DEMOCRACY INTERNATIONAL

MEHR DEMOKRATIE

Gefördert durch die bpb: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung

FORUM 2000

DSJ FSPJ FSPG

SCHU MAN

BSV

SWISS DEMOCRACY FOUNDATION SCHWEIZER DEMOKRATIE STIFTUNG

OFAJ DFJW Office Franco-Allemand pour la Jeunesse / Deutsch-Französisches Jugendwerk

Bundes Jugend Vertretung

Service Civique Européen

FRIDAYS FOR FUTURE Oberhausen

YOUTH DEMOCRACY HANDBOOK

Co-funded by the European Union

This material is a result of the project Democracy Camp 2023 - Democracy, sustainability and intersectionality, funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or Erasmus + JUGEND. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 DEMOCRACY CAMP
- Structure
- Methods

02 PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

03 DIRECT DEMOCRACY

04 PRACTICING PARTICIPATION

05 YOUTH PARTICIPATION
- Informing
- Engaging

06 DEMOCRACY FOR SUSTAINABILITY

07 INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

08 TOOLS OF ACTION
- And how can young people get involved?

09 NEXT STEPS

01 DEMOCRACY CAMP

What forms of youth participation exist in Europe? Which of them work well and why? While various developments cast a bad light on the state of democracy in Europe, the Democracy Camp wants to highlight the positive achievements. Far from negative headlines, many new forms of democratic participation are emerging across Europe and deserve to be better known and spread by and for young people.

It is important to emphasise that young people themselves know best how they want to participate democratically and shape sustainability, diversity, intersectionality and the Future of Europe. Thus, it is crucial to make opportunities visible for young people so that they can exchange, collect best practices and contribute to improvements across national borders.

The Democracy Camp provides the necessary tools for this. The initiative creates an international project on the democratic participation of young people with a focus how to use democracy to foster sustainable and inclusive societies. The concept of the 2023 Camp was a cooperative effort between Democracy International e.V. (DE), Mehr Demokratie e.V. (DE), Dachverband Schweizer Jugendparlamente (CH), and partners from all participating countries.

The Camp was funded by the European Union, the Swiss Democracy Foundation, the Franco-German Youth Office and the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung.

The project complements the existing offers of political participation and fills a gap: Best practices of youth participation for sustainability and inclusion explicitly by young people for young people in a multilateral exchange.

Structure

From 13 to 17 September 2023, more than 50 young people aged between 15 and 25 residing in six different EU countries gathered in Vallendar, a small town in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany, to take part in the Democracy Camp.

The English-language and free of charge event brought together participants from Switzerland, Poland, Austria, Czech Republic, France and Germany, who are involved or interested in democracy and citizen participation. They are members of youth parliaments and councils, youth parties, youth organisations, active in the political field, or simply want to become active citizens.

The participants were accompanied by a group of invited experts who stand out for their experience in the topics of the programme: The European Union, its democracy, climate protection, inclusive societies and spaces of participation for all. Bursting social filter bubbles, attention was paid to diverse backgrounds of the team and participants.

The Democracy Camp provided an exchange platform on democratic youth participation from the local to the international level by promoting democratic activities such as: meetings with decision-makers and youth representatives, interactive workshops with experienced trainers and input on EU institutions and tools.

In this 5-day programme, the participants shared ideas on how to improve youth participation mechanisms. They also explored the European and global system. In this way the Camp ensured that young people can adequately influence all areas and levels of the decision-making process.

Methods

The Democracy Camp combined digital and in-person informal education methods. Tools such as Zoom, WhatsApp, Google Forms and shared drives were used during the preparation meeting and during the exchange. They supported participants in collecting results independently and to record them in the long run. During the digital preparation meeting, we also collected ideas for inclusive techniques or activities. The use of digital methods strengthens the media competence of the participants beyond the end of the project.

The inspiration for the informal learning methodology is based on the belief that young people have and should have the autonomy to debate their political opinions and demands for a more sustainable and egalitarian society within the European Union. We believe that informal and democratic spaces for exchange encourage broader participation, the development of a collective responsibility, critical thinking and more active participation in politics.

The Democracy Camp was designed to give participants this autonomy. They did not only share their ideas during discussions, but also featured as hosts of workshops and activities such as the World Café or skill workshops.

THE ACTIVITIES INCLUDED:

World Café
- Democratic initiatives from youth in the partner countries.

Workshops
- Public speaking
- Climate change simulator
- School participation
- LGBTQIA+ rights and intersectionality
- European elections and mobility
- Direct democracy in Germany

Visit to UN Bonn
- Guided visit to the UN Campus and discussion about the SDGs

Study case of an European Citizens' Initiative

In line with these perspectives and methods, the following material is a compilation of reflections and recommendations on promising strategies and instruments available to young Europeans to foster a more sustainable and inclusive society.

02 PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Participatory democracy is a form of democracy in which citizens actively participate in decision-making processes beyond elections, rather than simply choosing representatives to make decisions on their behalf. In a participatory democracy, individuals have the opportunity to influence and shape policies, laws, and other aspects of governance. This involvement can take various forms, including attending public meetings, participating in discussions, proposing initiatives, engaging in community-based decision-making, and joining a citizens' assembly.

The key principle behind participatory democracy is the belief that all citizens should play an active role in the decisions that affect their lives. Participatory democracy aims to foster a more inclusive involvement of citizens in the political process, promoting transparency, accountability, and a sense of civic engagement. Various models and approaches to participatory democracy exist, and the extent of citizen participation can vary depending on the specific system or context.

Contrary to direct democracy mechanisms where e.g. citizen-led ballot initiatives are legally binding and replace, e.g a decision in the city council, participatory democracy often gives citizens a more consultative and deliberative role in the policy-making process.

Participatory democracy tools:

Public Consultations: The European Commission often conducts public consultations to gather input from citizens, businesses, and other stakeholders on proposed policies and legislation. These consultations provide a platform for direct input from the public. Access to open and recently closed consultations can be found at Public consultations and other consultation activities.

Online Participation Platforms: The EU has developed online platforms and tools to facilitate communication and engagement with citizens. These platforms may include forums, surveys, and other interactive features to gather feedback on specific topics. Some examples:

- EU Feedback is a platform where citizens can provide feedback on existing EU laws and regulations. It allows individuals to share their experiences and opinions on how EU policies affect them. Access at EU Feedback - Have your say.

- Eurobarometer is a series of public opinion surveys conducted regularly by the European Commission. Some surveys are conducted online, providing insights into public attitudes toward various EU policies. Access at Eurobarometer.

Civil Dialogue Groups: The European Commission engages with civil society through various advisory and consultation groups. These groups bring together representatives from different sectors to discuss specific issues and provide input on proposed policies. Access at Civil dialogue group.

Youth Empowerment through Education: The EU places a strong emphasis on education as a means of promoting civic engagement. Initiatives like the Erasmus+ programme not only facilitate educational exchanges but also promote cross-cultural understanding and active citizenship among young Europeans. The programme in the years 2021-2027 focuses on promoting young people's participation, social inclusion, and the green and digital transitions. More information at Erasmus+ 2021-2027.

European Youth Dialogue: Is a process and platform that facilitates communication and exchange between young people and decision-makers in the European Union (EU). It involves structured consultations and discussions that aims to involve young people on various topics, enabling them to express their views, concerns, and suggestions directly to policymakers. These themes can range from education and employment to social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and more. It also allows for a broad and inclusive representation of young people from various backgrounds. Access at EU Youth Dialogue.

03 DIRECT DEMOCRACY

In a democracy, the power lies with the people. That is why the people must have the right to complement representative structures on the local, regional, national and transnational level, beyond elections. Binding citizens' initiatives and bottom-up ballot initiatives triggering a referendum are already filling the gaps in political representation and give citizens more opportunity to play an active role in decision-making processes in many EU contries. Even in a representative democracy as is primarily the case in the EU, there are mechanisms that allow for a degree of direct democracy and citizen engagement at all levels.

The EU is also home to the first-ever transnational tool of direct democracy: **The European Citizens' Initiative!**

Direct democracy tools and practices can vary across countries. All partners of the Democracy Camp offer direct democratic opportunities for their citizens at different levels. Some examples: France has a semi-presidential representative democratic system, and referendums can be called for constitutional matters. Switzerland is known for its extensive use of referendums at both the federal and cantonal levels.countries. All partners of the Democracy Camp offer direct democratic opportunities for their citizens at different levels. Some examples: France has a semi-presidential representative democratic system, and referendums can be called for constitutional matters. Switzerland is known for its extensive use of bottom-up, citizen-led referendums at both the federal and cantonal levels.

The participants of the Democracy Camp identified several promising and often already existing participation tools and formats.

One example of direct democracy tool at EU level:

European Citizens' Initiative (ECI): The ECI is a mechanism that allows EU citizens to directly participate in the development of EU policies. If a citizens' initiative collects 1 million signatures from citizens in seven EU countries, the European Commission is obliged to respond to citizens' policy proposal. Organisers of the ECI can make their case during a hearing at the EP. Signing an ECI requires certain criteria: one must be a citizen of an EU member state and as the signature age is tied to the voting age in EU elections, which differs between the member states, signatories must be eligible to vote in EU elections. More info at the European Citizens' Initiative Forum.

One common denominator: For these tools to realise their potential, they often require a systemic increase in financial, legislative or other backing.

04 PRACTICING PARTICIPATION

A common issue for many of those, who have been informed of their options, and who are willing to engage, is the lack of opportunities to do so. The reason is that many initiatives are often difficult to access, either due to age, or due to location. Many EU decisions and policies may not be visible or well-publicized at the national level and the extent of media coverage on EU affairs can vary across member states.

When it comes to youth participation, young people may face challenges when trying to engage in politics. These can include complex bureaucratic procedures for participation, financial barriers to running for office, or a lack of representation in political structures.

An interesting opportunity for young people to learn about international relations, diplomacy, and the functioning of international organizations can be through the participation in simulations, such as the **Model European Union** (MEU) or **Model United Nations** (MUN). In these simulations, participants, typically between the ages of 14 and 30, take on roles as legislators, debate proposed legislation, and engage in parliamentary processes. This hands-on experience helps them understand democratic principles, parliamentary procedures, and the complexities of governance. The experiences contribute to the development of leadership skills, critical thinking, and a sense of social responsibility among young participants. They also serve as important channels for youth to communicate their ideas, advocate for change, and actively contribute to fostering sustainable societies. More information can be found at Model European Union and Model United Nations.

Another possibility is the **European Solidarity Corps**: A flagship programme that encourages young Europeans (between 18 and 30) to engage in volunteer work, civil society projects, and other forms of civic participation for a sustainable continent. Access at European Solidarity Corps.

While these opportunities exemplify some of the progress that has been made in promoting youth participation in politics, several challenges and concerns persist. Student councils, youth parliaments, and other various iterations of youth self-governing bodies are instrumental to fostering youth engagement. Often, these initiatives are initiated and supported by local, regional, or government authorities at various levels. Yet, their frequency and power varies drastically across Europe, but also across the different regions of each country.

If we think about school participation, school could function as a space where students practice responsible decision-making and democracy. However, problems often arise here because the actual decision-making power of these student or pupil-led bodies is very limited. Often their decisions remain mere suggestions as their results are not binding for city councils or parliaments. A huge amount of great, constructive, and future-looking ideas are, hence, never implemented or even taken into account. This often leaves young people with the bitter impression, that they don't invest their scarce resources wisely.

Instead of serving as a laboratory for positive democratic experiences, the school environment can turn youth into critics of democracy. An additional issue is the concentration of participation experiences in capital or bigger cities. For most young Europeans living in rural areas, this means that they are deprived of learning activities surrounding participation, do not know their available participation tools in the first place or have to commute long distances to take part.

As a result, some youth who would consider attending are discouraged due to the fact that the nearest simulation would entail several hours of commuting. Schools or the government should step up and ensure that young people have better access to such projects. This can be achieved by supporting their creation in various regions instead of concentrating them in capital cities or by providing financial assistance to those who are left with no choice but to commute long distances.

05 YOUTH PARTICIPATION

In order to uphold democratic principles to the highest level, it is pivotal to engage all parts of society. With this in mind, it is even more crucial to include youth into decision-making today. It is, after all, **today's and tomorrow's youth who the future concerns the most.** It is them who are the foundation of our future society, and it is in the interest of all to make sure that this foundation is firm and rooted in democratic principles. Yet, youth participation remains low among many European countries, often falling behind other age groups. Therefore, over the course of the Democracy Camp, we set out to unite youth and participation.

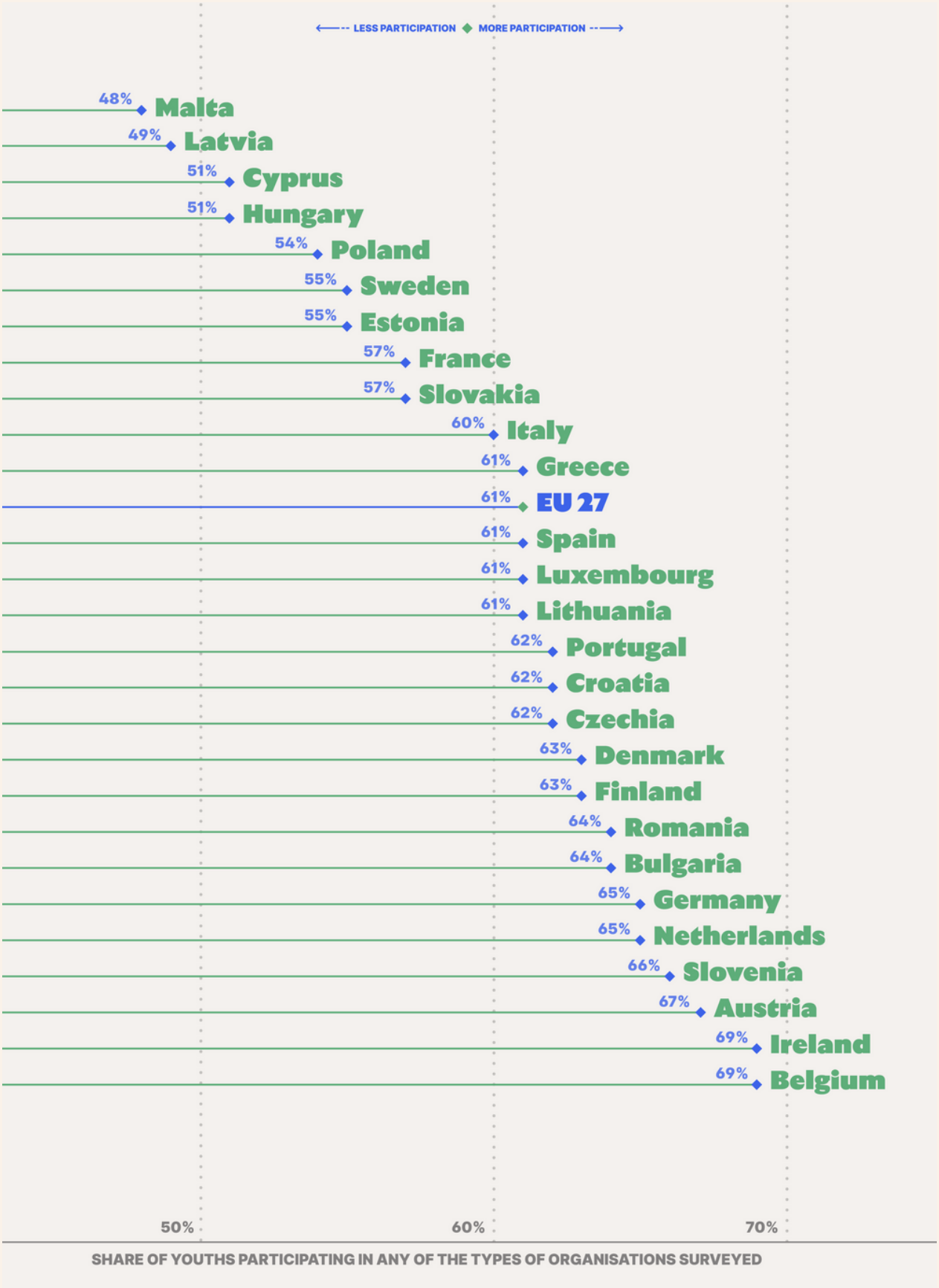
It is necessary to realise that the category of young people in this case does not only include young voters, but also those who have not yet reached the voting age, or had not reached it during the last local, regional, national or EU elections. With democracy commonly being reduced to taking part in elections, many young people feel completely detached from the political system.

Consequently, once they reach the voting age, they often lack the knowledge needed to make informed decisions, or have already lost their trust in the political system. The result: They may abstain from voting and participating beyond.

Therefore, although these young Europeans might not currently have as strong of a voice as the average voter, they should not be excluded from the efforts to increase participation. To turn young people into active participants, one needs to perform **two inseparable actions: inform and engage**. Simply informing, without providing the needed tools to participate, will not bear any results - or satisfaction among citizens. On the other hand, simply creating opportunities, without informing the youth of their importance, functioning, or even their existence, will also carry little fruit.

“ENGAGED YOUTH, BUT NOT EVERYWHERE”

The percentage of young people in the EU that have participated in youth activities. Study published at the portal for European Data.



Common youth participation activities in Europe (Source: Flash Eurobarometer FL502: Youth and democracy in the European year of youth)

Informing

Whether it be done at the regional, state, or continental level, by the private sector or the non-governmental organisations, young people should know when relevant elections are taking place, how to vote, be informed about referendums, running European Citizens' Initiative, or any other ballot initiatives.

By informing, one is to understand providing young people with the proper knowledge of the functioning of their country's political system, laying out the different possibilities to participate therein, and enabling the creation of international networks and cultural exchanges that would bring about new democratic ideas. It is on this front that there is quite a significant room for improvement for European society.

Reducing these problems requires efforts that involve multiple actors. From parents, through the private sector and non-governmental organisations, to the government level, a coordination of all elements is needed to achieve the desired goal.

The first step to take if one wants to enlarge the pool of active young people is to adjust the system to their generation. More specifically, move towards a digital participation.

It is no secret that the new generation extensively uses modern technologies and the internet, and so one way to increase their participation is to digitalise it. On the most fundamental level, it means introducing online voting and signature collection. However, digitalisation can be extended to any other means of participation. While some European countries are fairly advanced in this regard, many are lagging behind significantly.

NGOS AND PRIVATE INITIATIVES

...focusing on issues of the coming generations should collaborate more frequently with the educational institutions in the form of presentations, events, or projects regarding youth participation. Naturally, this will require not only the will of the private sector, but also the schools. As such, schools should be allowed and encouraged to partake in these projects.

Informing

THE GOVERNMENT

...has the unique possibility to regulate and, hence, give more time to education in schools, which, in many EU countries, remains underappreciated. From a young age on, children should be taught and experience why youth participation is beneficial, what can happen if it is neglected, and, above all, that their opinion matters. There are countless historical examples of the impact of youth participation across Europe to teach in schools, such as the student protests in the former Czechoslovakia that lead the way to abolishing the communist dictatorship. This, along with more regular involvement of the private sector in everyday learning environments, could lead to a drastic increase in youth political awareness.

Another issue faced is the limited network and outreach of NGOs and private organisations, who often do not work together as much as would be desired. The government is in a position to link these dispersed initiatives together through organising forums and platforms where the private sector could create networks, and enable the sharing of information between youth and NGOs.

Informing

ADDITIONAL IDEAS

To further increase youth participation, either the private, or the public sector could partner with a third party - one that is popular and influential among the young - the influencers. Some influencers already specialise in or deal with political topics, and thus, seeing as their audience is generally young, their reach could be used to build a stronger sense of civil responsibility.

It is also important to recognise that political systems, although all democratic in principle, vary across Europe and the world. As a result, there is a lot to be gained from connecting youth across boundaries, allowing for intercultural exchange of thoughts and ideas, and thus improving all democratic societies.

Engaging

By engaging, one is to understand providing young people with the possibilities and motivation to actively participate in a democratic society. It is instrumental to realise that participation is not restricted to voting in an election. Rather, it can constitute a plethora of tools and mechanisms that not only contribute to civic participation and create a responsible electorate, but also build important skills for participation and work life.

This can be organised and promoted through workshops, ensuring knowledge exchange on civic participation and may include topics such as campaigning, fundraising, public speaking, project management, and many more. Such workshops are relatively easy to establish for any interested group, institution, or individual, and their universal applicability contributes to strengthening democratic societies and enhancing future career prospects.

The EU has implemented a range of initiatives aimed at fostering active citizenship and political participation among young people. As for our future, young people are essential.

06 DEMOCRACY FOR SUSTAINABILITY

All across the world, young people actively use their democratic rights for a sustainable future participating in movements like Fridays for Future. They organise protests, raise awareness about climate change, and advocate for more ambitious environmental policies at local, national, and EU level.

Since youth are active for sustainability, some participatory tools are very promising to foster sustainable societies. A few of them are:

- The previously mentioned **European Solidarity Corps** also provides opportunities targeted at environmental protection and fostering sustainability.

- **Youth Councils and Advisory Boards:** Some EU countries have established youth councils or advisory boards that work alongside government officials to provide input on policies that directly affect young people. These councils help ensure that the perspectives and concerns of youth are taken into account in decision-making processes.

- **Youth Parliaments and Forums:** Platforms or events designed to engage young people in discussions, debates, and activities related to civic participation, governance, and social issues. They provide a space for youth to voice their opinions, express concerns, and contribute to decision-making processes. These initiatives aim to empower young individuals, promote civic education, and foster a sense of responsibility and leadership among the younger generation.

- **Funding and Grants for Youth Initiatives:** The EU provides financial support for youth-led projects and initiatives that promote democratic participation and civic engagement. This funding helps to empower young people to take the initiative and and uphold democratic values. The goals of all of the grants are education, training, youth and sport (Erasmus+), fellowship among young researchers (Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions), young entrepreneurs (Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs), young volunteers (European Solidarity Corps), young farmers (European Agricultural Guarantee Fund), and young unemployed (Youth Employment Initiative). Access can be found in the websites:

Erasmus+
Youth Employment Initiative
Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions
Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs
European Agricultural Guarantee Fund

In addition to demonstrations, participants identified direct democratic instruments as promising tools to enhance sustainability across Europe.

One practical example is the *Klimawende Köln* (climate turn Cologne), an independent citizens' initiative and organisation based in the city of Cologne. The group/initiative successfully ran a bottom-up citizens' initiative in Cologne in 2019. For the city to achieve the 1.5 target, the initiators proposed for Cologne's administration to convert the energy supply by the energy provider RheinEnergie, which is majority-owned by the city, to 100 percent renewable energy by 2030 and hence become climate neutral. By collecting the required 30,000 signatures of eligible citizens of Cologne, the organisers could have triggered a referendum on this issue in the city of Cologne. As the citizens' initiative is a binding, direct democratic tool, the outcome - hence, citizens' decision - would have been binding for the city of Cologne. Instead, the organisers opened negotiations with the city and which lead to a workable, climate friendly compromise that is now beeing implemented.

At European level, participants highlighted the sustainable potential of the European Citizens' Initiative. A positive success story is the initiative “End the Cage Age“. It requested the European Commission to propose an EU-wide ban on cages in animal farming in 2018. The ECI was successful, as it collected 1.4 million signatures from seven EU countries. In 2021, the European Commission announced a proposal to revise the current EU legislation, including: 1) Put forward a legislative proposal by the end of 2023 to phase out and prohibit the use of cages for hens, sows, calves, rabbits, ducks, geese and other farmed animals. 2) Phase out the use of cages for farmed animals across Europe by 2027. Since then, campaigns and mobilisation for the cause have been growing, although the Commission has been non-responsive and persists in postponing the implementation of the proposals.

These examples highlight the diverse ways in which young people in the EU contribute to sustainable practices, demonstrating a strong commitment to addressing environmental and social challenges for a more sustainable future.

Even so, some challenges remain, such as the opportunity to use these tools. As the voting age for European Parliament elections in European Union (EU) member states is typically 18, there is a need for more countries to lower the voting age for EU elections. Some countries have already taken this step, providing young Europeans with the opportunity to put issues of sustainability on the EU's political agenda. Examples include:

- Austria and Germany: The voting age is 16 for both national and European Parliament elections.
- Greece: The voting age is 17 for national and European Parliament elections.
- Estonia: The voting age is 16 for local elections.

The advancement of sustainable practices is a global imperative and various tools and organisations play a crucial role in fostering this commitment. It is fundamental to offer opportunities for young Europeans to engage in meaningful activities that contribute to societal well-being and environmental sustainability.

07 INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

The United Nations describe an inclusive society as a "society for all in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play." Inclusive democracy and citizen participation are the road to fulfilling this promise.

Often, participatory instruments outside of elections are simply not known to citizens. Usually, they are most used by white cis men, citizens with higher education, who are able-bodied, and share a strong interest in politics. For example, higher participation in local referenda in Switzerland directly correlates with higher wealth and education, as a study in the European Journal of Higher Research describes. Accessibility can be improved by providing easy-to-understand information in multiple languages, easy language, screen reader conform formats etc.

The use of citizen panels and assemblies can also play a role in fostering a more inclusive society. Utilising deliberative processes involving a representative mini public ensures equal representation of all segments of society in the panels, leading to greater inclusion of marginalised groups and their perspectives. Thresholds are e.g. often set for gender, income, education, migration and background. This provides especially women, individuals with low income, or those with a migratory background — voices often overlooked in conventional politics with a platform.

Participation in citizen panels and assemblies should be properly compensated to ensure that a lack of income does not hinder the participation of fincancially vulnerable groups. The same is true for families, for which childcare should be provided during the citizen panels. As it is usually women caring for their family members, providing child- or other care during the deliberation days enables these women to take part and helps to include their perspectives into proposed policy solutions. This in turn contributes to closing the representation gap. Virtual participation should be enabled, for less mobile citizens to take part.

Furthermore, direct democratic initiatives such as the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) have pushed for more inclusive societies in the past, for example, the ECI “Minority Safepack – one million signatures for diversity in Europe”. The initiative aimed to address the protection of individuals from national and linguistic minorities while enhancing cultural and linguistic diversity in the Union. Its focus encompassed various themes, including regional and minority languages, education, culture, regional policy, participation, equality, audiovisual and other media content, and regional (state) support. The initiative reached the goal of 1 million signatures and was answered by the European Commission. While the initiative fullfilled all necessary criteria, no policy changes followed.

On the one hand, this shows how ECIs and also other forms of local and national participatory bottom-up tools can strengthen the rights of minorities and underrepresented groups. It is specifically these groups that can unite and put their concerns and ideas on the political agenda.

On the other hand, the Commission's response illustrates the main issue of non-binding tools: While the organisers have delivered through the successful signature collection, the Commission's lack of political follow-up gives only symbolic value to the process. This issue at European level should be tackled, e.g. by making the ECI more binding or by introducing Europe-wide referenda and, hence, including all EU-citizens in the decision for policy change. At local or national level, binding tools mostly exist. Here the challenge lies in ensuring the timely implementation.

Some further strategies could be:

- Using multiple communication channels to reach a diverse audience, with care for accessibility and gender-neutral language.

- Supporting initiatives that promote social cohesion and integration within the EU, whether European Citizens' Initiatives or civil society projects.

- Fostering dialogue between different marginalised communities to build understanding, bridge cultural gaps and develop common advocacy campaigns or citizen-led initiatives.

For such strategies, there are also previously mentioned tools that can promote inclusivity, such as the Online Participation Platforms, or making inclusive experiences when volunteering for the European Solidarity Corps.

Promoting inclusivity in the EU involves a multi-faceted approach that integrates democratic tools with policies, education, and community engagement. It requires ongoing efforts to ensure that the democratic process is accessible, representative, and responsive to the needs of all citizens.

A key element involves reforming education systems to embrace diverse learning styles and cultural perspectives, fostering awareness and understanding. Additionally, ensuring accessible infrastructure, such as public spaces and transportation, is crucial for accommodating individuals with diverse abilities during elections, citizens' assemblies or panels and ballot initiatives.

Diverse representation in media, government, and corporate leadership is vital for shaping inclusive narratives and policies. Promoting community engagement through events that celebrate cultural diversity fosters a sense of belonging. Robust anti-discrimination policies are essential, offering protection against bias based on race, gender, sexuality, or disability. Language inclusivity, cultural competency training, and interfaith dialogue contribute to understanding and tolerance. Support for LGBTQ+ communities, youth engagement in decision-making, and economic policies that address income inequality further enhance inclusivity. Flexible work arrangements, mental health support, and initiatives to reduce stigma around mental health contribute to overall well-being. Many of these issues can be suggested by the communities and citizens themselves via bottom-up participatory processes. These processes ensure that solutions reflect the needs of those targeted.

08 TOOLS OF ACTION

As we stand at the threshold of the future, we envision a greener, more inclusive and democratic Europe. In this chapter, we embark on a visionary journey, showcasing promising participatory practices at different political levels.

Youth participation tools are essential at various levels - local, national, and European - to empower young people. The differences lie in the scope of influence and the types of issues addressed at each level. Protests, civil disobedience, and demonstrations represent pivotal tools within the societal toolbox for expressing discontent and advocating change. These dynamic forms of collective expression are not confined to any specific political echelon; rather, they resonate across diverse levels of governance, from local communities to the global stage. In summary, we present here some suggestions of tools of action specific to different levels of governance. It is important to know that this list is not complete.

And how can young people get involved?

01. LOCAL LEVEL

Scope: Local participation focuses on community-specific issues and initiatives.

Involvement: Young people can engage through local youth councils, community forums, and advisory boards. They can participate in neighborhood projects, volunteer initiatives, and collaborate with local governments on issues such as urban planning, education, budgeting and community development. In countries/regions with a lower signature age, they can also sign and initiate direct democratic citizens' initiatives, thereby placing an issue on the city council's agenda or triggering a city-wide referendum on their proposal. They can often vote in local elections and also pay a visit to their political representative in the city council.

02. NATIONAL LEVEL

- **Scope:** National participation extends to issues that affect the entire country, such as national policies, legislation, and social programmes.

- **Involvement:** Young people can participate in national youth parliaments, advisory committees, advocacy groups or Model EU or UN programmes. They may engage in consultations, petitions, and campaigns addressing national concerns, offering their perspectives on education, employment, social justice, and other overarching issues. They can join a youth party and once they are eligible, they can vote.

03. EUROPEAN LEVEL

- **Scope:** European participation involves contributing to discussions and decisions that impact multiple countries within the European Union.

- **Involvement:** Young people can participate in the European Solidarity Corps, join the EU Youth Dialogue, and sign or volunteer for an European Citizens' Initiative. They may engage in transnational projects, collaborate with youth networks from different EU countries, and advocate for policies related to climate change, inclusivity, and cross-border cooperation.

09 NEXT STEPS

While various participation tools are already available to young Europeans, democracy is never finished. Improvements can be made by actively advocating for legislative changes that empower young people, lowering the voting age and signature age for direct democratic initiatives, expanding access to educational projects and work experiences, embracing digital tools for democratic processes, providing life skills workshops, and fostering meaningful engagements between young individuals and decision-makers. These tools, when utilised effectively, can amplify the voices of young people and enhance their participation in shaping their communities and societies.

Collectively, these organisations and tools form a dynamic network that empowers young individuals to actively participate in fostering sustainable and inclusive practices at local, national, and European level. **Through volunteering, advocacy, education, and direct involvement in governance, young people are shaping a more sustainable and inclusive future.** What is still needed is more support, information and financial means to include all young people in these activities.

In addition, other practical changes such as lowering the voting and signing age, lowering signature thresholds, disseminating best practices like ECIs or youth councils with increased capacity for BINDING DECISIONS instead of purely consultative roles, could have a considerable positive impact in all EU countries.

Embracing these strategies advances our journey toward inclusive societies, where everyone is valued, respected, and afforded equal opportunities to thrive, while maintaining our living environment.

DEMOCRACY CAMP PROJECT BY

Authors
Ada Ciacharowska
Atyia Al-Hammud
Clovis Blanchard Djougba
Joanna Jedrzejewska
Leo Marhic
Mariana Gomes
Matyáš Zápeca
Timur Kazachkov
Tu Vy Yang

Editor-in-Chief
Mariana Gomes

Co-Editor
Anne Hardt

Democracy International e.V.
Gürzenichstraße 21 a-c
50667 Cologne, Germany
Phone: +49 (0) 221 669 66 50
Fax: +49 (0) 221 669 665 99
Email: contact@democracy-international.org

Cologne, December 2023