, in both Italy and Cyprus, geopolitical events such as the Israel-Palestine conflict have served as political awakening moments, especially among youth from Egypt or Western Asian countries, but also among the Italian or Cypriot community.

In **Lithuania**, youth activism is frequently driven by peer networks or educational institutions, indicating that formal outreach from institutions is less impactful than grassroots encouragement.

Yet, across countries, a common barrier remains: many young people feel unsure where to start or lack knowledge about available opportunities, particularly at the EU level.

3.2.4 Challenges and the Way Forward

Despite the wide spectrum of participation methods, many challenges remain. Structural barriers - such as limited awareness of opportunities, legal insecurity for first- or second-generation migrants, or a lack of institutional support - continue to inhibit broader engagement, as described in Section 3.3.

There is a growing call across countries for **more structured, long-term civic engagement pathways that go beyond single events or digital gestures**. Programs like Erasmus+ mobility programs or the European Youth Event have shown promise in fostering deeper involvement, but **knowledge gaps regarding opportunities for active participation for young people remain a significant hurdle**. Stakeholders in multiple countries emphasized the need for early civic education, better access to local opportunities, and more inclusive spaces for all youth, especially those from marginalized communities.

In conclusion, while traditional political engagement among European youth may be declining or shifting, non-electoral forms of advocacy - from protests and boycotts to volunteering and digital activism - are flourishing in new and dynamic ways. These practices, though varied in form and intensity, reflect a generation deeply attuned to justice, solidarity, and social change.

3.3 Barriers

Numerous barriers consistently limit young people's ability and willingness to engage civically and politically in Cyprus, France, Italy and Lithuania and in general in the EU, particularly among marginalized groups. Many young people express willingness to contribute but feel overwhelmed by the multitude of causes or discouraged by a perceived lack of impact.

3.3.1 Legal and Systemic Barriers

Across Italy, France, Cyprus, and Lithuania, legal frameworks and citizenship requirements remain central obstacles for youth political participation, particularly for TCNs. In **Italy**, naturalization requires ten years of residence plus additional years for processing, leaving both first- and second-generation migrants excluded from voting or running for office. **France** imposes a five-year residence requirement (reducible to two under special conditions), along with language, integration, and economic criteria, yet young TCNs remain excluded from national and EU elections until naturalized. In **Cyprus**, barriers are even more severe: residence requirements were extended from five to eight years, asylum-seeker years do not count, and many applications remain in backlog. **Lithuania's** framework is more inclusive at the local level, where permanent residents can vote and stand as candidates in municipal elections, but national-level participation is limited to citizens. Naturalization requires ten years of permanent residence, proof of livelihood, language and constitutional knowledge, and usually renunciation of prior citizenship, leaving many young

TCNs unable to participate in parliamentary or presidential elections. Collectively, these restrictions reinforce democratic exclusion for long-term residents.

3.3.2 Economic and Material Barriers

Economic hardship shapes youth participation across countries. In terms of economic barriers affecting youth participation more broadly, the financial burden of accessing higher education significantly limits young people’s knowledge of Italy’s civic and political systems, which in turn reduces their engagement. This is especially true for TCN youth, many of whom face added responsibilities. These pressures often force them to prioritize work and immediate priorities over education and civic involvement, making it even harder to access opportunities that foster political awareness and participation. In **Italy**, financial pressures force many, especially migrants, to prioritize work over civic life (Riniolo, 2020). In **France**, participation is often perceived as a “luxury,” with administrative complexity, travel expenses, and lack of compensation discouraging engagement (Civic Space Report 2025). **Cyprus** further restricts economic participation through highly regulated labor market access: asylum seekers must wait nine months to work and are limited to low-skilled jobs, while only highly paid, “skilled” migrants gain accelerated paths to residence (ECRE, 2024).

Economic limitations also restrict young people’s ability to participate in mobility programs, which have been shown to enhance both knowledge of and sense of connection to the EU. A recent study in Italy investigated the various reasons respondents gave for not participating in learning mobility programs, specifically in response to the question: “Is there a more specific reason for not engaging with Erasmus?” Among the key reasons cited were family restrictions and financial concerns, with some students mentioning strict parental rules or the perceived high costs of the program (INDIRE/Erasmus Agency Italy, 2024). This is also the case for their possibility to participate in mobility programs. **Lack of financial means is also the most commonly cited barrier by young people to participating to activities in another EU countries** for surveyed youth in all four countries, mentioned by **37% of respondents in Italy, 35% in Lithuania, 39% in France and Cyprus** respectively (European Commission, 2024a).

Limited funding for outreach and inclusion initiatives for CSOs working in this field compounds these barriers across all countries.

3.3.3 Linguistic and Informational Barriers

Language barriers pose significant challenges to civic and political participation in all four countries, particularly for TCNs. These barriers affect access not only to citizenship, but also to education, everyday social life, and as a result meaningful civic engagement.

Language requirements and lack of accessible information limit meaningful civic engagement. In **Italy** weak adaptation of political communication to non-native speakers discourages involvement. In **France** and **Lithuania**, bureaucratic and inaccessible language in EU communication alienates youth, especially those outside academic or policy circles. **Cyprus** presents acute linguistic

divides: although both Greek and Turkish are official languages, Greek dominates, sidelining Turkish and excluding many migrants from education and public services.

Limited English proficiency is another language barrier that can affect youth particularly when it comes to participating in EU-wide initiatives and projects. Many of these opportunities require knowledge of English or other foreign languages, which not all young people possess. In fact, **12% of surveyed youth in Italy, 7% in Cyprus, 19% in France and 18% in Lithuania** reported that insufficient **foreign language skills were the main reason they did not participate in activities in other EU MSs** (European Commission, 2024a)

3.3.4 Discrimination and Structural Inequalities

In all four countries, systemic discrimination against migrants and ethnic minorities is prevalent, particularly in areas like employment, housing, and access to public services. These **structural inequalities indirectly, but powerfully, impact their ability to participate in the democratic process**. For young migrants and racialized youth, these challenges are especially acute, shaping their everyday experiences and long-term civic engagement.

In Italy, migrants and minorities face exclusion in employment, housing, and public services, leading to segregation and invisibility in political life (MIPEX, 2020). France's minority youth encounter legal barriers, racism, and gendered expectations; Muslim women are disproportionately affected by the 2004 ban on religious symbols in schools (European Network Against Racism, 2016). Cyprus combines structural and cultural exclusion: Greek and Turkish Cypriots are locked in mutual distrust, while migrants are scapegoated through xenophobic narratives, including conspiracy theories about demographic "replacement" (Clever, 2024). Lithuania's non-native populations report systemic exclusion and low scores on equal opportunity, particularly in rural or low-income communities.

3.3.5 Identity, Euroscepticism, and Perceptions of the EU

Youth across the four countries often view the **EU as distant, bureaucratic, and irrelevant to their daily lives**. In Italy, Euroscepticism is rising, with many perceiving the EU as an abstract, "grey" institution. **Migrant youth struggle with layered identities**: not fully accepted as Italian, they also find it harder to identify as European, often experiencing racial or religious exclusion. Youth in FGDs mentioned that many times their sense of exclusion was closely tied to visible markers of differences, such as skin color or religious expression. In France, similar sentiments of disconnection are fueled by inaccessible information and a lack of representation. Lithuanian youth express interest but possess shallow knowledge of EU politics, hindered by inadequate civic education. These perceptions weaken motivation to engage in EU-level democratic processes.

A shared barrier is the **widespread mistrust of institutions and feelings of disempowerment** that particularly emerged from ParticipACTION FGDs. Youth often believe decisions are controlled by elites and express little trust in national or EU institutions. This is also confirmed by

secondary research: in **Italy**, about one in four young people (24%) believe that the world's most important decisions are controlled by a small and secret group of individuals (Italia Generativa, 2023). Among those who chose not to vote to elections of the European Parliament in 2024, the reasons most often cited were **a general disinterest in politics (19%)** and the **belief that voting will not bring meaningful change (19%)**, followed by **distrust in political systems (17%)** and the **perception that the EU does not address issues relevant to their lives (16%)**. While gender differences remain limited, young women are slightly more likely than men to report disinterest in politics. (Lavizzari, 2025). In **Cyprus**, hate speech and nationalist rhetoric deepen polarization, while in **Lithuania**, youth often feel their participation is symbolic, without tangible impact. Across all countries, **polarization, misinformation, and weak civic education provide fertile ground for populist narratives** that exploit frustrations, turning apathy into active rejection of liberal democracy. In the absence of a strong civic education and inclusive spaces for political dialogue, these narratives can go unchallenged, especially in online spaces where misinformation spreads quickly, as demonstrated by DEMOS European study (2022) that found that students with stronger civic education are less likely to adopt populist attitudes. As populist rhetoric grows, it often undermines democratic norms by delegitimizing dissent and concentrating power in the hands of charismatic leaders and populist parties capitalize on the youth frustrations.

These findings underscore the need for **targeted civic education and outreach** to reconnect disillusioned or indifferent young voters with democratic institutions. Moreover, youth during ParticipACTION events expressed the importance of bringing visibility to the lived experiences of those with migratory backgrounds in the public discourse, and the need for a cultural shift towards inclusivity where individuals are open to hearing differing perspectives and can debate respectfully.

4. Cross-cutting themes

Across Italy, France, Cyprus, and Lithuania, young people face recurring challenges in accessing civic and political life. These cross-cutting issues reveal how systemic, cultural, and institutional factors interact to limit participation, particularly for those from marginalized backgrounds. The themes below highlight common barriers and opportunities across national contexts.

4.1 Civic Education and Access to Information

In all four countries, civic education emerges as a decisive factor shaping youth engagement. In Italy, many young people lack youth-friendly information about the EU and describe civic education as fragmented, inconsistent, and overly formal. French youth echo these concerns, noting that embedding EU-related topics in school curricula would strengthen both understanding and confidence. In Cyprus school practices often undermine inclusion, with politicized curricula, insufficient language support, and religious expectations framing minority groups as outsiders. Lithuanian youth also point to shortcomings: while civic education exists formally, it remains

theoretical and disconnected from real-world experience, leaving young people with shallow knowledge about institutions. Where civic education is delivered through interactive, practical, and inclusive methods, youth report stronger engagement and motivation to participate.

4.2 Identity, Exclusion, and Belonging

Feelings of exclusion from both national and European identities are widely reported. Italian youth with migratory backgrounds often struggle for recognition as citizens, reinforcing alienation from a broader European identity. In France, social inequalities - such as racism, discrimination, and gendered expectations - reinforce marginalization, leaving many minority youth feeling “less European.” In Cyprus, TCN youth are nearly invisible in public discourse, which continues to focus on intercommunal conflict and migration-as-threat narratives. This lack of institutional recognition fuels dissatisfaction and erodes trust. Lithuanian youth from rural, low-income, or migrant backgrounds also report symbolic rather than meaningful participation, often feeling that their voices are overlooked. Across contexts, the failure to recognize diverse identities undermines belonging and engagement.

4.3 Trust in Institutions and Representation

Distrust in political and institutional structures is a consistent barrier. Italian youth frequently describe democratic processes as ineffective and political discourse as unclear, with little space for genuine dialogue. In France, marginalized groups report skepticism toward institutions they perceive as opaque or unresponsive, with some describing experiences of “administrative violence.” Cypriot youth highlight a disconnect between institutional outreach and their evolving forms of engagement: traditional opportunities such as youth councils often target a narrow group of already-active individuals, leaving others excluded. Lithuanian youth echo this frustration, noting that participation often feels symbolic, with little evidence that input influences policymaking. The lack of diverse representation across all contexts further weakens legitimacy, reinforcing feelings of invisibility among underrepresented groups such as TCNs, women, and LGBTQI+ youth.

4.4 Shifting Forms of Civic Engagement

Amid declining trust in formal institutions, many young people are turning to informal, community-driven forms of participation. In Italy, youth increasingly favor online activism, volunteering, and creative initiatives as more authentic and accessible channels. In France, a generational shift is evident, with young people from diverse backgrounds using digital activism to challenge traditional power structures. Cypriot youth are similarly moving toward digital activism and issue-based mobilization, such as environmental justice, though these efforts remain under-recognized by institutions. In Lithuania, youth demonstrate strong engagement in NGOs and volunteering, yet low participation in voting and formal politics. These patterns reflect a broader shift toward participatory practices that feel meaningful, immediate, and relevant, but which lack systematic institutional support.

4.5 Toward Inclusive Participation

Across all countries, young people consistently call for more inclusive, responsive, and empowering participation. In Italy, youth demand that their voices be taken seriously in shaping policies, with participatory mechanisms that go beyond tokenistic consultation. French participants stress the need for inclusive policies that reflect the realities of diverse youth, particularly migrant-origin and minority groups. Cypriot youth call for recognition of diversity and institutional reforms that respond to the island's multicultural reality. Lithuanian youth emphasize the need for inclusive civic education, stronger recognition of youth-led initiatives, and policymaking processes that validate their contributions. Collectively, these perspectives underscore a shared aspiration: a civic and political life where youth voices are not only heard but have real influence.

5. Recommendations

When asked *“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?”*, respondents identified several key priorities. The most frequently selected option was **increasing civic education opportunities across all educational levels (71.3%)**, highlighting a widespread belief that participation begins with knowledge, awareness, and access to information about democratic processes. This was followed by **organizing cultural events and festivals (60.0%)** and **financing local engagement activities (56.7%)**, both reflecting the importance of creating accessible, community-based spaces for youth involvement and social connection. A considerable share of respondents also emphasized the need for **stronger social media campaigns (42.5%)** and **greater protection for the right to protest (39.6%)**, pointing to young people's desire for visibility, expression, and the safeguarding of democratic freedoms. Meanwhile, **broadening electoral eligibility (22.9%)** and other innovative ideas (5.4%) were less frequently mentioned but still signal interest in institutional reforms and inclusivity measures, especially relevant for third-country nationals.

Overall, these responses suggest that young people view participation as a **multifaceted process** that requires both **education and empowerment**, as well as **spaces, online and offline, where their voices can be heard and valued**.

The following recommendations summarize the outcomes of youth discussions during the ParticipACTION **Transnational Workshop in Verona (WP4)** and the subsequent **online Transnational Workshops (WP5)**. The recommendations were initially brainstormed in WP4 and then further refined and finalized across the four transnational workshops. These recommendations are intended to **enhance young people's participation in decision-making and policy processes at the European level**.

During the Transnational Workshop in Verona, participants engaged in thematic group discussions aimed at identifying ways to enhance civic and democratic participation among young people from diverse backgrounds, with a particular focus on TCNs.

In the group on *Education, Culture, Youth and Sport*, a shared set of challenges emerged: outdated or poorly tested education systems, a lack of critical thinking in curricula, and chronic underfunding of schools. Participants emphasized the need for structural reforms and greater youth involvement in policymaking. Among the proposed solutions was a call for the EU to allocate dedicated funds not only to education but also to monitoring their use, reducing territorial inequalities, and expanding scholarships. The group also stressed the importance of combating the stigma surrounding vocational education and promoting the use of arts, music, and sports as tools for inclusion and intercultural dialogue.

In the group focused on *Values and Rights, Rule of Law and Security*, discussions highlighted common issues such as misinformation, corruption, slow judicial processes, and widespread institutional racism, particularly within police forces. Participants proposed targeted interventions including the creation of accountability mechanisms for public officials and mandatory sensitivity training for key professional categories such as teachers and police officers. They also underlined the need to strengthen civic education from early schooling, focusing on fundamental values, diversity, and democratic participation. Additional recommendations included organizing “human libraries” to encourage dialogue among people from different backgrounds and promoting media literacy as a key strategy to counter disinformation.

Finally, in the *Migration* group, participants strongly advocated for the harmonization of European laws regarding reception, residence permits, and citizenship. The proposals called for a unified legal framework that simplifies and makes these processes more transparent, along with continent-wide awareness campaigns to foster integration and solidarity between citizens and migrants. Participants also emphasized the need to ensure that migrants receive clear information about their rights and that non-governmental organizations are given greater freedom to provide assistance. A further key recommendation was to invest in intercultural education and training for those working with migrants, as empathy and mutual understanding were seen as essential foundations for building a more cohesive and participatory society.

During the online Transnational Workshop (WP5), participating youth, both those who attended the Verona session and additional online participants, worked alongside project staff, external stakeholders, and advocacy advisors to further refine the recommendations across the three project themes. While the majority of these recommendations are aimed at national ministries, they are also relevant and applicable at the EU level.

A. Migration

- 1. National Ministries of Equal Opportunities should, by 2028, establish Youth Migrant Advisory Councils in each Member State, composed of young migrants and refugees, to co-create youth and migration-related policies. These councils should meet at least twice per year, and their recommendations should be publicly reported and integrated into national youth strategies.*
- 2. National Ministries of Education should, by 2028, include migration, identity, and belonging modules in secondary school curricula to promote empathy and social inclusion. Schools should also organise annual storytelling initiatives, such as sharing migrant and refugee experiences on International Migrants Day (18 December), to foster understanding and reduce stereotypes.*
- 3. National Ministries of Interior should, by 2028, adopt and promote Ius Scholae or equivalent legal frameworks granting citizenship to young people who have completed a full cycle of schooling in the country, enabling their full participation in society.*
- 4. National Ministries of Culture should, by 2028, increase funding for cultural inclusion initiatives by at least 20%, supporting local cultural associations, language-learning programmes, and intercultural school activities. Funding should prioritise projects that bring together young migrants and local youth and include voluntary cultural orientation courses for those wishing to better understand their host country's culture.*
- 5. Municipalities, in cooperation with civil society organisations, should, by 2028, create regular intercultural learning and exchange opportunities between third-country national youth and local communities. These should include community roundtables, cultural festivals, sports, and food-based events, with at least 30% of activities in rural areas, fostering empathy, dialogue, and a sense of belonging.*
- 6. National Ministries of Culture, together with youth agencies and civil society, should, by 2028, provide targeted outreach and material support, including travel funding and local engagement opportunities, to ensure inclusion of young people from modest or migrant backgrounds in cultural and civic initiatives. They should also establish annual European Youth Camps bringing together European and non-European youth, ensuring at least 40% of participants come from underrepresented groups.*
- 7. The EU Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM) should, by 2028, fund and co-design decentralised, youth-friendly communication initiatives with local and migrant-led organisations. These should include authentic, multilingual campaigns on platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and Telegram, and support local influencers to reach 20% more youth from marginalised backgrounds within three years.*

B. Education, Culture, Youth and Sport

- 1. National Ministries of Education, together with local education authorities, should, by 2028, ensure that all schools establish or strengthen student councils and provide training for student representatives to engage effectively with institutions. Teachers should be supported to foster youth leadership through meaningful student roles and responsibilities, with regular seminars between schools and local authorities to build civic engagement skills.*
- 2. National Ministries of Education and Youth should, by 2028, ensure that all students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can participate in international and European school trips involving cultural and sports activities. Participation should increase by at least 20% within three years, supported by pre- and post-trip workshops to promote inclusion and intercultural understanding.*
- 3. National Ministries of Education should, by 2028, revise civic education curricula to include current political issues, EU decision-making, and national governance, balancing theory with experiential learning such as youth assemblies, student councils, and real-world simulations. Partnerships with NGOs and policymakers should support long-term civic engagement projects, especially in remote and underrepresented schools.*
- 4. National Ministries of Education and NGOs should, by 2028, establish long-term civic engagement programmes within schools through appointed Civic Engagement Coordinators. These should promote participation in initiatives like Youth Parliaments and Youth Councils and collaborate with traditional and digital media to expand awareness and participation across all regions.*
- 5. Donors, businesses, and philanthropic foundations should, by 2028, support mentorship and leadership programmes that inspire young people to broaden their vision for the future - especially in sports, education, and culture. These programmes should include guidance networks involving teachers, parents, and counsellors to provide long-term support for youth aspirations.*
- 6. National Ministries of Education, Culture, and Health should, by 2028, create dedicated funds to expand awareness of European and national youth opportunities, such as Erasmus+ and youth exchanges. They should strengthen partnerships with NGOs, sports associations, and cultural organisations to organise workshops and dialogue spaces that connect young people to available opportunities.*

C. Values, Rights, Rule of Law and Security

- 1. National Ministries of Education, in partnership with judicial bodies and civil society, should, by 2028, mandate teacher training on social inclusion and implement age-appropriate curricula on civic engagement, equality, and social justice from early childhood to secondary level. Learning should combine formal education and non-formal methods, such as online forums, human libraries, and peer discussions.*
- 2. National Ministries of Education, Youth, Sports, and Culture should, by 2028, implement comprehensive media literacy programmes to help young people critically assess information and counter disinformation. Initiatives should include interactive workshops, video campaigns, and educational websites, and be developed in partnership with media agencies and civil society organisations.*
- 3. National Ministries of Youth, Sports, and Culture, in collaboration with NGOs and local authorities, should, by 2028, create and support inclusive platforms for youth participation in policymaking - such as surveys, roundtables, municipal consultations, and school or university councils - through public grants and Erasmus-supported training opportunities.*
- 4. National Ministries of Youth, Sports, and Culture, in collaboration with national parliaments and educational institutions, should, by 2028, establish Youth Parliaments (ages 16–30) as formal, representative bodies allowing young people to debate, propose, and monitor policies on issues that affect them. Youth Parliaments should be inclusive and publicly promoted across digital and traditional media.*
- 5. National Ministries of Justice and Interior, by 2028, should develop youth-led awareness and peer education campaigns promoting tolerance, civic responsibility, and respect for human rights. These initiatives should involve young activists, local schools, and NGOs, and be integrated into community outreach programmes to strengthen trust in democratic institutions.*

6. Conclusion

The ParticipACTION Joint Assessment Report underscores both the promise and the challenges of youth civic engagement across Italy, France, Cyprus, and Lithuania. Despite clear enthusiasm and growing awareness among young people, significant structural and cultural barriers continue to constrain their participation in democratic life, especially among Third Country Nationals (TCNs) and marginalized groups.

The findings confirm that while young Europeans express a strong commitment to justice, equality, and social change, their knowledge of EU institutions, rights, and participation mechanisms remains uneven. Educational systems often fail to deliver consistent civic education, leaving gaps that are filled, only partially, by informal or digital sources. As a result, social media has become both a key enabler and a limiting arena - offering visibility and connection, yet frequently reinforcing polarization and superficial engagement.

At the same time, the project revealed inspiring patterns of resilience and innovation. Many young people are redefining what civic participation means: moving beyond formal politics to embrace community volunteering, digital activism, intercultural dialogue, and advocacy for human rights. These emerging forms of engagement suggest a shift from institutionalized participation toward more fluid, issue-driven, and values-based involvement.

To sustain this momentum, national governments, EU institutions, and civil society must act jointly to build **inclusive, long-term pathways for youth participation**. This requires early civic education, stronger support for youth-led and migrant-led initiatives, and meaningful mechanisms for young people to influence decisions at every level of governance. Crucially, engagement opportunities must extend beyond major cities and reach underrepresented communities, ensuring that participation is not a privilege but a right accessible to all.

The ParticipACTION project demonstrates that Europe's democratic renewal depends on investing in its youth, not only as future leaders but as present-day agents of change. By fostering inclusive, informed, and empowered participation, the EU and its Member States can bridge the gap between ideals and action, turning civic engagement into a shared foundation for a more cohesive, democratic, and resilient Europe.

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Annex 1: FGDs Reporting Template

This document provides the template for reporting Focus Group Discussion (FGD) findings across partners. It details the essential technical information to be included and organizes sections for participant responses, key findings, and notable quotes. To ensure clarity and conciseness, we recommend that the final report does not exceed 4-5 pages per conducted focus group. Consequently, if 3 focus groups have been conducted, the total length of the document will range between 12 to 15 pages.

Focus Group Details

- Location the FGD took place in:
- Date:
- Participant Profile: (age range, gender, and nationality proportion)
- Facilitator(s) name and brief profile of facilitator:
- Notekeeping/Recording method:

Section 1: Level of Awareness

- Do you know which EU institutions exist?
Are you aware of any EU strategies/plans that focus on promoting the democratic and civic participation of young people?

Section 2: Participation

- How would you describe your level of civic/political participation? Have you ever voted, been a candidate, taken part in protests, boycotts, or volunteered with a local organization? Why not / How was it?

Section 3: Participant–proposed solutions

- What do you think the EU/State/Organizations working with young people do to encourage solidarity and participation among young people?
- What do you think would help you/encourage you and your friends to participate/engage with institutions/increase solidarity?

Section 4: Other relevant findings/insights: If present, report here relevant findings/insights that emerged during the FGDs that do not necessarily fit into the above categories.

Section 5: Standout Quotes: Feel free to insert standout quotes from participants on the aforementioned topics or other interesting insights here.

Annex 2: 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, etc) and levels of awareness and knowledge (or lack thereof) of political, civic, and solidarity mechanism 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 policy making.
- 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 TCN's 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 3: Survey Questions

Demographic Questions

- **What is your age?**
 - Between 16 and 19 years old
 - Between 20 and 23 years old
- **What gender do you identify as?**
 - Female
 - Male
 - 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?**

Knowledge Questions

1. Which of the following European Union institutions, opportunities and policies are you familiar with? By “know” we mean that you feel you can describe their role, functions, or content with some confidence. Options Include:

- European Commission
- European Parliament
- EU 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

Answer Selection Key (Along with Listing Which Institutions, Opportunities, and Policies)

- I don't know of any
- I know one
- I know of two
- I know of three
- I know four of them
- I know five of them
- I know six of them
- I know seven of them
- I know eight of them

2. Listed below are some ways to participate in EU activities. Which, if any, are you familiar with? Options Include:

- Petitions to the European Parliament
- Opportunities to visit the European Parliament
- Events organized by the European Parliament Liaison Office
- European Youth Event (EYE) / EYE Online
- Online events or activities organized by together.eu
- Charlemagne Youth Prize
- Euroscola

Answer Selection Key (Along with Listing Which EU Activities)

- I don't know of any
- I know one
- I know of two
- I know of three
- I know four of them

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

- Yes
- No
- Partially

4. Do you know the six core values of the European Union?

- Yes
- No
- Some

If you answered “Yes” or “Some,” try pointing to some of them

- Answers that include *human dignity*
- Answers that include *freedom*
- Answers that include *democracy*
- Answers that include *equality*
- Answers that include *rule or law*
- Answers that include *human rights*

5. Are you familiar with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights?

- Yes
- No
- Partially



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Open-Ended Questions

6. Are you aware of recent EU developments, policies or decisions related to migration? How do they impact your national/local context?
7. Are you familiar with EU initiatives, policies, or plans to promote Education, Culture, Youth and Sports? What impact do they have in your national/local context?
8. How do you think the EU or your state can promote the civic and political participation of young people (EU and non-EU citizens) at the local, national and European level?
9. In your opinion, how could your country or the EU support you in expressing acts of solidarity with the most vulnerable people in your daily life?
10. On a scale of 1 to 5, do you think there are enough online opportunities to participate in civic and political actions in the EU?
11. Indicate the activities in which you participated in the past year (12 months). If you did, who or what inspired you to get involved civically or politically in your community or to express solidarity with others?