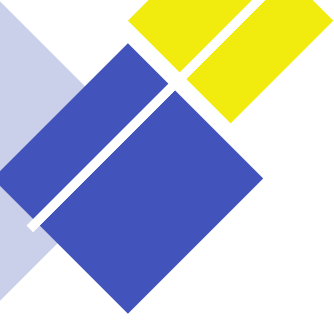


# GUIDE WITH PARTICIPATORY TOOLS *for active citizenship*



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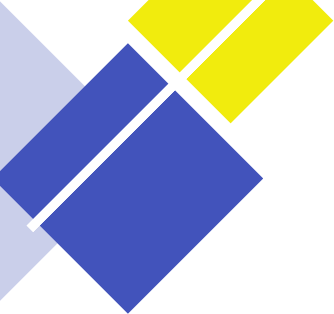




Version 1, November 2023  
Produced by the FECE team  
Contributions from the project partners

Project Make Your Vote!  
CERV-2022-CITIZENS-CIV-101081335

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*“Every citizen shall have the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union. Decisions shall be taken as openly and as closely as possible to the citizen”*

Art. 10 TEU

# ABSTRACT

The project *Make Your Vote!* aims to raise awareness of the common EU values, encourage the participation of young people and first-time voters in Europe’s democratic life as well as to engage, connect and empower young Europeans to be active citizens and to contribute to the creation of more peaceful, inclusive, and resilient societies.

This guide with participatory tools for active citizenship has been created in the context of the CONNECT: International Skills Training, a 5-day international training that took place in the period 6-10 November 2023 in Sofia, Bulgaria. The training aimed to strengthen young people’s voice in decision-making by raising necessary skills and creating innovative tools for the young people to effectively participate in public and civic life.



# INTRODUCTION TO PARTICIPATION

The European Union (EU) is a modern representative democracy governed by its Treaties (TEU, TFEU), core values, institutions and citizens.

On 1 November 1993, under the Treaty of Maastricht, citizens of all Member States achieved a new legal status as citizens of the European Union.

According to the EU, if you are a citizen of an EU country, you enjoy EU citizenship by definition and have the right to actively take part and participate in the political life of the Union.

This status of an eligible citizen allows for the use of certain participatory rights to have your voice heard within the European arena.



According to Art. 10 (1) 'TEU, the functioning of the Union is founded on representative democracy, meaning that citizens are directly represented by the Members of the European Parliament they have voted for in European elections which take place every five years'.



# THE EU CITIZENSHIP STATUS OFFERS FOUR SECTIONS OF POLITICAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS:

- 01 to move, reside and work freely within any EU country
- 02 to be protected by the diplomatic authorities of any Member State when outside the EU
- 03 to vote and stand for election at the local and EU levels in any Member State
- 04 to participate in the legislative process of the EU by, for example, petitioning the European Parliament and organising/supporting a European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)



# FORMS OF PARTICIPATION

There are various ways, forms (traditional and alternative) and participatory tools to have your voice heard in the European arena.

## Traditional forms

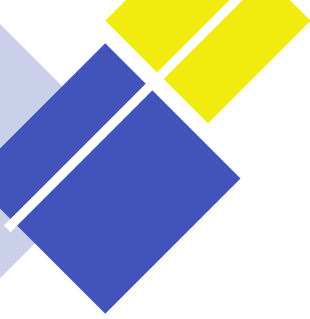
refer to involvement in a representative democracy

- Voting
- Standing for elections
- Joining a political party or a Trade Union
- Joining Youth Councils and/or youth NGOs.

## Alternative forms

refer to any form of participation other than the traditional forms.

- Campaign movements and youth activism, volunteering, especially based around single issues or causes that allow young people to express their identity as part of a youth movement;
- Participation which extensively utilises digital tools and spaces;
- Youth activism which changes the way public spaces are used, for example, opening a community café.
- Innovative approaches to involving young people in policy-making or implementation (co-production and co-management, where young people and decision-makers share responsibility for creating or running something);
- Deliberative democracy projects, where young people work collaboratively with policymakers to create new ideas



Alternative forms of participation have become popular among young people. More and more young citizens wish to be informed about the EU and how it influences their lives; thus, young people are seeking new and alternative forms of civic engagement and civil participation in the democratic life of their communities.

Originating in the 2000s, e-participation, smart participation or digital participation mostly refers to the use of ICT in facilitating citizen's participation in public life and decision and policy making. So, digital participation refers to the use of the Internet, social media and digital technologies and platforms to enhance young people's participation in democratic life.

There are different ways on how digital participation can enhance active youth participation, some are:

- Information channels through which young people can access information that supports their active participation. These include news sources, information about political debates online;
- A communication channel through which young people can communicate with one another and exchange important information about participation;
- A virtual space in which youth participation activities can take place and where virtual communities can form.

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So, let us explore the various forms and (new) participatory tools for active youth participation!

**23%**

*In 2022, only 23% of young people used the internet for civic or political participation*



# FORMS AND TOOLS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION

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

European Youth Strategy

The young people that participated in the CONNECT: International Skills Training, identified traditional and alternative forms of active youth participation and their positive and negative sides.

## Traditional forms of participation

Voting  
Signals  
Petitions  
Political campaigns  
Complaints  
Membership in a political party or Trade Union  
Formal consultations  
European Youth Council

### PROS

- Provides framework and resources
- Dialogue and interaction
- Attracting media attention
- More access to decision-making

### CONS

- Less adaptive
- Not close to the interests of young people
- Bureaucracy
- Lack of digital process





# TRADITIONAL TOOLS FOR PARTICIPATION

**Signals:** If you see something wrong on the street in your community at a local, regional or national level, you can file a signal to the relevant authorities or institutions. Signals go directly to the responsible officials in your municipality or other institution.

You can send signals about different issues, such as improperly parked cars, air pollution, lack of street lighting, dangerous trees and branches and other pressing matters in the urban environment.

**Petition:** Is one of the fundamental rights of European citizens; any citizen, acting individually or jointly with others, may at any time exercise his right to petition to the European Parliament under Article 227 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Any citizen of the EU, resident of a Member State or company, organisation or association with headquarters in the EU, can individually or in association with others, submit a petition to the European Parliament.

The petition may present an individual request, a complaint or observation concerning the application of EU law or an appeal to the European Parliament to adopt a position on a specific matter.

[www.petiport.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.petiport.europarl.europa.eu)

**Complaint:** If you are not happy with an EU-related measure (law, regulation or administrative action), absence of measure or practice by a country in the EU, you can submit a formal complaint. You have to describe how you believe that the national authorities have breached Union law, and which is the law that is infringed.

If you consider that the European Commission has not dealt with your request properly, you can consider filing a complaint to the European Ombudsman, offering an online form in the 24 official treaty languages.

[www.ombudsman.europa.eu](http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu)

**(Formal) Consultations:** Citizens can contribute to public consultations and various feedback mechanisms when the European Commission is preparing a new policy or policy changes. This is a great opportunity to get involved in the decision-making processes at an early stage. You can register to be notified when a consultation regarding an issue of interest to you is launched.

<http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice>



# TRADITIONAL TOOLS FOR PARTICIPATION

**Interactions:** You can also interact with the EU institutions, bodies and agencies through social media channels. In addition to formal channels, now the European Commission presents its work through various widely-used social media channels to inform, consult, discuss and interact with EU citizens. For an overview of available channels, visit.

[https://commission.europa.eu/law/contribute-law-making\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/law/contribute-law-making_en)

**Problem advice:** If your EU rights as a citizen or as a business entity are breached by public authorities in another EU country and you have not yet taken your case to court, then you can approach the SOLVIT problem-solving mechanism provided by the European Commission. This is a mainly an online service in 24 languages that handles problems that occurred due to the improper application of EU law by national authorities within the EU Member States.

<http://ec.europa.eu/solvit>

**Citizens' Initiative:** The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) allows you to have a greater say in the policies that affect your life, by allowing around 1 million EU citizens to ask the European Commission to implement a certain policy in areas under their competence.

To be considered by the European Commission, an ECI must be backed by at least 1 million EU citizens within one year of registration from at least 7 of the 28 Member States and managed by a citizen committee.

Signatures must be certified by the competent authorities in each Member State and can be collected online. After successfully fulfilling the requirements, the Commission will meet with the organisers to then present their idea at a public hearing in the European Parliament in order to get a final answer from the Commission. Therefore, the ECI can be considered a pre-legislative instrument for agenda setting.

<http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative>



# ALTERNATIVE TOOLS FOR PARTICIPATION

*“The youth can mobilize and create a stir that often leads to transformative political change.”*  
Nelson Mandela

Alternative (innovative) forms of participation

Social media  
Performative protests  
Boycotting  
Procotting  
Volunteering  
Donating  
Sit-ins

## PROS

- Possibility to reach more young people
- Express oneself better and quicker
- More cooperation
- More people can donate to a specific cause
- More awareness
- Diverse cause to support

## CONS

- Traffic in terms of data
- Possibility of online violence
- Vandalism
- Fake news
- Hate speech and cyberbullying
- Requires more funding
- Polarization
- Ageism



# ALTERNATIVE TOOLS FOR PARTICIPATION

Based on the listed alternative/innovative forms of participation, participants in the CONNECT: International Skills Training created their own, innovative, e-participatory and smart participation tools.

Divided in groups they proposed new ideas and digital tools for active participation.

## Participatory tool #1

### *Social Media*

**Format:** Digital platform

**Hashtags:** #makeyouthvote, #activeyouthcitizens

**Purpose:** A social media with special profiles of active European youth

**Target groups:** Young people and disadvantaged groups

#### **Functionalities:**

- **Videos:** Showing educational and participatory videos of active European youth and their active citizenship initiatives;
- **Tools:** Exploring traditional and innovative tools for active participation showed in an innovative ways, through online talks, chats and videos
- **Podcasts:** Raising awareness about vulnerable groups through storytelling, experience based podcasts to motivate other young people to participate actively in decision-making processes and in policy creation.
- Connecting people using hashtags, testimonies, creating online campaigns and initiatives;
- Fundraising through shared activities and crowdfunding for innovative projects;
- Gathering of feedback and testimonies through evaluation forms;
- Creating umbrella social media platforms for more sustainability.



# ALTERNATIVE TOOLS FOR PARTICIPATION

## Participatory tool #2

### *Street campaigns/Youth activism and volunteering*

**Format:** Mobile application

**Hashtag:** #volunteerEU, #ActiveyEUth,

**Purpose:** A mobile application tackling topics of interest of young Europeans and diverse volunteering opportunities and initiatives across Europe.

**Target group:** Students, young people and young people with fewer opportunities, and it aims to deliver different workshops and flash mobs.

#### **Functionalities:**

- **Research and identifying:** Exploring topics of interest of young people through surveying and needs analysis;
- Promoting **civil education in schools;**
- **Topic-based debates:** Setting up dates for debates with representatives of institutions, both offline and online, inviting stakeholders and MEPs to discuss policy reforms, and drafting of proposals and recommendations.
- **Factsheets** on what the EU does in specific policy area, such as:
- **Climate action:** The EU is taking action in response to changes in the earth's climate, in particular the rise in global temperatures due to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions caused by human activity.
- **Food waste:** Saving food and investing in new technologies for producing sustainable products
- **Youth:** Giving young people more equal opportunities in education and the job market
- **LGBTIQ:** Protecting the rights of vulnerable groups and minorities and promoting actions against discrimination.



# ALTERNATIVE TOOLS FOR PARTICIPATION

## Participatory tool #3

### *Performative protests and sit-ins*

**Format:** Website

**Hashtag:** #peaceprotestmatters, #Youthruletheworld

**Purpose:** To organise live concerts with famous performers to raise awareness on important youth topics together with a digital platform to collect data about protests all over Europe where young activists can join.

**Target group:** Young people, young activists, artists, musicians and performers

#### **Functionalities:**

- Mapping of European hot spots and hot topics: Identifying places of activism activities and topics of interest of young people;
- Creating of an online platform to track youth activism campaigns and peaceful protests across Europe;
- Creating profiles of active youth, sharing of testimonies and storytelling on active youth campaigns;
- Organising live performance and concerts to promote young people's views and interests across Europe;
- Drafting proposals and recommendations for policy reforms;
- Drafting of protest protocols.



# ALTERNATIVE TOOLS FOR PARTICIPATION

## Participatory tool #4

### *EUcottapp (Boycotting/Procotting\*\*)*

**Format:** Mobile application

**Hashtag:** #EUCOTTAPP

**Purpose:** To help young people support or boycott certain causes

**Target group:** Young people, influencers

#### **Functionalities:**

- **Self-assessment:** Reflection about personal shopping and consumption habits.
- **User access:** Barcode scans and users can upload information about products, quality certificates, sourcing materials, trade law.
- **(User) progress:** Comparison of previous and current habits, comparison of habits with other users, tracking of brand progress.
- **Database:** Providing data about brands, return policy, customer rights, use of particular materials, sustainability, suppliers, transport
- **Whistling:** Information about greenwash, law violations, forced and child labour, information about ongoing protests, petitions, consultations, indirect actions, problem advice and code of conduct on protests.

*\*Procotting: To choose, either as an individual or group, using, buying, or dealing with someone or some organisation as an expression of support.*

*\*Boycotting: A boycott is an act of nonviolent, voluntary abstention from a product, person, organisation, or country as an expression of protest.*



# ALTERNATIVE TOOLS FOR PARTICIPATION

## Participatory tool #5

### *Active Citizen Label (Donations/fundraising)*

**Format:** Website

**Hashtag:** #ActiEUcitizenlabel

**Purpose: Website with** To acquire an “Active citizen label” to support funding of initiatives and projects of active citizens.

**Target group:** NGOs, CSOs, young people, citizens

#### **Functionalities:**

- Database of projects and initiatives of stakeholders and active young people;
- European Youth Councils: Successful projects to be ranked by a committee of young people and stakeholders;
- Ranking from 0 to 10, threshold: 7
- Acquiring an “Active citizen label” and receiving funding for innovative and creative projects that promote active citizenship initiatives across the EU.
- Exchange of good practices and





# ALTERNATIVE TOOLS FOR PARTICIPATION

## Participatory tool #6

### *Virtual Mobility for Young People*

**Format:** Digital platform/website

**Hashtag:** #virtualvoicerecorder, #myvoiceisnowheard!

**Purpose:** To organise a virtual mobility project to discuss important topics for young people and propose ways to have young people's voice heard in decision-making, with the participation of policy and decision-makers.

**Target group:** Young people, NGOs, CSOs

#### **Functionalities:**

- Every two weeks of a month to hold a virtual mobility project;
- Each project has a certain topic of interest to young people;
- Each virtual mobility lasts up to three days;
- Each virtual mobility includes a discussion with a policy-maker at a local, national or European level;
- Website to gather all the discussed topics and the created recommendations;
- Facilitating learning through exchange of ideas on actions and initiatives.



# ZNOSIS US CL NC NZ CO C

Empowering young people to participate in decision-making stands as a cornerstone for active, vibrant and inclusive societies. Fostering active youth participation and ensuring young people's voices are heard at decision-making levels holds immense significance. This endeavor not only strengthens democracy but also enriches the quality and relevance of the policies that directly impact the lives of young people.

Youth participation in decision-making is important for various reasons. Firstly, active participation provides fresh perspectives and innovative ideas for policy-making through the vision and needs of the younger generations. Their unique experiences, diverse backgrounds, and forward-looking outlook serve as invaluable assets in creating policies that resonate with the evolving needs of our societies.

Creating efficient tools for active youth participation requires a multifaceted approach. First, it demands the establishment of accessible digital platforms that encourage open dialogue and discussions between young people and policymakers. These platforms could take various offline and online forms, such as physical meetings and consultations with youth councils to digital forums and social media campaigns, ensuring inclusivity and diversity of viewpoints.

The utilisation of technology and digital tools catalyses amplifying youth participation. Online platforms, mobile applications, and social media channels provide arenas for continuous engagement and active participation, enabling young people to voice their concerns, propose solutions and recommendations, and collaborate with policymakers on a broader scale. Furthermore, financial support, mentorship programmes, civic education, and capacity-building activities aimed at NGOs can further enhance young people's ability to engage meaningfully in shaping policies that affect their lives directly.

In conclusion, the potential of youth participation in the decision-making process requires the active engagement of different actors and institutions. By creating digital platforms, integrating new interactive participatory tools and ensuring the direct involvement of young people in policy-making, a safe environment can be created where young people's voices are heard, valued and acted upon.



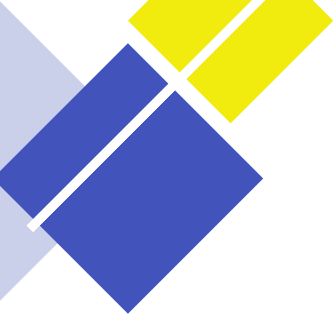
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Version 1, November 2023

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Sofia, Bulgaria 2023



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