DEMOCRACY FOR YOUTH
Empowering Active Citizenship

Youth-Friendly Forms of Democratic Participation

Toolbox

October 2026

Funded by the European Union

Udruga Prizma

Civix

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Toolbox Overview

This toolbox was developed within the framework of the “Democracy for Youth: Empowering Active Citizenship” project (No. 2025-1-BE04-KA210-YOU-000354064), 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 BIJ. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

This Toolbox is designed as a practical, interdisciplinary guide to support diverse actors in fostering youth-friendly and inclusive democratic participation. It is specifically created for youth workers, youth organizations, public institutions, decision-makers, and young people engaged in peer-to-peer activities. For youth workers and non-governmental organizations, it provides ready-to-use non-formal education methods, deliberative democracy tools, and field-tested strategies to engage young people, particularly those with fewer opportunities. Representatives of public institutions and local decision-makers can utilize this manual to better understand youth perspectives, adopt alternative participation channels, and effectively integrate youth recommendations into local policy-making processes. Furthermore, young leaders and active youth can draw upon its structured activities and digital frameworks to facilitate peer-led discussions, media literacy initiatives, and civic engagement projects.

To ensure maximum usability and digital accessibility, this publication features interactive navigation designed for seamless reading across devices. Readers can utilize the clickable table of contents to jump directly to specific chapters, method sheets, or documented project outputs. Embedded internal links allow users to cross-reference related non-formal tools, youth parliament outcomes, and policy recommendations effortlessly. External links connect readers directly to relevant European digital platforms, including the European Youth Portal, the EU Youth Strategy Platform, and Youth Wiki, as well as digital tools and primary project resources. Visual pictograms are integrated throughout the text to provide quick reference cues for activity duration, group sizes, target levels of accessibility, required materials, and specific thematic focus areas, making session planning clear and efficient for all facilitators. In line with the project’s commitment to environmental sustainability, this publication adheres to green practices through sustainable physical printing on eco-paper with a reduced color palette, as well as the parallel distribution of an energy-efficient, data-optimized digital file.

Introduction to Youth-friendly and Alternative Forms of Democratic Participation

Involving young people in democratic processes is crucial at a time when they are often overlooked by traditional political channels. Alternative, youth-friendly forms of participation offer dynamic spaces where they can explore civic life on their own terms. By combining deliberative democracy, which promotes dialogue and shared decision-making, with flexible, learner-centered non-formal education, youth workers create safe environments for critical reflection. The integration of art and artivism provides powerful tools for self-expression that enable young people, particularly those facing social, geographical, or economic barriers, to articulate their experiences, challenge systemic issues, and influence local and European policies.

This chapter provides an introductory framework for applying these approaches in day-to-day youth work. It presents operational models from project partners CIVIX and Association Prism, which blend digital engagement tools, youth advocacy, and artivism in practice. The section also includes a collection of ten good-practice examples from the European Union, ranging from school participatory budgeting and AI-driven media literacy to digital dialogue and youth-led deliberative festivals, demonstrating how innovative methods can be adapted to diverse local contexts.

Practice-Based Approaches from Project Partners

Leveraging Digital Tools for Youth Political Engagement at CIVIX

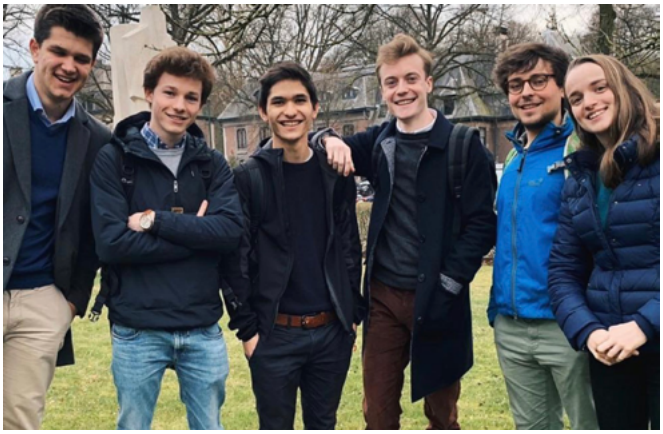
Founded in 2018 as a student-led non-profit, Civix has developed into a Belgian laboratory for civic resilience, specialising in the intersection of digital technology and youth empowerment. Its approach treats digital tools as levers for citizen empowerment: identifying emerging threats to democratic participation - complexity, information overload, disinformation, synthetic content - and responding with immediate technological and pedagogical answers. Each of its initiatives illustrates a youth-friendly, alternative entry point into democratic life.

- **Civix.app (2019) — making elections readable**. For the May 2019 Belgian elections, Civix launched a mass vulgarisation app for the federal, regional and European elections. Political parties filled in their own programmes, which the app regrouped by theme, guaranteeing neutrality. The results: 68,000 unique users (reaching #1 on the App Store), 150,000 website visits and 400,000 views of pedagogical videos, powered by volunteers - including students from 7 universities - overseen by academic experts.

- **Politix (2021) — decrypting Belgian politics through video.** A video platform explaining Belgian politics in a few minutes per episode: how a law is made, what a federal state is, as well as current legislative debates such as voting at 16 or universal basic income. A second feature let users submit and vote on questions, which Civix members then put to Belgian experts and politicians - keeping citizens active and interested beyond electoral periods.

- **LOU — civix.chatbot (2024) — managing information overload.** Faced with "information fatigue" caused by 800+ pages of political manifestos, Civix launched an AI electoral chatbot allowing citizens to query official party programmes in natural language. It answered 30,000 questions, providing neutral information on political programmes and candidates - bypassing social-media filters to return to the heart of the debate: ideas.

- **civix.workshops (2025) — forging critical thinking.** Confronted with the rise of generative AI and deepfakes, Civix brought AI-literacy workshops into secondary schools (grades 10–12), deconstructing manipulation mechanisms, algorithmic biases and synthetic content so that students move from passive consumers to informed decoders of digital content, while strengthening their understanding of the Belgian and EU political systems.





A documented, replicable operational model. Beyond the tools themselves, Civix has documented the full lifecycle of its school-based educational projects: contacting schools and securing partnerships, scheduling, delivering sessions, and post-activity evaluation with students and teachers. Combined with a digital community of 17,000 followers, this model shows how a small youth organisation can reach young people at scale and "translate" complex political and technological realities into accessible civic engagement.

Fostering Democratic Youth Participation through Creative Learning Environments and Artivism at Udruga Prizma

Since 2016, Udruga Prizma has enabled participation of young people with fewer opportunities in decision-making processes at local, regional, national, and European levels. Through non-formal education, Prizma builds competencies in political and media literacy, the work of youth councils, activism, artivism, and public policy advocacy. Its strategy for developing youth work in Zadar County has strengthened participation in youth councils, improved local programs, and raised the level of civic engagement. As a result, the voice of young people has been integrated into public policies with measurable results.

- **Youth policy development.** Focused on co-designing policies through deliberative methods. Udruga Prizma drove the creation of local youth programs in Gračac and Zadar by combining deliberative democracy, visual arts, and creative expression. Furthermore, it drafted the Development Program for Youth Work in Zadar County to ensure equitable infrastructure across rural, island, mountainous, and hinterland areas.

- **Civic engagement.** centered on structural participation and institutional representation. Udruga Prizma systematically supported the operation of youth councils in Gračac, Zadar, and Zadar County. They directly participated in working groups tasked with drafting the National Youth Program of the Republic of Croatia and the Statute of the Center for Contemporary Art, Culture, and Youth in Zadar.

- **A creative learning environment and artivism.** Udruga Prizma empowered young people to tackle social, environmental, and civic challenges through hands-on action and artistic expression. Initiatives like Citizen Z, Youth for Stray Dogs, and Young ARTivists demonstrated how creative methods and deliberative spaces served as accessible entry points for democratic engagement, especially for young people with fewer opportunities. From citizens' juries connecting

local priorities to the European level, to animal welfare activism, mural creation in Madeira, and youth-authored picture books, these projects translated personal reflection into active citizenship. By blending non-formal education, art, and peer learning, young participants developed critical thinking and civic agency.

A comprehensive framework for empowering youth at the local level. Beyond specific project outcomes, Prizma bridges non-formal learning with safe, creative spaces to lower barriers to inclusion for marginalized groups. By linking structured public policy mechanisms with creative expression, Prizma offers an adaptable model for youth engagement.







Good Practices in the European Union

Democratic participation is being reinvented every day in youth centers, nonprofits, schools, and municipalities across Europe, and the best way to learn is directly from those already putting it into practice. This section presents ten good practice examples gathered through a public call for proposals in the summer of 2026, aimed at European Union organizations working with young people in the field of democratic participation and alternative forms of engagement.

The selection was guided by two criteria: innovation - practices that test something genuinely new, and an interdisciplinary approach, meaning methods that connect democratic participation with art, media literacy, or digital tools. Special attention was paid to how each of these practices includes young people with fewer opportunities.

To facilitate practical application and peer-to-peer learning, each initiative is presented in a standardized format. Alongside a detailed description of the practice explaining core objectives, target groups, and implementation methods, readers will find direct contact details and organizational information. Each overview clearly highlights what makes the approach innovative and interdisciplinary, supported by documented results and community impact. These profiles are meant to be actively used, not merely read. We therefore encourage readers to reach out to the featured organizations, share experiences, and adapt these methodologies to their own local contexts.

Mentoring Program

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Description of the practice

The Mentoring Program is a six-month-long, structured youth empowerment initiative that combines civic participation, peer learning, and career development within a European context. The programme connects young people with youth leaders and professionals working in European and international organisations, creating a supportive environment for personal growth, active citizenship, and professional orientation. connects young people with experienced youth leaders, NGO practitioners, and professionals working in European and international affairs. The programme supports young people who want to become more active in democratic participation, youth advocacy, civil society, and EU-related career pathways, but who often lack access to networks, role models, or practical guidance

Through a flexible mentoring model, participants can explore both civic engagement and EU-related career pathways according to their individual interests and needs. The programme follows a structured mentoring framework consisting of goal-setting, guided mentoring sessions, reflection exercises, and continuous support. Dedicated learning materials, including workbooks and exercises, help participants identify their strengths, develop new competencies, expand their networks, and increase their understanding of career and advocacy opportunities.

Participants engage in regular one-to-one mentoring sessions over a six-month period, supported by structured learning materials, goal-setting tools, and reflection exercises. Depending on their interests, participants can focus on topics such as youth participation, democracy, European policymaking, advocacy, leadership, project management, volunteering opportunities, traineeships, and careers within EU institutions and international organisations. The mentoring process combines personal guidance with practical action, helping young people identify concrete next steps for their civic engagement, studies, or professional development.

The programme places a strong emphasis on inclusion and accessibility. The program can be delivered both online and in-person, making it accessible, scalable, and adaptable to different organisational contexts. By creating meaningful connections between experienced professionals and emerging youth leaders, the

programme strengthens democratic participation, builds confidence and competences, and helps young people transform their interest in European issues into active engagement and long-term impact in their communities.

What makes it innovative ?

The programme combines two areas that are often addressed separately: active citizenship and career development. By integrating civic participation, youth advocacy, and professional mentoring into a single framework, participants receive holistic support that strengthens both their engagement in society and their future career prospects.

Another innovative element is the structured mentoring methodology. Rather than relying on informal conversations, participants follow a clearly defined learning journey supported by workbooks, reflection tools, and tailored activities. The programme also creates opportunities for transnational mentoring relationships, enabling young people to access international perspectives, networks, and expertise regardless of their geographical location.

What makes it interdisciplinary ?

The practice brings together approaches from youth work, non-formal education, civic education, leadership development, career guidance, and international cooperation. Participants engage with themes such as democracy, European policymaking, advocacy, employability, intercultural dialogue, and personal development.

The diversity of mentor profiles further strengthens the interdisciplinary nature of the programme. Mentors include youth leaders, NGO practitioners, and professionals from European and international sectors, allowing participants to gain knowledge and perspectives from multiple fields while connecting civic engagement with real-life educational and professional pathways.

Lastly, what makes the program unique is its “by youth, for youth” nature. As the mentors are young professionals, they benefit from the programme by developing leadership, coaching, communication, and facilitation skills in a practical setting. Through supporting mentees in setting goals, reflecting on their development, and exploring opportunities for civic engagement and professional growth, mentors strengthen their ability to guide others, provide constructive feedback, and build meaningful learning relationships. The mentoring process also encourages mentors to reflect on their own experiences, achievements, and future aspirations, often leading to increased self-awareness and confidence. This sets it apart from other traditional mentoring programs, in which the mentor is usually an older individual.

Results

The programme strengthens young people's confidence, skills, and engagement in European civic life. Participants improve their understanding of European institutions, active citizenship, advocacy, and international career opportunities. Many have reported increased confidence in pursuing leadership roles, participating in civic initiatives, and accessing European opportunities.

The mentoring process also enhances transferable competencies such as communication, critical thinking, goal-setting, self-reflection, networking, and intercultural cooperation. Young mentors develop leadership and coaching skills, while participating organisations strengthen their capacity in mentoring, youth work, and non-formal education.

The programme creates lasting value through reusable and accessible mentoring materials, establishes international networks, and strengthens connections between young professionals and emerging youth leaders. As a result, it offers a sustainable and transferable model for promoting democratic participation, inclusion, and youth empowerment across Europe.

Youth-Led Deliberation in Pärnu: World Cafés and the Pre-Opinion Festival

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Description of the practice

Youth-Led Deliberation in Pärnu: World Cafés and the Pre-Opinion Festival is a youth-led participation practice implemented in Pärnu, Estonia, from January to June 2026. It combines non-formal education, community development and direct dialogue with local decision-makers. The practice was designed for young people in Pärnu and Pärnu County, with several ways to participate according to confidence, experience and interest. A core group of five young people was involved throughout the process, while the Pärnu Youth Council (20 young people) became an important cooperation partner. Young people helped choose topics, prepare discussion questions, moderate World Café tables, coordinate dialogue between participants and decision-makers, organise the physical space, welcome participants and reflect on the results.

The process included a training day for the youth team, four thematic World Cafés, the Pärnu Pre-Opinion Festival on 30 May 2026, and a final meeting with the Mayor of Pärnu. The thematic discussions addressed issues relevant to young people and the city, including community and crisis preparedness, wellbeing, democratic power and responsibility, and substance use. One World Café, "Friends, Pressure and Substances", was added during implementation after young people and local experts raised serious concerns about increasing drug and substance use among young people in Pärnu.

Young people could take part as organisers, moderators, volunteers, discussion participants or idea contributors. The World Café method was especially useful for participants who were less comfortable speaking in a large public forum, because discussion took place in smaller facilitated groups. All activities were free of charge and organised locally, lowering financial and practical barriers to participation.

What makes it innovative?

The innovative element is the continuity of youth participation across the whole cycle, rather than asking young people for opinions only once. Young people identify issues, shape the agenda, prepare and facilitate discussions, work with experts and decision-makers, reflect on outcomes and bring proposals directly into local

dialogue. The model combines youth-led event design with small-group deliberation and direct access to decision-makers. It also remains deliberately flexible: when young people identified substance use as an urgent local concern, the project itself changed and an additional World Café was created. This demonstrated participation in practice - young people did not only respond to a predetermined programme; they influenced what the programme became. Another strength is the range of entry points. A young person can begin by joining a table discussion or volunteering at an event, and can later take on moderation, programme design or representation roles. This makes democratic participation more accessible as a learning pathway, not only as a formal consultation.

What makes it interdisciplinary?

The practice combines civic education, non-formal learning, deliberative democracy, youth work, community development, wellbeing and crisis preparedness. The World Café method provides the deliberative framework, while training, peer learning and reflection support the educational side. Depending on the topic, young people worked directly with local government representatives, the city architect, youth work professionals, health and prevention experts, the Estonian Rescue Board and the Red Cross. At the Pärnu Pre-Opinion Festival, young people also participated in the committee selecting programme ideas together with representatives of local civil society organisations. This interdisciplinary structure connects lived experience with professional knowledge and public decision-making. Young people therefore participate not only in discussion but also in programme development, facilitation, community organising and real local governance processes.

Results

Across the activities, the project recorded 247 participations: 167 by young people and 80 by decision-makers and experts. A core group of five young people participated throughout the process, and the 20-member Pärnu Youth Council became a key cooperation partner. The project produced the summary, bringing together ideas and proposals from discussions on community development, accessibility, crisis preparedness, cooperation and the future development of Pärnu. The process concluded with a meeting between seven participating young people and the Mayor of Pärnu, where the results, young people's experiences and possibilities for future cooperation were discussed directly.

Qualitatively, the practice strengthened young people's experience of taking responsibility for democratic dialogue: they moderated discussions, worked with specialists, contributed to programme choices and saw that emerging concerns could change the project itself. For local partners and decision-makers, the format created a practical and repeatable way to meet young people in smaller, more constructive discussion settings rather than relying only on formal consultations.

Comissões de Cidadãos (Citizens' Comissions)

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Description of the practice

The practice known as Comissões de Cidadãos (Citizens' Commissions), developed by the association Os 230, is a civic participation project that aims to involve ordinary citizens in the process of shaping public policy, replicating the institutional structure of the Portuguese Parliament (Assembleia da República, AR).
Citizens' Commissions aims to strengthen democratic participation by giving citizens a direct role in researching, debating and developing solutions to public-interest issues.

What is the practice and how does it work?

The project brings together 230 citizens with no party-political affiliation, selected according to criteria of pluralism and equality, to join one of 14 thematic Commissions mirroring the Standing Parliamentary Commissions of the Portuguese Parliament, for this reason referred to as "Citizen-MPs" (deputados-cidadãos). The project seeks to replicate the work carried out by the Portuguese Parliament in drafting, debating and enacting Bills, which translate into public policies.

The process unfolds in three main phases. In the first phase, the Citizen-MPs identify problems and debate them within their respective Commissions, with the participation of various experts and relevant organisations in the field in question. This is followed by the proposal-formulation phase, carried out in Working Groups set up for this purpose within each Commission.

The third phase corresponds to the validation and analysis of the proposals, through three successive stages: a vote in Plenary Session, a Public Consultation open to civil society and, finally, a Final Plenary Session held at the Portuguese Parliament, which confers democratic legitimacy on the process. The proposals are thus presented directly to the Members of the Portuguese Parliament, as well as to the Government and its respective Ministries and Secretaries of State, through direct contact between them and the Citizen-MPs who created the proposals, allowing their feasibility of implementation to be assessed and discussed.

Who it targets

Portuguese citizens over the age of 16, residing in Portugal or abroad, may apply, with applications also accepted from foreign citizens residing in Portugal with a good command of the Portuguese language who are interested in participating in democratic life, regardless of their educational or political background.

When and where was it implemented?

The project has already held two editions, taking place in 2024/2025 and 2025/2026, respectively. A third edition has already been scheduled and will take place in 2026/2027.These were implemented in Portugal, in a hybrid format, with the Commissions' working phases taking place remotely, while the Plenary Sessions were held in person, at the Faculty of Law of the University of Lisbon in the case of the first Plenary Session, and at the Portuguese Parliament itself in the case of the Final Plenary Session for the presentation, discussion and vote on the proposals.

What makes it innovative?

The Citizens' Commissions have at their core the promotion of stronger democratic participation among the Portuguese population, particularly young people, who make up the majority of participants in both editions. However, this feature is not limited to this age group, as applications from people aged 50 or 60 have also been accepted, demonstrating the age-transversality of the project.

The Citizen-MPs are fully involved in the dynamics of creating, designing and implementing public policies, replicating every stage of the Portuguese legislative process, from the discussion of problems to the vote in Plenary Session and direct contact with the Sovereign Bodies. It is precisely this proximity to the political process that brings citizens closer to Democracy, increasing their interest in participating and strengthening their trust in institutions, through direct contact with experts, holders of political office and Members of Parliament.

The project also stands out for allowing young people from the age of 16 to join the Commissions before reaching the minimum voting age, holding the same degree of institutional seriousness as an MP with an effective mandate, selected through a voluntary application based on criteria of pluralism and the exclusion of party-political ties. In addition, the institutional mimicry is direct, as the 14 Commissions mirror the Permanent Commissions of the Portuguese Parliament, fostering ongoing contact between the Citizen-MPs and real decision-makers.

The process also involves the whole of Civil Society, through the Public Consultation that precedes the Final Plenary Session. In the second edition, it received 800 comments and assessments, reflecting the level of social engagement with the project. In sum, at a time when confidence in institutions is under pressure, the project demonstrates that citizens can be trusted with responsibility, provided

they have access to information, dialogue and tools for deliberation. By bringing together people from different backgrounds, it creates spaces for respectful disagreement and collective problem-solving, in which participants research, debate and co-create concrete public policies. With two editions completed and a third now launching, the project is a practical example of how participation and transparency can help restore trust in democracy from the ground up.

What makes it interdisciplinary?

The Citizens' Commissions, despite their necessarily political nature, encompass and combine different fields, methods and even sectors. In this sense, the project combines aspects of civic education and political participation, but also of other technical thematic areas, such as media literacy, culture, foreign affairs, defence, environmental education, public health, economics and finance, among others, covering the full range of subjects addressed by the 14 Permanent Commissions of the Portuguese Parliament.

As a result, the selected participants come from all kinds of technical backgrounds, which requires young participants to draw on knowledge from sectors that are very different from one another. Furthermore, participants are required to vote on all proposals, even those outside their own area of expertise, which pushes them to research, take an interest in and question topics they are not familiar with, thereby increasing their knowledge and critical thinking across different fields.

Results

The Citizens' Commissions have already completed two editions, involving 230 citizen-MPs per edition, totalling around 400 young people directly involved. The first edition resulted in approximately 48 approved public policy proposals, and the second in 78, totalling 126 proposals, covering the 14 thematic areas corresponding to the Permanent Parliamentary Comissions of the Portuguese Parliament. The third edition is currently accepting applications and will begin at the end of 2026.

Several of these proposals have already led to changes in existing public policy, in Portugal, such as the establishment of free companion tickets for cultural events for citizens with disabilities, or even a proposal concerning the establishment of a specific tax scheme for young people, known as the IRS Jovem (Youth Income Tax). Other proposals have also inspired Legislative Bills submitted to the Portuguese Parliament that are still under parliamentary discussion. More information, including all the proposals presented in the latest edition of the Citizens' Commissions, can be found in the links provided below.

V.E.G.A. - Visualizing European Goals through Arts

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Description of the practice

V.E.G.A. - Visualizing European Goals through Arts was a 24-month Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership (1 June 2024-31 May 2026) coordinated by Teatro Metaphora and implemented with partners in Portugal, Italy, Spain, Hungary and Germany. It involved young people aged 16-25, especially rural youth, young people with disabilities and young people in vulnerable situations.

The practice addresses young people's distance from EU institutions by turning policy into a youth-authored creative process. Participants first explored five European Youth Goals (#2 Equality of All Genders, #6 Moving Rural Youth Forward, #8 Quality Learning, #9 Space and Participation for All and #10 Sustainable Green Europe) through accessible non-formal education. Trained young people and youth workers then facilitated peer sessions in their communities. Participants connected the goals to lived experience, chose a message for their peers and co-created comics, graffiti, photography, graphic art or video art with youth workers and artists.

The artworks became public civic messages, presented through five local exhibitions and a virtual exhibition. The method creates a complete participation pathway: understand a policy, discuss its local relevance, formulate a position, communicate it creatively and bring it into community dialogue. Visual and practical learning, a choice of media, small collaborative groups, local delivery and face-to-face/online formats reduced barriers for young people who may not feel confident in formal debate.

What makes it innovative?

V.E.G.A. changes young people from recipients of simplified EU information into interpreters, authors, peer educators and public communicators of policy. It makes three deliberate shifts: from policy text to creative brief; from learner to peer facilitator; and from closed workshop to public civic encounter.

This is particularly effective for young people who do not identify with formal political spaces. Visual storytelling offers multiple entry points across educational, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, while a choice of media lets participants contribute through their strengths. The shared European Youth Goals provide a democratic frame, but each group owns its local narrative, symbols and artistic

form. The model is modular and transferable: organisations can apply one policy theme and one accessible artistic medium or reproduce the full pathway, without needing a large cultural institution or sophisticated digital platform.

What makes it interdisciplinary?

V.E.G.A. integrates civic education and EU youth policy; non-formal and peer-to-peer learning; visual arts and storytelling; social inclusion and community development; and digital communication. Youth workers, policy-informed facilitators, artists and young participants bring different expertise to one shared process.

Each medium adds a distinct democratic function: graffiti places civic messages in public space; comics explain policy through narrative; photography documents lived realities; graphic art condenses ideas into visual symbols; and video combines testimony, image and sound for digital audiences. Art is therefore not an illustration added after citizenship education; artistic creation is the method through which participants deliberate, formulate a position and engage community audiences.

Results

Implementation across five countries involved more than 200 young people and around 20 youth leaders. The international training in Budapest prepared 15 participants (10 young people and five youth workers). More than 150 young people took part in peer knowledge- sharing activities and more than 150 in artistic workshops; some participated in both phases.

The practice produced at least five core artworks, additional local works, five local exhibitions and one virtual exhibition. A Facilitator's Booklet was published in six languages (English, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Hungarian and German), supporting replication. Participant satisfaction was above 80%. Questionnaires, activity reports, photographs, artworks and the online catalogue/exhibition documented the process and outputs. Participants strengthened their knowledge of the European Youth Goals, artistic and communication skills, teamwork and confidence to engage with community issues. The exhibitions gave local audiences and institutions a youth-authored interpretation of policies intended to serve them.

School Participatory Budgeting

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Description of the practice

TI Lithuania piloted its first participatory budgeting (PB) initiatives in schools in 2019. Since then, it has supported the implementation of PB in 142 schools across 28 municipalities, engaging more than 71,000 pupils and resulting in 267 initiatives. The practice has been implemented across Lithuania in primary schools, pre-gymnasiums, gymnasiums, vocational education schools and centres, as well as pre-schools.

Participatory budgeting in schools is a practice that enables students to participate directly in decisions about how a part of the school's budget is used. It primarily targets children and young people from pre-school age to 18, including the youngest pupils, students with disabilities and pupils in special education schools. The wider school community, including teachers and school administration, is also involved in the process.

Schools typically need 3–6 months to implement a PB process. Students develop ideas for their school, prepare project proposals, refine them based on feedback, present and promote them to the entire school community, and vote to select the proposal they consider most valuable for their school. Once an idea is selected, the school administration commits to implementing it using the allocated budget.

Throughout the process, the Transparency International Lithuania team acts as facilitator, providing practical training, step-by-step methodological guidance, ready-to-use materials and templates, individual consultations and mentoring. Decision-making remains in the hands of students, ensuring that they are not only consulted but have a meaningful role in deciding how resources are used.

The practice develops civic engagement, financial literacy, project management and collaboration skills. TI Lithuania has supported its implementation through three editions of the Participatory Budgeting Guide, annual Participatory Budgeting Forums and ongoing methodological support to schools.

In 2019, when TI Lithuania first implemented PB in schools, it also conducted its first impact study. It found that three times more pupils knew how they could get involved in school activities, while nearly eight times more understood how their school budget was formed. These findings provided early evidence of the practice's impact on pupils' participation and financial literacy.

What makes it innovative?

TI Lithuania was among the first organisations in the Baltic region to introduce participatory budgeting in schools, pioneering a model that brings a real financial decision-making process into the everyday life of schools.

The innovation lies in turning the school budget, something generally invisible to students, into a hands-on exercise in democracy. Unlike a student council, the model enables all pupils, from primary grades upward, to propose and vote on ideas, while the outcome is binding: the school administration commits real funds to implement the winning idea.

The model was designed to be replicable and scalable, with a step-by-step guide, templates, training and a national map of participating schools. It also incorporates impact measurement which allows the approach to be continuously evaluated and improved based on evidence.

What makes it interdisciplinary?

The practice combines civic education with financial literacy, enabling students to learn how public resources are managed while directly participating in decisions about the use of the school budget. It also connects democratic participation with practical project management and collaboration: students develop proposals, work with others, consider costs and feasibility, and collectively decide which idea should receive funding.

The practice develops students' understanding and practical experience of democratic principles, participation and collective decision-making. By experiencing these processes at school, students build competencies that can later be applied as residents of their municipalities. In municipalities where participatory budgeting is available to residents, they can use these skills to participate in municipal decision-making and collectively decide how part of the municipal budget should be used.

The practice therefore connects education, financial literacy and democratic participation with public governance, creating a learning pathway from practising

democracy at school to participating in decision-making in the wider community.

Results

Since 2019, TI Lithuania has helped move school participatory budgeting from pilot projects to a widely applied national practice. To date, TI Lithuania and its partners have implemented 267 participatory budgeting initiatives in approximately 142 schools across 28 municipalities, engaging more than 71,000 pupils and enabling them to collectively allocate over EUR 361,000 of school funds. This represents nearly 18% of all non-private schools in Lithuania.

Beyond direct participation, the practice has contributed to stronger pupil empowerment, social cohesion, trust and integrity in school governance. To assess and strengthen the sustainability of PB, TI Lithuania has conducted annual reviews since 2020. The latest 2025 review found that 36 of Lithuania's 60 municipalities already involve pupils in decision-making through school PB, with a further seven preparing to introduce the practice. Overall, at least 276 Lithuanian schools have implemented participatory budgeting at least once, representing more than one third of all general education schools in the country. This demonstrates that school PB has grown beyond individual school initiatives into a broader approach to youth participation in democratic decision-making.

VoxPop – Learning Democracy Through Play, Debate and Dialogue

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Description of the practice

VoxPop is a game-based debate and dialogue methodology developed by the Democratic Youth Foundation (DIA) in Hungary. Implemented since 2017, it aims to strengthen democratic competencies, critical thinking, communication skills and constructive dialogue by creating safe and engaging spaces for discussing complex and sometimes controversial social issues. Originally developed as a debate game, VoxPop has evolved into a versatile methodological toolkit combining playful learning, structured debate and facilitated dialogue. Its primary target group is young people, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, but the methodology is also used by educators, youth workers, civil society organizations and professionals in other sectors.

At the heart of VoxPop is a non-competitive debate experience where participants formulate opinions, develop arguments, explore different perspectives and practice constructive disagreement. Rather than focusing on winning debates, the methodology encourages mutual understanding, active listening and shared learning. Over the years, DIA has expanded VoxPop with complementary card and dice games, thematic debate materials and adaptable facilitation techniques. In cooperation with civil society organizations, 14 thematic packages have been developed, addressing issues such as education, environmental protection, children's rights, social inclusion and community participation. These packages combine debate statements with accessible background information that supports informed argumentation. VoxPop is implemented through facilitated workshops, educational activities and community discussions.

Depending on the objectives, it can be combined with creative problem-solving and participatory methods, enabling participants to move from exploring different viewpoints towards identifying solutions and potential collective actions. Since 2017, VoxPop has been applied in schools, debate clubs, community spaces, organizations working with disadvantaged young people, and civil society initiatives addressing specific social issues. It has also supported dialogue between young people and decision-makers and has been used in corporate environments, demonstrating its adaptability across sectors and target groups. DIA shares the methodology with educators, youth workers and other professionals through workshops and methodological knowledge-sharing, supporting its wider application. To date, more than 1000 participants have experienced VoxPop. The game is also available in English and French, creating opportunities for international adaptation and exchange.

What makes it innovative

VoxPop transforms democratic learning into an engaging, game-based experience where young people explore complex social issues through structured debate and dialogue. Its innovation lies in combining a self-developed debate game with a flexible methodological toolkit, including card and dice games, thematic debate materials, facilitated workshops and professional training. Developed in cooperation with civil society organizations, the thematic materials address issues such as education, environmental protection, children's rights and social inclusion. Rather than focusing on winning arguments, VoxPop encourages participants to explore multiple perspectives, develop critical thinking and practice constructive disagreement in a safe environment. The methodology is adaptable to different educational and community settings, while training opportunities enable educators and youth workers to integrate it into their own practice. VoxPop thus moves beyond a standalone educational game to offer a transferable approach to democratic learning and participation.

What makes it interdisciplinary?

VoxPop combines civic education, game-based learning, debate methodology, communication skills development and creative problem-solving within a flexible, experiential learning framework. Its different formats, including board, card and dice games, integrate playful interaction with structured argumentation, critical thinking and facilitated dialogue. Thematic debate materials connect democratic learning with diverse social issues, including environmental sustainability, children's rights, education and social inclusion. Workshops extend the methodology beyond discussion by incorporating participatory problem-solving techniques, helping participants move from exploring different perspectives to identifying possible solutions and actions. VoxPop also connects formal and non-formal education, youth work and civil society. Through professional training, educators, trainers and youth workers learn to adapt the methodology to their own target groups and professional contexts. This interdisciplinary approach makes democratic learning accessible across different sectors, topics and learning environments.

Results

Since its introduction in 2017, VoxPop has reached more than 800 participants across diverse educational, community and professional settings in Hungary. The methodology has been successfully applied in schools, debate clubs, community spaces, organizations working with disadvantaged young people, civil society initiatives and corporate environments. It has also provided opportunities for dialogue between young people and decision-makers. A significant result is the continuous development of the VoxPop toolkit, including complementary card and dice games and 14 thematic debate packages developed in cooperation with civil society organizations. VoxPop provides participants with practical opportunities to develop argumentation, critical thinking, active listening and constructive dialogue skills while exploring complex social issues. Its availability in Hungarian, English and French further supports its transferability and potential international use, while its adaptability enables application across different target groups and contexts.

Ung til Ung: Peer-to-peer Dialogue Workshops on Democracy, Prejudice and Online Hate

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Description of the practice

Ung til Ung is a dialogue-based workshop that supports youth in reflecting on democratic life, community, identity, difference, prejudice, polarization and hateful speech, including how these issues appear in digital spaces. It is designed for youth aged 12–25 and has been delivered in schools, upper-secondary and vocational education settings, and youth clubs in Denmark.

A workshop is structured as four lessons of 45 minutes. It is facilitated by trained young dialogue facilitators (Dialogskabere), aged 18–25, who use short presentations, plenary discussions, participatory exercises and a digital dialogue game developed by the Center for Digital Pædagogik to get the participants activate in the dialog. The format gives participants opportunities to explore different perspectives, discuss difficult topics and practice disagreement in a facilitated setting. The practice has been implemented in Denmark since 2024, and we have currently facilitated more then 200 dialog workshops throughout the country.

What makes it innovative?

The practice uses a peer-to-peer approach: youth facilitators lead dialogue with other youth, making the format more relatable and creating space for open discussion without relying solely on a traditional teacher-led lesson. Rather than treating democracy only as formal political participation, the workshop connects democratic values to everyday experiences of belonging, identity, prejudice, polarisation and online communication. The combination of discussion, practical exercises and digital dialogue games allows participants to explore ways of responding to disagreement and hateful speech, rather than only learning about these issues in theory. The workshops also use real examples from social media, giving participants the opportunity to discuss and reflect on issues they encounter online in a facilitated classroom setting.

An important element of the approach is creating space for youth to express their opinions, including views that challenge prevailing norms. Rather than immediately shutting down controversial opinions or difficult conversations, the facilitators encourage critical reflection, respectful disagreement and dialogue. This allows youth to explore different perspectives in a constructive environment, while also

addressing prejudice and hateful speech. By engaging with difficult viewpoints through dialogue, the practice aims to keep conversations open and provide opportunities for reflection, rather than risking further disengagement or pushing disagreement into less constructive online spaces.

What makes it interdisciplinary?

Ung til Ung combines civic and democratic education with digital literacy, youth work and prevention of intolerance and polarisation. It brings together facilitated dialogue, short knowledge inputs, participatory exercises and gamifying controversial conversation. The practice addresses the links between offline social relations and online communication, and supports reflection on how prejudice, group identity and hateful speech can affect democratic participation and communities.

Results

The workshop has been implemented in schools, youth education settings and youth clubs across Denmark. CfDP has previously reported delivery of more than 200 workshops nationwide reaching close to 4000 youths. Participant feedback indicates positive learning outcomes across three key areas. Regarding their understanding of what they can do when encountering prejudice and unlawful hateful speech, 78% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that the workshop had made this clearer to them. Furthermore, 89% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they had learned what prejudice and unlawful hateful speech are. Regarding democratic dialogue, 79% either strongly agreed or agreed that the workshop had improved their understanding of why it is important to have a dialog, even when people disagree.

These findings suggest that the workshops support youth in understanding prejudice and unlawful hateful speech, identifying possible responses when encountering these issues, and recognizing the importance of dialogue across differences. The results are based on participants' self-reported evaluations following the workshop.

Foróige Citizenship Programme

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Description of the practice

The Citizenship Programme is one of Foróige's longest-running programmes, established in 1969 to engage young people in Irish civic life. It operates through Foróige's clubs, projects and mentoring work across Ireland. The programme follows a civic-action cycle built around awareness, action and evaluation: young people research the needs of their own community, organise and deliver a practical response, reflect on the outcome and celebrate the difference made. Youth groups choose and carry out their own community projects, which are showcased through annual Regional Citizenship Showcases. The programme is grounded in Positive Youth Development and active citizenship principles. An independent evaluation of the Foróige Youth Citizenship Programme was conducted by researchers at NUI Galway (now University of Galway), with quality assurance from Prof. Pat Dolan, then UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement, and Prof. Mark Brennan of Penn State University.

What makes it innovative?

A structured model of youth-led civic action dating back to 1969, embedded in Foróige's clubs, projects and mentoring work across Ireland rather than delivered as a one-off project. The combination of a simple, repeatable civic-action cycle with nationwide regional showcases and independent academic evaluation gives the model a distinctive balance of local ownership, continuity and evidence-based assessment.

What makes it interdisciplinary?

Combines non-formal youth work, civic and citizenship education, community volunteering and development, and an evidence-informed approach drawing on Positive Youth Development research, with independent academic evaluation by researchers at the University of Galway and quality assurance from scholars at the University of Galway and Penn State University.

Results

Foróige's published evaluation materials report substantial participation in the Citizenship Programme across youth clubs and projects in Ireland. The programme has also been subject to structured evaluation, including participant surveys assessing young people's experiences and perceptions of the programme. At organisation level, Foróige reports working with tens of thousands of young people annually across Ireland; these figures refer to Foróige's overall youth work rather than to the Citizenship Programme alone.

YouPart : Engage, Connect, Empower: Political Participation of Disadvantaged Youth

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Description of the practice

YouPart was an Erasmus+ KA220-YOU cooperation project (1 January 2022 – 30 June 2024, project no. 2021-1-AT01-KA220-YOU-000035766), led by Südwind (Austria) with eleven partner organisations — twelve in total — across Austria, Italy, Czechia, Greece, Slovenia and Serbia. In Slovenia, Mreža MaMa implemented the project together with Društvo Humanitas. The project targeted young people aged 13–24, particularly those with limited access to political participation. The process progressed step by step: local and national workshops enabled young people to articulate their concerns and demands; a national workshop selected youth delegates; and two international youth conferences, in Vienna and Prague in 2022, brought participants from the six countries together to develop common political demands.

In December 2022, the resulting "YouPart European Youth Demands" - covering ten themes: healthcare, LGBTQIA+ rights, women's rights, interculturality, schools, youth work, sport, the economy, environmental protection, and human-rights-based migration and asylum policy - were presented to Members of the European Parliament in Brussels. In 2023–2024, the partners jointly developed the "Digital Toolkit for Citizenship Education and Civic Participation in Youth Work": 48 units in five chapters, openly licensed under CC BY-NC-SA and published in seven languages, including Slovenian.

What makes it innovative?

YouPart escalates from grassroots youth participation to EU-level policy dialogue- through local workshops, national youth delegations, transnational conferences and a presentation of the resulting demands to Members of the European Parliament in Brussels- specifically involving young people with limited access to political participation. The project's methods and experience were subsequently developed into a free, modular and reusable digital toolkit for youth workers and organisations working on citizenship education and civic participation.

What makes it interdisciplinary?

Combines youth-work methodology, civic and non-formal education, digital tools - including a dedicated digital chapter in the toolkit - and EU-level policy dialogue, coordinating twelve organisations across six countries and connecting local, national and European levels of participation.

Results

More than 150 young people aged 13–24 took part in the project's local and national activities; 60 young people, together with youth workers and partner-organisation staff, participated in the two international youth conferences in Vienna and Prague; Slovenian youth delegates took part in the process; the European Youth Demands were presented to Members of the European Parliament in Brussels in December 2022; and the final digital toolkit contains 48 units across five chapters, available in seven languages.

YUPAD - YoUth PArticipatory Budgets Empowering Young People Using Big Data

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Description of the practice

YUPAD ("YoUth PArticipatory budgets empowering young people using big Data", project no. 101049352) was an Erasmus+ Partnership for Cooperation project led by Out of the Box International (Belgium), running from 1 March 2022 to 1 March 2024, with ten partner organisations in total across Belgium, Poland, Italy, Cyprus, Austria, Latvia, Serbia, Greece and Lithuania. It combined research on existing youth participatory-budgeting practices, an online tool — the YUPAD Calculator — for collecting and analysing young people's priorities, training curricula for educators and policymakers, and local pilot activities in which youth groups developed concrete project proposals.

CESIE ran the Italian pilot in Sicily with two "YUPAD Bees" youth groups: the youth councils of Gratteri and Prizzi, two small municipalities in the province of Palermo. The groups disseminated the YUPAD Calculator questionnaire among their peers, analysed the results, and developed project ideas; CESIE allocated a small sum to each group to support the realisation of their projects. The pilot concluded with a public event on 26 February 2024 at Moltivolti in Palermo, where a bonus prize was awarded to the group whose project idea was judged the most sustainable.

Project outputs included the YUPAD Calculator and platform, the YUPAD Cookbook, YUPAD Recipes — a collection of good practices in youth participatory budgeting — curricula for educators and policymakers, the YUPAD Bees methodology, and a report with recommendations on youth participatory budgeting.

What makes it innovative?

YUPAD combines face-to-face youth participatory budgeting with a digital data tool - the YUPAD Calculator - designed to collect and analyse young people's priorities at scale. Its policy recommendations present participatory budgeting as a way to strengthen young people's participation and ensure that their voices and needs are taken into account by decision-makers, and call for participatory budgeting to be introduced in schools and higher education as a mechanism for active participation and interdisciplinary learning.

What makes it interdisciplinary?

Combines non-formal education, democratic participation, local authorities and governance, and digital tools and data collection. The policy brief explicitly links youth participatory budgeting to school subjects and topics such as sustainability and civic education, presenting it as a mechanism for active youth participation and interdisciplinary learning.

Results

The YUPAD Calculator, the Cookbook and Recipes collections, training curricula for educators and policymakers, and an EU-level policy brief; two youth-council pilot groups in Gratteri and Prizzi, which developed community project ideas supported by small project grants, with the pilot activities presented at a public event in Palermo on 26 February 2024.

Introduction to Deliberative Democracy

What Is It?

Deliberative democracy is built on a simple idea: a democratic decision is legitimate not just because it was voted on, but because it was genuinely discussed first. As Gutmann and Thompson put it, *"its first and most important characteristic […] is its reason-giving requirement"*: citizens and their representatives owe each other justifications for the decisions they take (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004, ch. 1). An election records preferences as they stand at a given moment; deliberation asks what citizens would conclude after receiving balanced information and discussing it with others (Stanford Center for Deliberative Democracy, n.d.). Deliberative democracy addresses that gap: citizens form, test and revise their opinions through an open exchange of arguments among equals, before deciding.

The term was coined by the American political scientist Joseph Bessette (1980, pp. 102–116), but the core idea is most associated with the philosopher Jürgen Habermas: in a fair discussion, the only thing that should carry weight is *"the unforced force of the better argument"* (Habermas, 1996, p. 306, as cited in Ferrell & Old, 2016) - not status, money or the loudest voice.

In practice, four conditions make a process genuinely deliberative. They are synthesised here from the OECD's good-practice principles for deliberative processes (OECD, 2020, pp. 115–120), and they structure this Toolbox's approach:

Inclusion. Everyone affected by a decision must have a real chance to take part and be heard - explicitly including those usually left out, such as young people and citizens with fewer opportunities. *"Participants should be a microcosm of the general public"* (OECD, 2020, p. 16).

Information. Participants need balanced evidence, plural perspectives and time to digest them (OECD, 2020, pp. 16–17).

Deliberation. Positions must be defended with reasons that others can accept or contest: *"Group deliberation entails finding common ground; this requires careful and active listening, weighing and considering multiple perspectives, every participant having an opportunity to speak, a mix of formats, and skilled facilitation"* (OECD, 2020, p. 17).

Impact. The outcome must visibly influence the actual decision, with a public response from the authority to each recommendation (OECD, 2020, pp. 115–120).

One critique deserves mention, because it shaped modern practice. The philosopher Iris Marion Young warned that even when everyone is formally around the table, *"internal exclusion"* persists: some participants find that *"others ignore or dismiss or patronize their statements and expressions"* (Young, 2000, p. 55, as cited in Schmidt, 2024). A polite exchange of arguments can quietly favour the educated and the confident. The response was practical: widen what counts as legitimate expression - storytelling, personal experience, artistic forms such as the artivism used in this project - and invest in facilitation so that the least confident speakers are actively brought in. A Youth Parliament in a classroom, run this way, is deliberative democracy in its own right.

How Does It Work?

The most common vehicle is the "mini-public": a small, diverse group of citizens who learn about an issue, deliberate, and produce collective recommendations. Its most distinctive ingredient is **selection by lot**: instead of volunteers or elected representatives, participants are drawn by civic lottery - *"random sampling from which a representative selection is made to ensure the group matches the community's demographic profile"* (OECD, 2020, p. 16). Sortition neutralises the two classic filters of participation, ambition and connections. That is what makes it so effective at reaching young people who would never answer an open call.

The formats are a family, not a single recipe. **Citizens' assemblies** address major societal questions: *"On average, Citizens' Assemblies gather 90 citizens (ranging from 36 to 161 […]) for 18.8 days"* (OECD, 2020, p. 37). **Citizens' juries and panels** are smaller - around 34 people on average, and **"between 12 to 24 people"** in the original Jefferson Center model - over a few days, suited to one focused local question (OECD, 2020, p. 39). **Deliberative polls** measure how informed discussion changes opinions, by surveying participants before and after deliberation (Stanford Center for Deliberative Democracy, n.d.). And lighter formats - world café, fishbowl, structured debate, parliamentary simulation - bring the same principles into classrooms and youth centres.

Whatever the format, the OECD has distilled the evidence from its 289 collected cases into eleven **Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes for Public Decision Making** (OECD, 2020, pp. 115–120; summarised by the OECD itself on pp. 16–17). Faithfully rendered, they state that:

1. **Purpose**. *"The task should be clearly defined as a question that is linked to a public problem"* (OECD, 2020, p. 16).

2. **Accountability.** *"The commissioning authority should publicly commit to responding to or acting on recommendations in a timely manner and should monitor and regularly report on the progress of their implementation"* (OECD,

2020, p. 16).

3. **Transparency.** *"Anyone should be able to easily find the following information about the process: its purpose, design, methodology, recruitment details, experts, recommendations, the authority's response, and implementation follow-up"* (OECD, 2020, p. 16).

4. **Representativeness.** *"Participants should be a microcosm of the general public; this can be achieved through random sampling from which a representative selection is made to ensure the group matches the community's demographic profile"* (OECD, 2020, p. 16).

5. **Inclusiveness**. *"Efforts should be made to ensure inclusiveness, such as through remuneration, covering expenses, and/or providing/paying for childcare or eldercare"* (OECD, 2020, p. 16).

6. **Information.** *"Participants should have access to a wide range of accurate, relevant, and accessible evidence and expertise, and have the ability to request additional information"* (OECD, 2020, p. 17).

7. **Group deliberation**. *"Group deliberation entails finding common ground; this requires careful and active listening, weighing and considering multiple perspectives, every participant having an opportunity to speak, a mix of formats, and skilled facilitation"* (OECD, 2020, p. 17).

8. **Time.** *"For high-quality processes that result in informed recommendations, participants should meet for at least four full days in person, as deliberation requires adequate time for participants to learn, weigh evidence, and develop collective recommendations"* (OECD, 2020, p. 17).

9. **Integrity.** *"To help ensure the integrity of the process, it should be run by an arm's length co-ordinating team"* (OECD, 2020, p. 17).

10. **Privacy.** *"There should be respect for participants' privacy to protect them from unwanted attention and preserve their independence"* (OECD, 2020, p. 17).

11. **Evaluation.** *"Deliberative processes should be evaluated against these principles to ensure learning, help improve future practice, and understand impact"* (OECD, 2020, p. 17).

For youth settings, this Toolbox translates these principles into a simple four-phase sequence - **learning** (balanced briefing from different perspectives: principles 6), **deliberation** (facilitated small groups where everyone speaks: principles 7 and 5), **decision** (recommendations drafted, amended and voted: principles 1 and 3), and **response** (the authority — a school board, a municipality, a youth council - answers publicly, point by point: principle 2). Formal requirements such as the four-day minimum are relaxed in educational contexts, where the aim is learning democracy by doing it rather than formal policy-making; the principles of inclusion, balanced information, skilled facilitation and a genuine response, however, remain non-negotiable.

These processes have moved from the margins to the mainstream. Drawing on *"data collected from 289 case studies […] from 1986 to October 2019"* (OECD, 2020, p. 3), the OECD opens its report by observing that "*the deliberative wave has been building as innovative ways of involving citizens in the policy-making cycle have gained traction"* (OECD, 2020, p. 16).

In Ireland, two successive deliberative bodies - the Constitutional Convention (2012–2014) and the Citizens' Assembly (2016–2018)- prepared the referendums on marriage equality (2015) and abortion (2018), showing that ordinary citizens can deliberate soundly on the most divisive questions (Farrell & Suiter, 2021). At European level, the Conference on the Future of Europe (2021–2022) convened transnational European Citizens' Panels of randomly selected citizens whose recommendations fed the EU's agenda (European Parliament, 2021). And Belgium offers two landmarks: the G1000, which brought a thousand randomly selected citizens into structured deliberation in 2011 (G1000 Organisation, n.d.), and the Ostbelgien Model, which in 2019 established the first permanent citizens' dialogue attached to a parliament (OECD/Participo, 2021).

The evidence on outcomes is encouraging: the OECD documents that *"participation in a deliberative process can lead to increased trust by citizens in government"* (OECD, 2020, p. 110). That is exactly why deliberative methods suit youth work with young people with fewer opportunities: they do not presuppose political knowledge, confidence or connections - they build them. The following sections translate these principles into concrete, tested activities.

Methods and Tools

The methods and tools compiled in this chapter are designed to translate abstract concepts of active citizenship, democratic dialogue, and deliberative governance into concrete learning experiences. Rooted in the principles of non-formal education, these ten structured exercises offer youth workers, educators, and facilitators practical frameworks to foster active listening, critical thinking, visual expression, and public policy advocacy among young people, especially those with fewer opportunities.

Although each activity in this handbook functions as a standalone module that can be adapted based on group dynamics, context, or objectives, they are intentionally ordered according to an experiential learning continuum. The journey begins with sensory and creative exercises such as Clay Portraits, Sound Bridge of Communication, and Building Our Future Together, which build interpersonal trust, non-verbal expression, and a sense of psychological safety. From there, communication and stance-mapping formats, Four Corners, World Café, and Fishbowl, encourage participants to examine diverse perspectives, distinguish debate from dialogue, and practice active listening. Finally, the chapter transitions into policy-focused methodologies, including Deliberative Workshops, Open Space Technology, Youth Parliament, Citizens' Jury, and Citizens' Assembly, in which participants engage in evidence-based inquiry, set agendas through self-organization, draft policy proposals, and participate in decision-making.

When planning more complex methodologies such as the Youth Parliament, Citizens' Jury, or Citizens' Assembly, facilitators are advised not to jump directly into these demanding formats. Instead, use foundational icebreakers and dialogue exercises as preparation. Additionally, complex methods can be broken down into shorter, modular sessions spread over several days. This phased approach gives participants time to process background information, conduct research, reflect on opposing viewpoints, and construct well-reasoned arguments. Dedicating time to building trust and listening skills ensures that their contributions during formal debate are informed, meaningful, and inclusive.

Getting to Know Each Other Through Clay Portraits

Topic
Icebreaking, non-verbal communication, getting to know one another.

Duration
60 minutes.

Group size
2-20 participants.

Materials
Clay (1–20 kg, depending on group size), buckets of water, spray bottles, hand towels.

Objectives
To create a relaxed atmosphere for authentic mutual introductions.
To foster non-verbal communication, focused observation, and active listening.
To build trust, empathy, and a sense of belonging within the group.

Outcomes
Developed observation skills and enhanced sensitivity to non-verbal cues.
Increased creative confidence through hands-on work with the material.
Stronger group cohesion and reduced social anxiety.

Instructions

Divide participants into pairs, either randomly or by facilitator placement.
Distribute a piece of clay, a bucket of water, a spray bottle, and towels to each pair.

Announce the activity: each participant shapes a portrait of their partner's face using only their hands—the use of sculpting tools is not permitted.

Emphasize the rule: each participant holds the clay in one hand and uses the other hand to shape only one side of their partner's face.

While sculpting, encourage pairs to talk, ask open questions, and share personal stories.

When time is up, participants display their work in a circle to create a shared, temporary exhibition.

Conclude the activity with a guided discussion and reflection.

Debriefing

What was it like to sculpt someone you had just met, and how did it feel to be observed so closely?

How did using a tactile material like clay influence your conversation and the way you connected?

What new insights did you discover about your partner during this process?

How does non-verbal observation help us build empathy and understanding in group settings?

Tips

To keep the clay pliable, instruct participants to lightly spray it with water occasionally, taking care not to soak it.

Speed rotation (Variant A): Set aside 15 minutes per pair for a deeper connection before switching partners and taking fresh clay for a second round.

Collaborative portrait (Variant B): Run quick 3–4 minute rounds where participants carry their work-in-progress to a new partner, resulting in a multi-author artwork.





Sound Bridge of Communication

Topic
Non-verbal communication, group dynamics, active listening.

Duration
60 minutes.
Group size
4-20 participants.

Materials
Musical instruments, natural materials (dry leaves, stones, wood), waste and everyday objects from the surrounding environment.

Objectives
To explore the acoustic potential of natural and everyday objects.
To develop active listening, group dynamics, and wordless cooperation.
To connect participants with their environment through sound exploration.

Outcomes
Greater sensory sensitivity to ambient sounds.
Enhanced skills in non-verbal communication and collaborative improvisation.
Better understanding of group rhythm and collective expression.

Instructions

Send participants on a 10-minute walk around the surrounding area to collect natural or found objects that can serve as instruments.

Arrange the collected items and traditional instruments in the center of the room. Form a circle so that all participants can see one another.

Briefly explain the exercise, emphasizing the importance of active listening and experimentation.

One participant begins with a sound or rhythm, and the others join in gradually and naturally to create a shared soundscape.

Encourage participants to generate rhythms, melodies, and dynamic changes using their chosen objects.

Gradually bring the sound improvisation to a close and transition into a guided discussion.

Debriefing

Which sounds or sound combinations were the most striking or unusual to you?

How did it feel to build a rhythm and communicate with others without words?

Did you notice a difference in dynamics between natural materials and man-made objects?

How did active listening affect the evolution of the collective sound?

How can we apply this experience of non-verbal communication to our daily group work and conversation?

Tips

Before starting the exercise, invite participants to close their eyes for two minutes to sharpen their hearing and focus.

For added structure, individual participants can step into the center of the circle to “conduct” the volume or lead a rhythmic call-and-response dialogue.

Ensure that participants with disabilities or sensory impairment receive adapted items for equal participation.



Four Corners

Topic
Taking a stand, active debate, critical thinking, exploring beliefs.

Duration
45-60 minutes.

Group size
8–30 participants.

Materials
Four large sheets of paper for the corners of the room labeled: “Agree”, “Disagree”, “I don’t know”, and “I don’t care”; a prepared list of controversial statements or public policy positions.

Objectives
Encouraging movement, decision-making, and personal reflection on complex topics.
Creating an environment where participants can express their positions, uncertainty, or indifference.
Practicing a culture of dialogue, active listening, and openness to changing one’s mind.

Outcomes
Improved ability to express personal views and defend them with arguments.
Greater awareness of group diversity, minority perspectives, and the reasons behind civic apathy.
Readiness to question initial assumptions in light of new arguments.

Instructions

Mark the four corners of the room with signs: “Agree”, “Disagree”, “I don’t know”, and “I don’t care”.

Explain the rules: after a statement is read, participants move to the corner that best reflects their stance, without prior consultation with others.

Read the first statement. Give participants 15–20 seconds to choose a corner.

Set aside 2–3 minutes for participants within each corner to prepare their arguments.

Lead a brief discussion where a participants individually from each corner presents their stance, starting with minority corners and the “I don’t care” and “I don’t know” options.

Emphasize that changing one’s position is encouraged: if convinced by another group’s arguments, participants may switch corners at any time.

Repeat the process with 5 to 10 increasingly complex statements, keeping a dynamic pace.

Gather the entire group in a circle for reflection.

Debriefing

How did it feel to physically take a stand in front of the group, especially if you were in the minority?

What did you notice about the reasons for choosing the “I don’t know” or “I don’t care” options? What would turn indifference into active engagement?

Did anyone switch corners during the discussion? Which argument prompted you to change your mind?

How does this exercise help us understand the formation and shifting of public opinion in society?

Tips

Pay close attention to the “I don’t care” corner. Check whether indifference stems from a lack of interest or a feeling that an individual voice has no impact.
Ask participants in the “I don’t know” corner what additional information they would need to form an opinion.
Encourage quieter participants to speak up, applying the “step up, step back” principle of equal participation.
Ensure the space is clear and accessible to participants with disabilities or mobility limitations.



World Café

Topic
Deliberative dialogue, communication, getting on the same page.

Duration
90 minutes.

Group size
6-24 participants.

Materials
Small tables, chairs, large paper or flipchart paper for each group, colorful markers, pens, sticky notes, background music, bell or sound signal.

Objectives
To explore the differences between debate, dialogue, and deliberation.
To connect ideas through small-group conversation and visual note-taking.
To create a relaxed environment that fosters equal participation and active listening.

Outcomes
Understanding the roles of debate, dialogue, and deliberation in civic engagement.
Enhanced active listening, appreciation of differing perspectives, and synthesis of diverse viewpoints.
A shared visual representation capturing key insights into democratic communication.

Instructions

Set up the space to resemble a cozy café, with small tables for 4 to 5 participants, covered with paper and equipped with markers.

Introduce the principles of the World Café method and encourage participants to write, draw, and sketch ideas directly onto the paper tablecloths.

Place one question on each table that will remain fixed there: “What is dialogue?”, “What is debate?”, and “What is deliberation?”.

The groups rotate, bringing their paper with them, while the questions stay at the tables.

After presenting their conclusions on the three topics, the groups answer how each form of communication influenced their work: “When is dialogue most effective in group communication?”, “How does debate differ from dialogue, and what are its strengths and limitations?”, and “How does deliberation lead us from debate and dialogue toward shared decision-making?”.

Transition to a guided discussion and reflection session.

Debriefing

How did the room layout and informal rotation affect your willingness to talk and share observations?

Looking at the table drawings, how would you summarize the fundamental difference between winning an argument and building understanding in dialogue?

Why is deliberative communication crucial when young people want to turn dif fering viewpoints into concrete public policy recommendations?

How can we adapt this format to address pressing issues in our communities?

Tips

Play soft instrumental music during discussions to create a relaxed atmosphere, and use stopping the music as a signal for rotation.
Before starting the verbal discussion, give participants 3 to 5 minutes to walk quietly around the room and view the completed paper tablecloths. This brief transition helps everyone notice and digest the group's collective notes prior to the conversation.

During the discussion, note down key words or contrasts between debate, dialogue, and deliberation on a central flipchart. A shared reference sheet ensures that everyone leaves with a unified understanding of the three concepts.

At the very beginning, remind the group that drawing, mind mapping, and symbols are just as valid as writing in full sentences. This lowers barriers to participation and encourages involvement from young people with fewer opportunities or those for whom the workshop language is not their mother tongue.

Fishbowl Conversation

Topic
Deliberative dialogue, active listening, group dynamics, perspective sharing.

Duration
60 minutes.

Group size
10–30 participants.

Materials
Chairs arranged in two concentric circles, flipchart or whiteboard, markers, sticky notes, clipboards, pens, and notebooks.

Objectives

To practice deliberative communication and active listening on complex or sensitive topics.

To foster youth engagement by introducing media reporting roles into the discussion.

To create an inclusive structure that combines guided participation, questioning, and open dialogue.

Outcomes

Enhanced capacity for constructive, multi-perspective dialogue and consensus building.

Increased youth motivation and active participation through interactive roleplay dynamics.

A concise summary report synthesized by peer journalists capturing key arguments and conclusions.

Instructions

Arrange the chairs into two concentric circles: an inner circle with 4 to 5 chairs (the "fishbowl") and an outer circle containing the remaining chairs.

Leave one chair in the inner circle empty at all times.

Select 2 participants to act as "Youth Journalists." Issue them clipboards, pens, and notebooks to track key arguments, contrasting viewpoints, and pivotal moments.

Introduce the topic or deliberative question and explain the rules of the fishbowl method, including the special role of the journalists.

Invite 3 to 4 participants to take seats in the inner circle to begin the conversation, while all other participants sit in the outer circle as active listeners.

Emphasize that only participants sitting in the inner circle may speak.
Open Fishbowl Rule: Any participant from the outer circle can step forward at any time and sit in the empty chair in the inner circle to contribute. When this happens, one of the current inner-circle speakers must voluntarily leave their seat and return to the outer circle to keep one chair open.

Journalist Intervention Rule: The two designated journalists observe from the outer circle, but have special permission to briefly step into the empty chair whenever the discussion stalls or needs a boost. They can pose a probing question, request clarification, or challenge a point before returning to the outer circle.

Facilitate the discussion, ensuring the conversation remains focused, respectful, and dynamic.

Journalist Final Report (5–10 min): Just before the general debriefing, the two journalists step forward to present a brief, objective summary report outlining the core themes, major debates, and points of consensus reached.
Conclude the activity and gather everyone into a single large circle for reflection.

Debriefing

How did having active journalists in the room change the energy and focus of the discussion?

Did the journalists' probing questions help deepen the debate or shed light on unexplored perspectives?

How accurate and representative was the journalists' final report compared to your own experience in the circle?

Did the fishbowl structure encourage you to listen differently compared to a standard open discussion?

How can we use this combination of deliberation and media reporting to address complex issues in our communities?

Tips

Brief the two journalists beforehand so they understand their dual role: keeping the discussion dynamic with well-timed questions and capturing the essence of the conversation for the final report.

If participants are hesitant to step into the inner circle initially, encourage the journalists to jump in first with a opening question to break the ice.

Remind outer-circle participants that active listening is a vital role, as any of them could be called upon or quoted in the journalists' synthesis.

Optional add-on: The journalists' final report can be transcribed into a short article or blog post for the project's newsletter or social media channels.



Deliberative Workshop

Topic
Deliberative decision-making, public policy analysis, consensus building, informed dialogue.

Duration
120–180 minutes (can be divided into multiple sessions).

Group size
8–25 participants.

Materials
Flipchart stands and paper, markers, multi-colored sticky notes, briefing summaries and fact sheets, note cards, voting dots/stickers for prioritization.

Objectives
To provide participants with balanced and verified information prior to deliberation and decision-making.
To create a facilitated space where young people explore diverse perspectives, weigh trade-offs, and re-evaluate initial assumptions.
To formulate collective and well-reasoned recommendations or action points for decision-makers.

Outcomes
Deeper understanding of complex social and political issues through evidence analysis and peer discussion.
Enhanced skills in critical thinking, analysis, and consensus building.
A clear set of recommendations grounded in informed deliberation rather than superficial opinions.

Instructions

During information phase present a neutral and balanced overview of the topic using briefing summaries, expert presentations, or brief case studies. Allow time for participants to ask clarifying questions.

During exploration phase divide participants into mixed groups of 4 to 6 people. Assign each group a sub-question or specific perspective related to the central topic.

During small group work groups identify key challenges, evaluate pros and cons, and record potential solutions on sticky notes or flipchart paper. Encourage active listening and consideration of opposing viewpoints.

During plenary mapping each group presents its ideas during the plenary session and places them on a central wall under shared thematic clusters.

During consensus and compromise phase lead a discussion addressing points of disagreement or more complex issues. Guide the group toward negotiating

trade-offs and identifying areas of common ground.

During drafting recommendations phase support participants in crafting clear and actionable recommendations. Use dot-voting or prioritization methods to agree on the final conclusions.
Conclude the workshop with a guided reflection on the deliberative journey undertaken.

Debriefing

How did the initial verified information influence your starting assumptions on the topic?
Was it difficult to reach consensus on trade-offs within your small group, and how did you resolve differences?
How did this structured workshop differ from a traditional debate or an informal discussion?
In what ways does informed deliberation lend greater weight to youth recommendations when presented to decision-makers?

Tips

Ensure that initial briefing materials are strictly balanced, non-partisan, and accessible to participants from all educational backgrounds.
Assign skilled facilitators to small groups to prevent dominant individuals from taking over and to ensure quieter participants feel comfortable.
Emphasize that consensus does not require absolute uniformity. Capturing dissenting opinions or minority nuances alongside majority recommendations adds value to the final output.
If dealing with complex policy issues, you may invite guest experts during the information phase to answer technical questions without influencing the decision-making process.



Open Space Technology

Topic
Self-directed problem-solving, participant-driven agenda setting, peer learning, action planning.

Duration
120–180 minutes (adaptable for full-day or multi-day events).

Group size
12–50 participants (scalable for large gatherings).

Materials
Large wall space, flipchart paper, markers, sticky notes, space labels/signage, report templates, masking tape.

Objectives
To entrust the full agenda creation to the participants based on the topics that matter most to them.
To create a flexible, self-organizing environment for simultaneously exploring various ideas.
To formulate concrete action points and recommendations originating from the genuine interests of participants.

Outcomes
High level of participant engagement, motivation, and personal ownership over discussion topics.
Rapid identification of priorities and solutions within a short timeframe.
Workshop reports featuring actionable next steps generated by self-organized groups.

Instructions

Seat participants in a circle and introduce the overarching theme of the event.

Introduce the “Law of Two Feet”. If participants feel they are neither learning nor contributing in a session, they are responsible for moving to another group or taking time for reflection.

Invite participants to propose topics, anyone with an idea or question steps into the center, writes it on a sheet of paper, announces it to the group, and posts it on the wall under an open time slot and location.

Once all topics are posted on the wall, participants step up, review the schedule, and choose the discussions they wish to join.

Participants disperse to their chosen spaces. Session initiators lead the conversation, ensure someone takes notes using the provided template, and keep the discussion focused on the topic.

At the end of each round, hosts draft a concise report outlining proposals and action steps, and post it back on the wall for everyone to read.

Reassemble all participants in the main circle to share takeaways, reflect on the process, and agree on next steps for implementing the ideas.

Debriefing

How did it feel to have complete freedom over what you discussed and where you participated?

How did applying the “Law of Two Feet” impact the energy and productivity of the discussions?

What unexpected connections or ideas emerged from setting your own agenda?

How can self-organizing methods like Open Space help young people launch their own initiatives outside formal structures?

Tips

As a facilitator, resist the urge to manage or intervene in working groups, trust the participants to self-organize.

Remind participants of the classic Open Space roles like “bumblebees,” who cross-pollinate ideas by moving between session groups, and “butterflies,” who foster spontaneous conversations outside the schedule.

Ensure report templates are simple so conclusions can be captured quickly without interrupting the flow of conversation.

Youth Parliament

Topic
Parliamentary procedure, policy drafting, democratic debate, youth policy advocacy.

Duration
180–240 minutes (half-day or full-day simulation).

Group size
15–40 participants.

Materials
Resolution templates, badges/nametags for representatives or political caucuses, speaker's gavel, flipchart, markers, debate rules, microphone or podium.

Objectives

To familiarize participants with formal legislative processes, parliamentary debate, and decision-making.

To develop critical thinking, public speaking, negotiation, and policy formulation skills.

To foster constructive debate on key youth issues and formulating recommendations.

Outcomes

Hands-on understanding of governance, legislative procedures, and consensus building.

Enhanced public speaking, argumentation, and negotiation skills.
A written set of resolutions or recommendations ready to be submitted to decision-makers.

Instructions

Set up the room in a parliamentary layout, rows of seating facing the podium and the presiding officer.

Explain the procedural rules and assign roles, political caucuses, or committees.

During committee work phase participants review background materials, debate issues, and draft resolutions or amendments.

Convene the plenary session and give the floor to committee representatives to present their resolutions.

Open the debate during which representatives take turns speaking for or against, adhering to a structured time limit and a speakers' list.

Allow for amendments to be proposed, voted on, and follow with a final vote on each resolution.

Conclude the simulation, step out of character, and transition to a reflection session.

Debriefing

How did it feel to work within a formal parliamentary structure compared to an informal discussion?

What challenges did you face when building alliances and reaching compromises across different political caucuses?

Did the formal rules help ensure equal speaking opportunities, or did they slow down the discussion?

How can we apply the skills gained in the Youth Parliament to real-world advocacy with decision-makers?

Tips

Streamline parliamentary procedure rules so participants do not get bogged down in technicalities instead of focusing on the debate.

Choose topics together with participants that directly impact young people (e.g., public transit, mental health, sustainability, digital rights, etc).

Facilitators should monitor the speakers' list carefully to ensure less experienced participants get a chance to speak.

Citizens' Jury

Topic
Informed deliberative inquiry, policy evaluation, consensus building, youth rights advocacy.

Duration
180–240 minutes (can be divided into a two-day event or multiple sessions).

Group size
12–24 participants (acting as jury members).

Materials
Information leaflets and background dossiers, flipcharts, markers, sticky notes, jury report templates, clipboards, pens, voting stickers or ballots.

Objectives
To enable young people to examine public policies and social issues in depth through thorough, informed deliberation.
To provide participants with direct access to expert perspectives, evidence, and community voices.
To collaboratively draft a reasoned jury verdict and a set of actionable recommendations for decision-makers.

Outcomes
Enhanced civic literacy, critical inquiry, and evaluation of policy trade-offs.
Strengthened skills in evidence analysis, active listening, and negotiation.
An official Citizens' Jury report featuring clear recommendations presented to public authorities.

Instruction

Arrange the space with a central seating layout for jury members, a designated spot for experts and witnesses, and flipcharts to record testimony.

Introduce the mandate or core question entrusted to the jury, and explain the rules of debate and presentation of evidence.

Present balanced information and invite expert witnesses to deliver brief presentations on different facets of the issue.

Allow jury members to cross-examine witnesses, ask questions, and request additional facts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Facilitate small-group and plenary discussions so participants can evaluate the evidence, weigh pros and cons, and negotiate points of consensus.

Support the jury in drafting the final report and verdict, incorporating consensus-based recommendations alongside key minority opinions.

Conclude the workshop by presenting the final report to invited stakeholders or policy-makers, followed by a reflection on the deliberative process.

Debriefing

How did hearing directly from witnesses and examining evidence impact your initial positions?
What did you find most challenging when weighing opposing arguments and rendering a verdict?
How did the facilitated discussion structure help ensure that all viewpoints were fairly considered?
How can decision-makers leverage citizens' juries when addressing youth issues?

Tips

Select expert witnesses who represent a balanced spectrum of perspectives so that bias does not dominate the information phase.
Remind jury members to act as independent thinkers serving the public interest rather than advocates for personal or partisan agendas.
Facilitate the deliberation thoughtfully so quieter participants feel comfortable questioning evidence and contributing to recommendations.
If decision-makers cannot attend the presentation, arrange a formal submission of the report accompanied by a request for a written response.



Citizens' Assembly

Topic
Deliberative democracy, co-creating public policies with citizens, representative youth voice, decision-making.

Duration
240–360 minutes (typically divided over multiple days or weekend sessions).

Group size
25–50 participants (selected randomly or stratified for demographic representation).

Materials
Public policy background dossiers, presentation slides, flipcharts, markers, sticky notes, voting cards or digital tools, report templates.

Objectives

To engage a representative cross-section of young people in an in-depth deliberation on major social, environmental, or political challenges.
To provide learning opportunities, direct access to expert evidence, and stakeholder input.
To draft robust public policy recommendations that reflect the informed will of young people.

Outcomes

Hands-on experience in large-scale decision-making and negotiating across diverse perspectives.
Strengthened civic literacy, public policy analysis, and cross-group understanding.
A comprehensive Citizens' Assembly report featuring policy proposals and voting results, presented directly to decision-makers.

Instructions

Arrange the space with round tables for mixed groups of 5 to 6 participants, ensuring good visibility of the central presentation area.

Present the mandate and the public policy topic, explain the learning, deliberation, and decision-making phases, and establish ground rules for dialogue.

Conduct the learning phase through balanced information and presentations by experts, stakeholders, and community representatives.

Following the presentations, allow time for groups to process the information, formulate questions, and address them to the experts.

Transition to the deliberation phase: small groups, guided by facilitators, weigh

options, analyze trade-offs, and draft recommendations.

Reassemble all participants in a plenary session to review the drafted recommendations, discuss details, and refine the text.

Conduct a vote where assembly members vote individually on each recommendation to establish the level of support.

Present the final report to government/public officials and transition to a reflection session.

Debriefing

How did participating in a representative group change your understanding of how other young people perceive this issue?
What impact did learning from experts have prior to drafting proposed solutions?
How did your group handle competing priorities when shaping the final recommendations?
What advantages do citizens' assemblies offer compared to traditional political processes when addressing long-term challenges?

Tips

Ensure small-group facilitation is strictly neutral so that dominant participants do not overshadow quieter peers.
Break down complex concepts into clear visual guides and executive summaries before presenting them to the assembly.
Maintain full transparency regarding how the assembly's outputs will be utilized, and secure a public response from decision-makers.

Building Our Future Together

Topic
Team building, vision alignment, creative problem-solving.

Duration
90 minutes.

Group size
4-20 participants.

Materials
Clay (2–5 kg per person), buckets of water, spray bottles, work clothes or aprons, hand towels.

Objectives

To foster teamwork, collaborative decision-making, and cooperation.
To develop creative problem-solving skills and shaping a shared vision through clay work.
To strengthen interpersonal relationships and group communication.

Outcomes

Improved collaboration skills and a stronger sense of commitment to shared goals.
More effective communication, consensus building, and performance under time pressure.
Greater group cohesion and creative confidence.

Instructions

Divide participants into teams of 2 to 4 people.

Distribute the clay, water, spray bottles, aprons, and towels.

Announce the activity: each team works together to create a sculpture that represents their shared vision of the future.

Give teams a short period to brainstorm their idea and assign roles before starting to sculpt.

Set a 60-minute time limit for crafting the sculpture.

Circulate among the teams, facilitate collaboration, and offer technical assistance with the clay as needed.

Once time is up, each team presents their work and explains the concept to the broader group.

Transition to a guided discussion and reflection session.

Debriefing

What was most challenging about agreeing on a shared vision within your team?
How did you approach decision-making and problem-solving during the creation process?
What skills and strengths did each member contribute to the final result?
If creative disagreements arose, how did you resolve them?
How did open communication influence finishing the work within the given time-frame?
What lessons about teamwork can we apply to future joint projects?

Tips

Suggest that teams divide roles (e.g., structural base construction, detail work, maintaining clay moisture) so everyone actively participates.
Emphasize that the focus is on symbolic meaning and the collective message, rather than artistic perfection.
Remind participants to lightly spray the clay with water occasionally to keep it from cracking during the hour-long session.



Building Capacity for Youth Participation

The project “Democracy for Youth: Empowering Active Citizenship” is a 15-month Small-scale Partnership in Youth (KA210-YOU) running from September 1, 2025, to November 30, 2026. Co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union, the initiative brings together CIVIX from Belgium and Udruga Prizma from Croatia to address young people’s growing disengagement from traditional political structures. By bridging the gap between young citizens and local decision-makers, the project focuses on equipping youth work professionals and young people with innovative, accessible methods for democratic life.

The core objectives of the project are to strengthen the capacities of partner organizations to work with youth through an interdisciplinary approach incorporating deliberative democracy, non-formal education, and visual arts. It aims to foster a sense of initiative among youth with fewer opportunities, empowering them to translate their needs and ideas into concrete policy recommendations. Through youth-friendly, alternative channels of engagement, the project ensures equal access to democratic participation, promotes media literacy, and combats political disinformation while supporting social inclusion and core European values.

Capacity Building

Capacity-building activities within the project established a concrete path for organizational growth, cross-border knowledge transfer, and the refinement of inclusive youth work methodologies. Designed to bridge the divide between young people and traditional political structures, these initiatives equipped youth workers, trainers, and partner organization staff with the tools needed to foster meaningful civic engagement. By documenting the activities in Belgium and Croatia, this chapter illustrates how targeted capacity building, combining job shadowing with an experiential seminar, strengthens both the operational and pedagogical foundations of youth work.

The goal of this phase was to elevate the quality, innovation, and recognition of youth work by integrating deliberative democracy, media literacy, non-formal education, and creative learning environments. Because traditional participation mechanisms often fail to reach marginalized groups, emphasis was placed on methodologies that lower barriers to inclusion for young people with fewer opportunities, particularly those from geographically, economically, or socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Through direct peer-to-peer exchange, organizations built competencies to com-

bat disinformation, understand emerging technologies and artificial intelligence, navigate European policies, and utilize artivism as a tool for political expression.

The impact of these activities extends beyond individual skill development to institutional transformation and community change. By mastering new methodologies, youth workers returned to their local communities better equipped to facilitate youth parliaments, media literacy workshops, and deliberative dialogues. The capacity built in this way establishes sustainable frameworks within which young citizens can clearly articulate their needs, co-design recommendations, and influence decision-making at local, national, and European levels.

This overview can serve as inspiration for designing your own models for building internal youth work capacity.

Job-Shadowing

The first job-shadowing mobility took place in Brussels from December 8 to 12, 2025, with two representatives from Udruga Prizma and four representatives from CIVIX participating. The focus was on digital tools, technological approaches to political engagement, and cyber literacy. The hands-on experience began with cybersecurity training on the Hack The Box Academy, TryHackMe, and OverTheWire platforms. Participants explored local digital education models at BeCode and studied how CIVIX designs, implements, and evaluates its flagship school initiatives. CIVIX provided operational insights into its digital platforms, including Politix, the Campus initiative, fact-checking tools, the AI-driven election tool civix.chatbot, and school workshops on AI literacy. The final phase covered European cybersecurity policies, with an emphasis on threat monitoring, the EU Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox, the Cyber Resilience Act, and the Cyber Solidarity Act.

This mobility enabled Udruga Prizma's staff to acquire practical knowledge regarding the application of artificial intelligence and digital literacy models, thereby strengthening their capacity to combat disinformation and integrate digital methods into civic education programs in Croatia.

A reciprocal job-shadowing mobility took place from March 16 to 20, 2026, in Zadar and Veli Iž, hosted by Udruga Prizma. Two participants from CIVIX and five from Udruga Prizma took part in activities focused on non-formal education, artivism, and the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in decision-making processes. During the mobility, participants met with a representative of the City of Zadar Youth Council to analyze the work of local advisory bodies and compare youth participation in the Belgian and Croatian political systems. The CIVIX team visited the Zadar Youth Center to study local youth policy frameworks and Prizma's methodology for co-designing strategic documents, such as the Youth Program of the City of Zadar. Practical artivism workshops demonstrated how visual arts can serve as an accessible entry point for civic dialogue, creative expression, and public policy advocacy.



The mobility provided CIVIX staff with proven methods for reaching marginalized youth, enriching their pedagogical work with creative and inclusive non-formal learning practices.

Seminar

The four-day international seminar on deliberative democracy took place from March 16 to 20, 2026, at the DKC Školj socio-cultural center in Veli Iž, hosted by Udruga Prizma in collaboration with the organization CIVIX. Bringing together eight youth workers, staff members, and active volunteers, the seminar served as a platform for experiential learning and the deepening of organizational competencies in the field of youth engagement.

The daily program unfolded across four 90-minute sessions led by trainers and facilitators, combining a theoretical framework with interactive learning-by-doing. Each session concluded with a debriefing, while daily reflection groups tracked learning outcomes using Youthpass. The program integrated key European youth platforms, the European Youth Portal, the EU Youth Strategy Platform, and Youth Wiki, to align local initiatives with European priorities. A central focus was placed on mastering the distinctions between debate, dialogue, and deliberation.

Through non-formal education and creative methods, participants gained a deeper grasp of deliberative processes using tools such as the fishbowl, four corners, and

the “step forward” exercise. The seminar provided practical knowledge on creating safe spaces for deliberation, equipping facilitators with methods for consensus building, negotiation, and shaping public policy recommendations. Furthermore, it detailed the methodology behind youth parliaments as well as citizens’ juries, preparing participants to implement these models within their own communities.

Peer-to-peer exchange enabled CIVIX and Prizma to compare practices in Belgium and Croatia, refine their facilitation skills, and prepare for upcoming local activities. CIVIX strengthened its capacity to reach marginalized youth and integrate artivism into civic education, while Prizma enhanced its expertise in facilitating deliberative frameworks.



Youth Engagement and Participation

The chapter on youth engagement and participation covers key local activities designed to turn theoretical democratic principles into practical experiences. To bridge the gap between young people and traditional decision-making structures, the project implemented two complementary models of civic expression: deliberative youth parliaments, and the public call and exhibitions titled "European Values Through the Eyes of Youth." The youth parliaments in Belgium and Croatia provided structured platforms where participants, particularly those with fewer opportunities, developed media literacy, engaged in evidence-based discussions, and formulated concrete recommendations for decision-makers. In parallel, the public call and exhibitions in Brussels and Zadar used artivism as an entry point into public life, enabling young artists to translate core European values into visual art.

By documenting these activities alongside an accompanying booklet of artworks and youth recommendations, this section illustrates how combining deliberative methods with creative expression creates inclusive spaces for meaningful participation.

Youth Parliaments

The Youth Parliament in Belgium took place at the Institut Sainte-Marie school in the Saint-Gilles municipality of Brussels on April 7, 10, and 14, 2026. Designed to build CIVIX's capacity to facilitate inclusive democratic participation, the initiative brought together 24 students for a three-day educational program combining media literacy, critical thinking, and deliberative democracy. The sessions relied on learner-centered non-formal education, open dialogue, case studies, and reflection, alongside the introduction of the Youthpass framework for validating learning outcomes.

The first two days functioned as preparatory committee meetings integrated into media literacy workshops. Students analyzed media consumption habits on TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat, examining content personalization, algorithmic bias, and manipulation techniques such as AI-generated voices and emotional storytelling. In the segment dedicated to artificial intelligence in education, participants inductively differentiated human creation from AI-generated work, analyzed data bias, and crafted prompt templates using tools like NanobananAI. Following thematic presentations, open discussions allowed students to debate opposing viewpoints and formulate shared positions on digital responsibility.

The final day featured a Youth Parliament plenary simulation dedicated to the responsible use of artificial intelligence. Applying the principles of deliberative

democracy through learning-by-doing, students worked in groups to draft proposals, present arguments, negotiate amendments, and vote on the final text. The simulation provided practical experience in decision-making, consensus building, and public speaking, while simultaneously enriching CIVIX's methodologies for moderating and facilitating parliamentary processes.

The Youth Parliament simulation at Gračac High School gathered 23 students in October for an educational and deliberative program dedicated to artificial intelligence, media literacy, and decision-making. The initiative was organized by Association Prizma to build its internal capacity for facilitating democratic youth processes in rural communities. The workshop kicked off with icebreakers and trust-building exercises, creating a safe space for active participation.

The core program opened with the Four Corners method, where participants physically moved and engaged in debate to take positions on the use of artificial intelligence in daily life and education. This was followed by small-group work using the World Café method, where young people analyzed their own AI tool usage habits alongside an expert introduction to the technological background provided by the trainer. During a screen-free work session, the groups formulated key conclusions and draft recommendations before leveraging AI tools to create visual and documentation materials to support their ideas. The program concluded with a deliberative youth parliament dialogue in which participants evaluated all proposals, aligned priorities, and voted on final recommendations for their peers and school decision-makers.

Recommendations of Youth Parliaments

Class charter "How to use AI responsibly" (Brussels Youth Parliament, April 2026)

1. AI as a tool for understanding and learning - not a generator of ready-made answers: every user remains responsible for what they produce.

2. Choose the appropriate AI tool: write clear, specific and contextualised prompts; restrict the scope of requests (assign the AI a role) to limit errors.

3. Systematic critical thinking: always question AI answers, demand and verify sources and URLs, cross-check with reliable references: stay alert to errors, hallucinations and biases.

4. Respect intellectual property; no plagiarism; never copy AI answers directly — reformulate.

5. Evaluate AI tools against explicit criteria: sources, ethics, operating company, personal-data protection, environmental footprint.

6. A possible age limit for AI tools.

Recommendations for the Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence in Schools (Gračac Youth Parliament, October 2026)

1. Determine for which tasks and in what ways AI is permitted, ensuring that it serves as a learning aid rather than a substitute for effort and critical thinking.

2. Teach students how to structure prompts and how to accurately evaluate and fact-check generated content against reliable sources.

3. Encourage students to use AI solely for explaining concepts and brainstorming ideas, rather than generating and submitting finished work as their own.

4. Require students to explicitly state when and how they used AI tools in completing their assignments.

5. Instruct students and teachers never to enter personal data or sensitive school information into public AI models.

6. Ensure that artificial intelligence tools are not used for cheating, harassment, or spreading disinformation within the school community.

European Values Through Eyes of Youth

“European Values Through the Eyes of Youth” was a public call and international exhibition that used visual art as a direct instrument for youth civic engagement. The initiative brought together creators aged 14 to 30 from across Europe, with a special emphasis on self-taught artists and young people with fewer opportunities, whose perspectives are often overlooked in public discourse.

The call was open in August 2026 and distributed through youth organizations, art schools, cultural networks, and European institutions. More than 50 submissions were received from 39 cities and 15 countries. A jury composed of experts in visual arts, youth work, and civic participation selected 23 works for exhibition, ensuring thematic, medium-based, and geographical diversity.

The selected works were printed in large format and exhibited in September 2026 at the Coin Culture cultural space in Brussels and the Youth Center in Zadar, accompanied by the publication of a digital booklet. The artists retained ownership of their works, using various techniques, ranging from 35mm photography and oil on canvas to glasswork, hand-cut paper, and textile art, to examine the core principles of the European Union outlined in Article 2 of the EU Treaty: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights.

On the following pages, you can explore the selected artworks, read the stories behind each piece, and meet the young artists who created them, presented in alphabetical order.





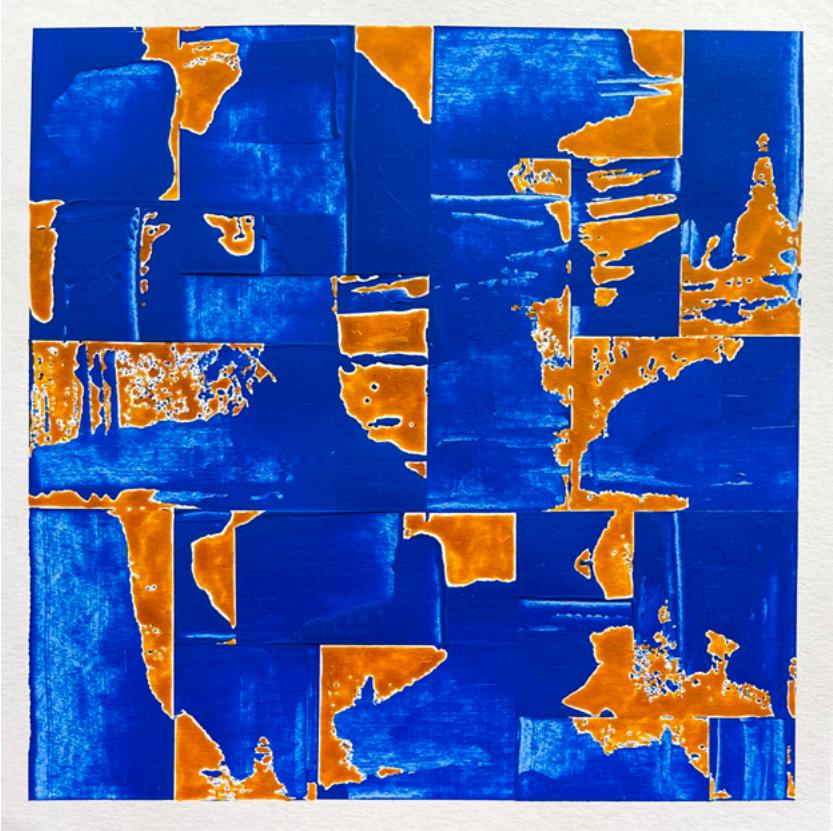
Eva Belkessam

Invitation à la liberté d'expression, 2023
Black and white 35mm film photography
Paris, France

Nancy, 7 March 2023. As preparations get underway for the protest march against pension reform in France, a sign-making workshop — set up by a student — appears in the middle of Place de la Carrière, inviting protesters to express their dissatisfaction creatively.

Shot on black and white 35mm film, the photograph captures something larger than one demonstration: the moment when anger becomes expression, and expression becomes solidarity. For Belkessam, the scene speaks for itself — a message of inclusion and sharing, proof that even in moments of dissatisfaction, it is possible to stand united. Freedom of speech is not only a right to protest; it is something people build together, one hand-painted sign at a time.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Eva Belkessam (b. 1999) is a young artist living in Paris. She studied graphic design at the École Nationale Supérieure d'Art et Design in Nancy, graduating in 2024, and took part in an Erasmus+ artist residency organised by the French NGO Rakonto, which led to a group exhibition. A volunteer with the European Solidarity Corps in 2025, she is committed to building connections between artists across Europe.



Christelle Beyeler

Common waters, 2026
Acrylic on paper
Brussels, Belgium

A constellation of blue and orange fragments - each with its own texture, density and rhythm - shares a single field, echoing the colours of the European flag. For Beyeler, the fragments stand for the Union's member states: distinct, shaped by their own histories, yet held together by common values.

Nothing separates the forms - no borders, no outlines - evoking openness, circulation and the freedom to move and connect. The tension between the two colours mirrors how diversity and cohesion coexist within the European project. The work proposes that unity is not uniformity: it is the ongoing choice to uphold shared values while embracing the richness of our differences.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Christelle Beyeler (b. 1996) is a French artist based in Brussels, whose practice has emerged alongside an international career that took her to the United States, Germany and Belgium. Her work explores structure, colour and quiet tension. It has been featured in Postcards at The Curators Gallery in Paris and in the digital exhibition Water curated by No35 Gallery in London (2026).



Thyrza Folkers

Lightning free, 2026
Photography — Sony A7III, Sigma 28–70mm
Hoogeveen, Netherlands

In the waters of Schoonhoven, a young woman - the artist herself - floats in a white bridal dress. Careless and free. Married to no one, but bound by unspoken vows to the earth, she lets the water lead the way and trusts it with all her heart. No modification, no make-up: just the girl and the dress.

For Folkers, the photograph - taken by her close friend Julian, the only one who could capture her vision - is about a feeling many young people have lost: being truly free. Freedom, she suggests, is not defined by where you live or what you look like, but by being at peace with yourself. In a world of trends and pressure to fit in, the image is an invitation to slow down, breathe, and find the way back to one's own peace.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Thyrza Folkers (b. 2003) is in her final year at the ArtEZ academy in Zwolle, where she is training to become an art teacher. Rooted in spoken word and performance, her practice has recently turned towards photography. She was selected for a multidisciplinary theatre residency, and has spent six years volunteering at her local library organising art events for children — driven by one goal: making art available to anyone who needs it.



Julia Gazel

Underneath The Stars, 2026
Watercolour
Paris, France

Two winged women sit on a barrier in a field, beneath twelve stars. Their wings embody liberty; the barrier beneath them could be an obstacle overcome, or a border being crossed. Their punk aesthetics - corsets, short skirts, stilettos - claim the freedom to define one's own identity. Though they look in different directions, they remain connected: freedom does not have to mean standing alone.
The twelve stars refer directly to the European flag, but they also burst like fireworks — symbols of celebration, gathering and personal fulfilment. Painted at a time of war and uncertainty, the work carries a quiet reminder: the sky was meant to hold something other than bombs. The title borrows from one of the artist's favourite songs by The Cure.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Julia Gazel (b. 2003) has drawn since childhood alongside a path in social and political sciences, including a degree in sociology and political science at Paris-Dauphine-PSL and a Master's in Public Policy. She exhibited at the French Association of Paralysed People in Le Cannet (2025), received an award in PSL University's Solarpunk: Futures of Hope competition (2026), and begins a Master's in Arts and Cultural Management at Sorbonne University in autumn 2026, in apprenticeship at the National Library of France.



Aurora Ghigino

4 Rue Titon, Paris 11th, 2026
Photographic series - digital photography
Genoa, Italy

This photograph is part of 4 Rue Titon, a series created at a student residence in Paris's 11th arrondissement, where around one hundred young people from different countries and cultures live under the same roof. Rather than portraits or extraordinary events, Ghigino turns her lens to the unnoticed details of communal living - shared kitchens, quiet corridors, moments of solitude.

The series explores the tension between private and shared space, individuality and community, and what it means to belong to a place that is, by definition, temporary. European values appear here not as slogans, but in the way strangers from different countries learn to share a home - and build their own futures side by side.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Aurora Ghigino (b. 1998) is an Italian photographer from Genoa. After working as a freelance photographer for cultural events and institutions in her home city, she spent four years photographing at sea, rising to Assistant Photo Manager on cruise ships. She recently completed the intensive professional programme at Spéos school in Paris, in collaboration with Polka Magazine. Her work combines portraiture and documentary photography with a natural, intimate approach to people, places and stories.



Heather (Dayn) Gonzales

Empathy, 2026
Digital artwork
Mortsel, Belgium

A wolf - symbol of ferocity and resilience - holds in its jaws the most fragile thing it possesses: its own heart. Tears fall from a creature built to survive. The heart is not surrendered; it is held, glowing like an ember in the surrounding darkness.
For Gonzales, the image is a paradox of strength: the wolf could harden, but chooses to grieve; it could destroy, but chooses to protect. Born from the artist's own experience of discrimination and rejection, the work argues that compassion is not weakness - and that dignity, solidarity and empathy demand the courage to keep feeling in a world that teaches us to become cold. "The strongest among us are not those who have never broken. They are those who have been broken — yet still chose to care."

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Heather (Dayn) Gonzales (b. 2003), known as Vylewolf, is a self-taught transgender artist based in Mortsel, Belgium. Nominated for the Global Arts Prize for Innovation, they donate part of all generated revenue to wildlife and climate conservation. Their work aims to turn emotion into action - inspiring people to look closer at nature, at each other, and to leave the world kinder than they found it.



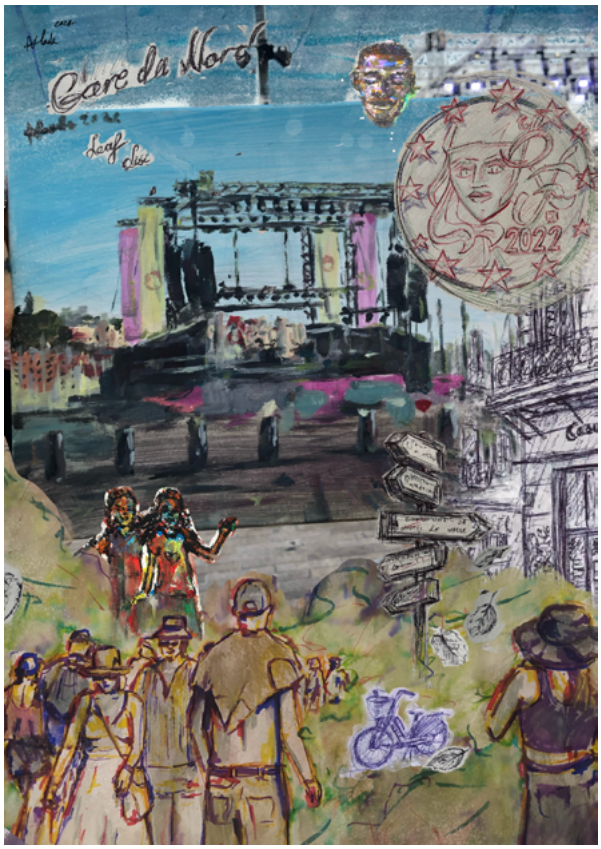
Ksenija Grigorjeva

Dreams of Flight, 2026
Oil on canvas - impasto and expressive brushwork
Līvāni, Latvia

Winged lambs - dreams, youth, the desire to fly beyond boundaries - gather around a young shepherd caught in an impossible choice. In one hand he holds a shepherd's crook: protection, guidance, responsibility. In the other, shears to clip their wings: the anxiety, hesitation and fear of letting dreams take flight into the unknown.

Painted in warm light with folklore-inspired imagery, the work reflects the emotional journey of European youth - navigating the tension between safety and the freedom to explore the world. Will we support young people to spread their wings, Grigorjeva asks, or hold them back out of fear? The painting is a plea to trust the younger generation, and to give everyone equal space to soar.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Ksenija Grigorjeva (b. 2008) is an illustration student from Daugavpils, Latvia. Art has been her main passion since childhood, and her participation in Erasmus+ projects - travelling across several European countries and discovering their art scenes first-hand - has become a defining part of her artistic journey.



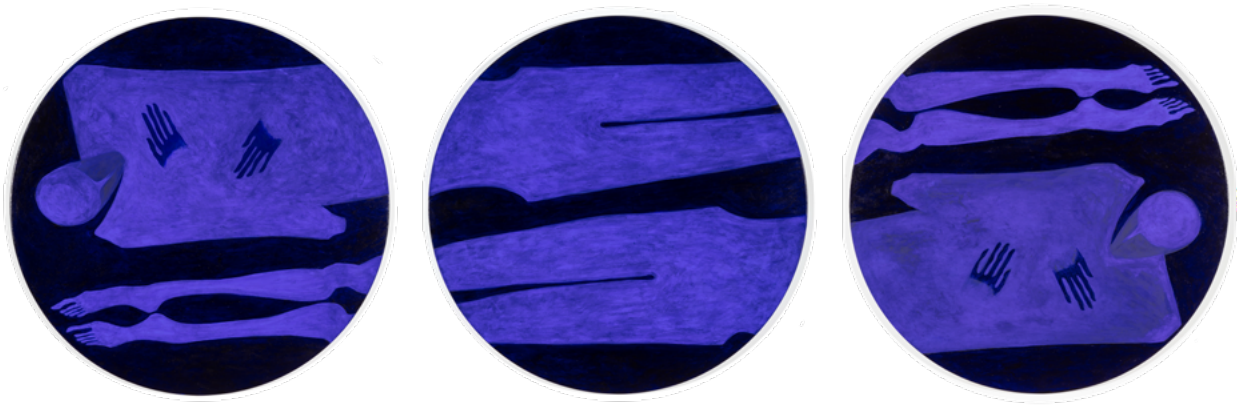
Natalia Janda

A place to belong, 2026
Digital collage — assembled in Procreate from the artist's own drawings and paintings
Marseille, France

Janda brings together sketches and paintings created during her life in France into a single joyful composition: a summer scene at Marseille's Vieux-Port, the words "Gare du Nord", the euro, faces from different cultural backgrounds. Each fragment keeps its original character, showing where the final image came from.

Born in Poland and living in France, the artist celebrates what Europe has made possible for her: the freedom to move, to discover other cultures, to meet different people and share the same spaces while remaining oneself. The work radiates gratitude - for cultural diversity, for connection, and for the possibility of building one's own path in a place one has chosen to call home.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Natalia Janda (b. 2006) trained at an art school before making art a personal passion - drawing portraits and creating tattoos in her free time. She rediscovered painting while working in Greece and has been developing her practice ever since, between personal works and plein-air painting. Originally from Poland and now based in Marseille, she is about to begin artistic studies in France.



Julija Jankavs

SOMA, 2026
Oil on canvas
Riga, Latvia

How does emotion become flesh? SOMA explores psychosomatics - the way inner tension takes physical form in the body. Jankavs's figures are stretched, deformed, frozen mid-gesture: in moments of intense emotion, she observes, a person does not act but freezes, trapped within their own body.

Painted in deep ultramarine and enclosed in a circular form that seals the figures in their own space, the work makes visible what usually stays hidden. For Jankavs, bodily autonomy is inseparable from human dignity: every person has the right to their own body, feelings and boundaries - and the freedom to express inner experience without shame or judgment. She leaves the reading open, so each viewer can meet the work through their own feelings.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Julija Jankavs (b. 2001) is a Ukrainian-Latvian visual artist and painter living and working in Riga. She holds a Master's degree in Monumental Painting from the Lviv National Academy of Fine Arts and is continuing her studies in Painting at the Art Academy of Latvia. Also working in sculpture, ceramics and digital art, she has shown her work in Switzerland, Latvia, Ukraine and the United States, including a solo exhibition in central Riga.



Lucas Kolodziejczyk

A circle among the squares, 2025
Hand-cut collage - paper, scissors, craft knife, glue and tape
Bordeaux, France

Squares and rectangles overlap into a dense urban landscape - the grids, boundaries and frameworks that organise the spaces we inhabit. Within this constructed world appears a single circle: the moon. Organic and still, it belongs to the composition without being confined by it.

Trained as an architect, Kolodziejczyk cuts and assembles his fragments by hand, letting different textures and origins coexist without becoming identical. The circle becomes an image of the individual within the collective - visible, distinct, undissolved. A metaphor, the artist suggests, for a Europe where belonging does not mean losing one's individuality, and where equality means difference living side by side rather than uniformity.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Lucas Kolodziejczyk (b. 1998), known as KLDZK, is a Bordeaux-based architect and collage artist - passionate about basset hounds, Jacques Tati's cinema, urbanism, the 1970s and West Ham United. A graduate of the École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture et de Paysage de Bordeaux, he has held solo exhibitions at Fragments (2025) and Hôtel Madame (2022) in Bordeaux, and his collages have been acquired by private collectors.



Maciej Król

Vision Born, 2024
Oil on canvas
Rotterdam, Netherlands

A storm in paint: forms overlap, collide and move in different directions as an old order begins to break apart. Heavy, solid elements lose their stability and collapse, while light, sharp forms cut through the turbulence - ideas still in motion. At the centre, a triangular shape starts to crystallise: a new direction coming into focus.

For Król, freedom, equality, dignity and democracy are not born from stability. They emerge through moments of tension and change, when existing structures are challenged and competing visions of the future meet. The storm is not only destructive - it is the space where something new can be born. Democracy, the painting suggests, is exactly this: a shared direction that is never given in advance, but negotiated between many voices.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Maciej Król (b. 1996) is a Polish painter, architect and computational designer based in Rotterdam. He holds an MSc in Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences from TU Delft and a Master in Parametric Design in Architecture from UPC BarcelonaTech. His practice focuses on geometric abstraction and the narrative potential of abstract situations; Vision Born belongs to his series The Painted Places.



Wen-Hsuan Lin

The Surface of Recognition, 2026
Acrylic on mirror paper mounted on wooden panel
Paris, France

Reflective surfaces are set into the eyes and mouth of the portrayed figure, so that fragments of the viewer's own reflection enter the image. As you move, the reflection shifts - every encounter with the work is slightly different. You do not stand outside this painting; you become part of it.

The work turns a quiet question towards the viewer: when we look at another person, how much of what we recognise belongs to them - and how much is shaped by our own position, experience and way of looking? Dignity and equality, Lin suggests, begin in this act of recognition: acknowledging that another person exists beyond the way we see or define them.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Wen-Hsuan Lin (b. 1996) is a Taiwanese visual artist based in Paris, holding a Master's degree in Visual Arts from Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. Working primarily with painting, she explores perception, memory, light and the act of looking. Her recent practice incorporates reflective surfaces, allowing the viewer's own image to become part of the viewing experience.



Violette Margraff

promenons nous dans les bois, 2025
Mixed media - acrylic paint and oil pastels
Paris, France

A portrait of a young Black girl dressed as a soldier, whose title borrows the opening line of a well-known French children's song: "let's walk in the woods while the wolf is not there." The next line stays unsaid - "if the wolf was there, he would eat us; but since he is not, he won't."

Margraff deliberately says little about this work: it is about what is implied more than what is stated. Equality, feminism and racism run beneath the surface, and the unspoken threat of the song hangs over the image. The painting is built to raise questions in the viewer's mind - questions, the artist hopes, that words cannot carry.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Violette Margraff (b. 2003) studied engraving at the École Estienne in Paris. Living with a disability related to her mental health, she is proud to have earned her diploma and co-created an exhibition with her classmates. She has since built an online community around her art and values — feminism, ecology, mental health, equality - collaborating with Lefranc Bourgeois and Conté à Paris, and running a mail club that sends her art around the world.



Anatoli Markoulaki

Domestic Gravity: Silenced by Routine, 2026
Digital collage - photography and digital editing
Oia, Santorini, Greece

A woman lies collapsed on a kitchen floor, surrounded by the objects of her many expected lives: a vacuum cleaner and dishwasher for the caregiver, a laptop and phone for the professional, high heels for the woman told to remain desirable through it all.

Through layered photographs and a deliberately fragmented digital collage, Markoulaki makes visible the invisible weight of gender expectations - the demand to do everything, and to look composed while doing it. The work asks whether equality is truly achieved when rights exist on paper but roles accumulate in everyday life, and defends every woman's freedom to define her own identity, ambitions and future.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Anatoli Markoulaki (b. 2008) is a Greek artist and writer. She studied Visual Arts at the Keratsini-Drapetsona School of Arts with a Certificate of Academic Excellence, and graduated from the International Baccalaureate at Doukas School on a full scholarship. The youngest member of the 3rd SNFCC Youth Council and the only Greek in the WOW Foundation's Young Leaders Directory 2026, she has spoken at the Athens Democracy Forum and the UN SDGs Forum in Bangkok, and has been featured by The New York Times.



Eva Martins

UE's pieces, 2026
Coloured pencils and watercolour
Paris, France

Look closely: every object in this drawing carries a value. An empty chair for democracy - power belongs to whoever takes their place, not to one person. A passport and a glass of water for human rights. Scales held by no one, because justice must be independent. A puzzle whose pieces are all different yet all necessary, for the rule of law. A key and falling feathers for freedom - the liberty to choose your own path.

Created specifically for this open call, Martins's work invites the viewer to stop, search and question what each element means. All the founding values are given equal weight - because, in her words, they are all equally important.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Eva Martins (b. 2006) grew up between French and Portuguese cultures. She studied Design and Applied Arts (STD2A) in Paris, twice entering the Angoulême International Comics Festival competition, then continued with a DNMADE in Interior Architecture and Object Design. Now a freelance artist working for private clients and institutions, she has also walked for an independent fashion designer and played the lead role in a short film.



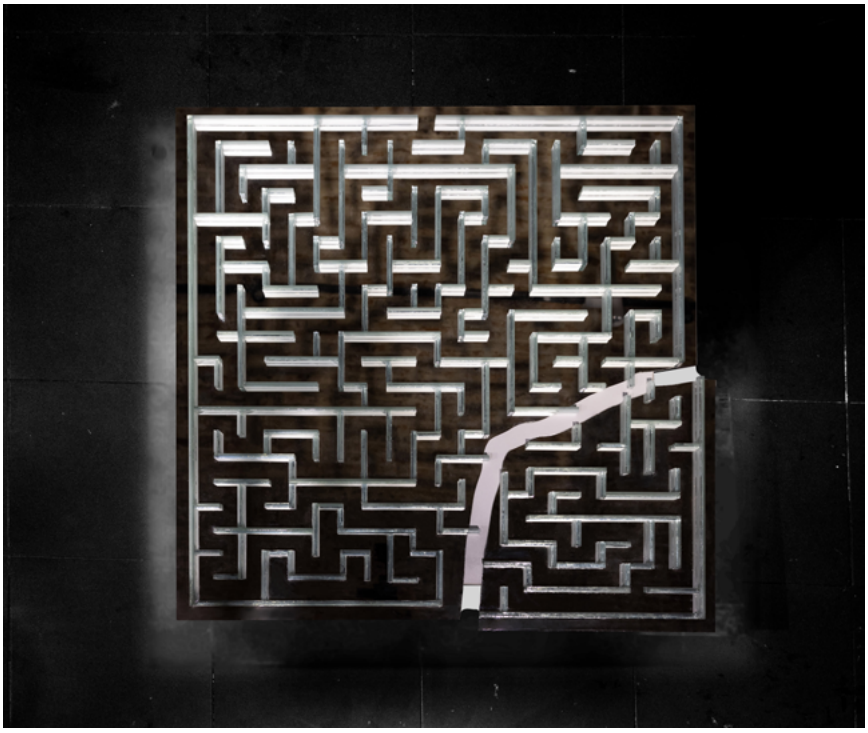
Leo Martinusic

Awaiting Rescue, 2024
Photography
Vienna, Austria

A ship - symbol of freedom, movement and the possibility of choosing one's own direction - sits trapped inside a slowly melting ice cube. Held back by circumstances beyond its control, it waits; but the ice is melting, and with it comes the possibility of breaking free.

For Martinusic, a Croatian citizen living and working in Vienna, questions of movement, identity and belonging are personal. Freedom, the work suggests, is not simply the absence of restrictions but the opportunity to move forward - fragile, never to be taken for granted. The photograph asks a question many young Europeans carry with them: how free can we truly be, when parts of our lives are shaped by circumstances we did not choose?

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Leo Martinusic (b. 2000) is a Vienna-based visual artist and designer with diplomas in Multimedia & Design and Graphic Design. His work has been shown at Fotohof in Salzburg and in exhibitions in Vienna, from an art-techno event to a creative pop-up. Alongside his artistic practice, he works professionally in visual communication and content creation, with a focus on youth culture and creative storytelling.



Meta Mramor

The Broken Labyrinth, 2026
Glass and mirror mosaic, free-hand cutting - 125 × 125 × 5 cm
Ljubljana, Slovenia

A labyrinth of cut glass stands for the structures, rules and prescribed ways of thinking that shape everyday life. But freedom is no longer found by following the correct path within the system: it appears as a crack running through the glass - an escape beyond established norms, a different way out.

The work was created during a research stay at the Tbilisi State Academy of Arts in Georgia - a country whose EU accession path was halted in 2024 following democratic backsliding. That tension, between the aspiration to European democratic values and a reality in which they are under pressure, is embedded in the work. Too large and heavy to be moved by one person, the mosaic was lifted, positioned and assembled collectively: even its making argues that together, we achieve more. The work joins the collection of the Museum of the Tbilisi State Academy of Arts.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Meta Mramor (b. 1998, Slovenia) works at the intersection of glass, applied arts and sculpture. She completed her BA and MA in Applied Arts at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana, where she also lectured, and is pursuing a PhD in Poland on embodied knowledge in artistic glass practices. She has exhibited at The Venice Glass Week (2024), Glass European Context in Denmark (2021) and the Biennial of Ceramics in Belgrade (2020), and was nominated for the STRABAG Artaward International (2024). She lives and works between Wrocław and Ljubljana.



Martyna Myśliborska

Cry for freedom, 2026
Acrylic on canvas
Chojnów, Poland

A woman in bridal attire attends a wedding - not willingly, but for the public. Her closed mouth symbolises the prohibition against expressing her own opinion. Around her, strangers crowd the frame, interested only in the sensationalism of the event and in selling the image of it; the table below is covered not only with food, but with newspapers, microphones and radios.

Painted specifically for this open call by one of the selection's youngest artists, the work is a protest against the violation of the right to free speech, free decision-making and free thought - and a warning about how fake news and imposed narratives can strip a person of faith in their own voice. It is, in the artist's words, a cry for the freedom that the European Union now guarantees us.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Martyna Myśliborska (b. 2009) is a high-school student in Legnica, Poland, with a humanities profile and a long record of national and international art competitions: a multiple winner of the international Nature in Colors competition in Kraków, Grand Prix of the Angel of the 21st Century competition in Będzin, and a prizewinner of a nationwide competition organised by the Sleńdziński Gallery in Białystok.



Stanislas Ricchi

Salad Bowl, 2026
Digital painting - Procreate
Paris, France

Painted on the artist's return from a long journey through South America, Salad Bowl explores the similarities between two continents: vibrant, layered, full of different energies that still manage to share a common space. Within the composition, Ricchi paints Europe's many environments, its ageing population, and the threats the continent sometimes faces.

The title says it all: not a melting pot where differences dissolve, but a salad bowl where they coexist. The wide spectrum of colour shades, from cool to warm, mirrors the breadth of European inclusion - across ages, social and economic backgrounds, and cultures.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Stanislas Ricchi (b. 2002) is a self-taught artist from Paris with no formal artistic education — and a growing track record: merchandise projects for the Delta Festival and Solidays, collaborations with schools, and personal projects. A first exchange in Spain at fourteen sparked a lasting attachment to European values of humanity, equality and diversity.



Beatrice Riva

Foxes, 2026
Acrylic on canvas
Bergamo, Italy

Two foxes chase each other in a circle - running towards the future, or perhaps away from a fire in the night. Riva leaves the reading open.
An animal found across most of Europe, the fox becomes a symbol of the beauty and fragility of the continent's shared fauna and flora - a natural heritage that must be protected, above all from ourselves. The circular composition evokes a spiral of life in which humans, animals and landscapes are bound together. "The bond that binds us to animals," the artist writes, "is stronger than we believe. We are all connected - in a circle, like the one formed by the foxes."

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Beatrice Riva (b. 2004) was born in Bergamo and graduated from the Paolo Sarpi classical high school before completing studies in Venice in conservation and management of cultural heritage, art history branch. She will soon train as a gold-smith artisan in Vicenza. With two fellow artists she has organised exhibitions in her home town of Corna Imagna: Unexpected Coincidences (2025) and Honorite Spirits (2026).



Pema Rooms

The wonder found in the decay of child's innocence, 2026
Photography - Sony ILCE-7E, 105mm
Hamme, Belgium

A child carries a stone, helping with the work around her - yet her expression still holds wonder and curiosity. There is something almost playful in the way she moves through a world that already asks her to take responsibility.
The stone becomes a symbol of growing up: carrying something, contributing, slowly discovering the weight of life. Rooms does not read the loss of innocence as purely negative - there is beauty in learning to carry what life gives us while keeping the ability to be amazed. The photograph asks a question the artist keeps for herself and for us: can we carry the weight of life without losing the freedom to play, explore and be surprised?

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Pema Rooms (b. 2005) grew up between two cultures in Belgium, fascinated from an early age by the smallest details and the worlds they reveal. She pursued an arts education at a boarding school in Ghent, then architecture in Hasselt, while photography grew through her father - her fundamental influence, whom she lost shortly before her twentieth birthday. Her intuitive practice has since become a way to process sensitivity, overstimulation and the details that often go unnoticed.



Magdalena Štibohar

At first sight / Na prvi pogled, 2023
Digital photography
Krapinske Toplice, Croatia

Two people are photographed in front of their home. The image deliberately keeps everything in the frame - clothing, architecture, everyday objects - offering the viewer a wealth of visual clues from which to construct an idea of who these people are, how they live, where they might belong socially.

The photograph is interested in the exact moment when observation turns into assumption. It provides no context and directs no conclusion; whatever the viewer decides about these two people, they have produced themselves. In that shift of attention - from the photographed to the person looking - the work asks whether we are able to separate a person's worth from the circumstances we associate with them. Dignity, it insists, does not depend on appearance, property or social position.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Magdalena Štibohar (b. 2000) is a Croatian graphic and visual communication designer with a particular interest in typography, editorial and poster design. She completed her BA at the Academy of Applied Arts in Rijeka and her MA in Visual Communication Design in Ljubljana, with an Erasmus+ semester at Bauhaus University Weimar. Her socially engaged work has been shown at Zagreb Design Week, in Slovenia and in Germany, addressing themes from war and climate change to food waste and humanitarian action.



Ines Thora

Untitled A.C 2026, 2026
Mixed media on unprimed textile
Brussels, Belgium

Painted on unprimed found textile - bed linen, tablecloths, fabric - this work lets the material itself remain visible and active. Folds, seams, overlaps and irregular edges are deliberately retained; delicate, washed-out passages meet intense gestures in pink, blue, burgundy, yellow and green. Parts of the fabric extend beyond the painted surface: the work is neither contained nor perfectly resolved.

The choice of textile is a feminist act. Fabric, sewing and domestic materials have long been dismissed as women's craft, while abstract expressionism was dominated by male voices —-Thora deliberately brings the two together, making sewing, stitching and mending acts of resistance, transformation and care. The fragile material becomes a carrier of strength: vulnerability, the work argues, is not weakness but a source of empathy, connection and change.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Ines Thora (b. 1996, Asse) is a Brussels-based visual artist working in painting and installation. A graduate in Visual Arts from LUCA School of Arts with studies in Cultural Studies at KU Leuven, she has exhibited in Brussels, Aalst, Berlin and Amsterdam — including the solo show Mostly Void at Tour & Taxis (2020) and the scenographic installation Dagen dagen for Ithaka Festival (2025), later presented at Oorzaken Festival in Amsterdam. Her work is currently on view at the Abby Museum in Kortrijk.

Long-term Impact and Sustainability

The long-term impact and sustainability of the project stem from transforming immediate results into lasting resources, institutional practices, and adaptable methodologies. Moving beyond the direct scope of the youth parliaments, media literacy workshops, and exhibitions, the project establishes a framework that will continue to influence youth work, organizational strategies, and civic engagement well after the conclusion of the project cycle.

At the core of this sustainability strategy is the creation and dissemination of this interactive toolbox. As a comprehensive resource, this publication encompasses proven methodologies, non-formal education methods, deliberative democracy tools, and European best-practice examples. Partner organizations CIVIX and Udruga Prizma use the toolbox to standardize their approaches, onboard new employees and volunteers, and enhance educational initiatives. Beyond partner organizations, it serves youth workers, workshop facilitators, educators, and decision-makers across Europe. By documenting entry points for including young people with fewer opportunities, the publication acts as an actionable blueprint for organizations seeking to integrate artivism, media literacy, and deliberative processes into local communities.

To support widespread adoption, the handbook pairs practical methodology with open digital accessibility. Hard copies printed on eco-friendly paper provide tangible materials for local youth spaces, while optimized digital editions enable seamless navigation across all devices, directly linking users to the European Youth Portal, the EU Youth Strategy Platform, and the Youth Wiki network.

European Platforms for Youth Participation and Policy

European Youth Portal

The European Youth Portal serves as a primary digital entry point for young people across Europe seeking meaningful opportunities for active citizenship, mobility, and democratic engagement. Managed by the European Commission, this multi-lingual platform aggregates essential information regarding cross-border volunteering through the European Solidarity Corps, youth exchanges under Erasmus+, traineeships, and democratic initiatives such as DiscoverEU and the EU Youth Dialogue. By offering centralized, accessible content tailored directly to young citizens, the portal empowers individuals—including those from disadvantaged backgrounds or with fewer opportunities—to explore their rights, connect with international mobility projects, and actively shape European society.

Website: https://youth.europa.eu/home_en

EU Youth Strategy Platform

The EU Youth Strategy Platform provides the structural framework designed to foster youth participation and integrate young voices directly into European Union policy-making processes. Operating under the core pillars of Engage, Connect, and Empower, the platform facilitates the EU Youth Dialogue, a deliberative mechanism that bridges the gap between young citizens, youth organizations, and institutional decision-makers. It ensures that youth work priorities, social inclusion initiatives, and civic participation tools are implemented systematically across Member States. By supporting non-formal learning frameworks and sustainable political engagement, the platform encourages young people to influence policies that directly impact their lives and broader communities.

Website: https://youth.europa.eu/strategy_en

Youth Wiki

Youth Wiki is the European Union's comprehensive online database dedicated to national youth policies across Europe. Maintained by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), it gathers updated, evidence-based qualitative data across key thematic areas such as voluntary activities, employment, participation, social inclusion, and youth work frameworks. By offering clear comparative overviews and individual country profiles, Youth Wiki supports researchers, policymakers, non-governmental organizations, and youth workers in analyzing national structures and tracking legislative reforms. It stands as an indispensable knowledge repository that promotes peer learning and reinforces evidence-based decision-making within European youth work.

Website: https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki

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