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# GUIDELINES FOR PROMOTING ACTIVISM AND VOLUNTEERING AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE



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Volunteering Competences”

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Understanding the needs and challenges of young people is crucial today. As the world becomes more interconnected, youth often struggle to have their voices heard and their actions recognized. Economic uncertainty, social inequalities, and limited access to education hinder their ability to engage meaningfully in civic life.

Empowering young people through activism and volunteering is vital. By providing them with the right tools and opportunities, we can inspire them to take ownership of the issues they care about, from climate change to social justice. This e-book serves as a guide for promoting youth engagement, exploring strategies and resources that equip young individuals to advocate for themselves and their communities. By investing in their activism, we foster a more inclusive and engaged society, ultimately strengthening our democracies.

Many young people today feel disconnected from the issues that affect their lives. Economic struggles, social inequalities, and limited access to education create barriers that prevent them from getting involved in their communities. As a result, youth often lack the confidence and tools needed to express their concerns and act on topics they care about. This disengagement not only holds back their personal growth but also limits the progress of society. If we don't work to encourage activism and volunteering among young people, we risk missing out on their valuable insights and contributions, which could help address important social challenges.

The primary objectives of this initiative are to increase awareness among young people about the importance of civic engagement, activism, and volunteering in addressing the social issues that affect their lives. This would be achieved by developing and distributing resources that equip youth with the necessary skills, knowledge, and tools to engage effectively in these activities.

To effectively engage young people in social and democratic participation, it is essential to:

- Break away from traditionalist approaches to social and democratic participation by creating non-formal opportunities for volunteering and activism.
- Create opportunities to empower young people in favor of their social and democratic participation.
- Create opportunities for the professionalization and specialization of YWs through the exchange of knowledge and transnational experiences.

This e-book will be a valuable resource for anyone looking to encourage activism and volunteering among young people. It will provide useful insights into the challenges youth face and offer practical strategies to engage them effectively. The guide will help

in developing tools that empower young individuals to act and express their opinions in social and democratic matters. Additionally, it will provide ideas for creating inclusive and accessible opportunities, ensuring all young people can participate meaningfully. By sharing examples and innovative approaches, this e-book will help youth workers, educators, and community leaders to implement programs that make a difference, helping to build a more active and engaged generation.

The general objective is to contribute to the social inclusion and democratic participation of young Europeans. To achieve this, we will promote knowledge and practices, innovation, and the development of differentiating actions that are highly attuned to young people's expectations. Additionally, we aim to strengthen knowledge in the youth sector and, in particular, on the subject of social and democratic participation. Finally, we recognize the need to expand networks and partnerships for the development of actions and projects in the youth field.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The primary goal of this E-Book is to empower young people to engage in activism and volunteering through non-formal education (NFE) principles. Different methods of data collection, content development, design and formatting were utilized to achieve this goal.

The methods participants of the Erasmus+ project have utilized for the data collection and content development were based on activities the participants did during the project. These activities included: visiting a small rural area of Portugal (Alqueva) and witnessing the population's way of living; listening to local youth organizations' interventions they implemented to solve the problems their community is dealing with; and sharing what challenges youth in participant countries are facing and giving an input on how to face those challenges. This methodology integrates the principles of non-formal education, ensuring that the E-Book not only informs but also actively engages young people in their journey toward activism and volunteering. The E-Book is based also on participants' knowledge of the priorities of the Erasmus program, discussions on youth activism, brainstorming sessions on youth activism and strategies. In conclusion, the content of this E-Book is based on teamwork of participants, group work on Erasmus priorities and reflections on NFE (Non-formal education), information exchange, discussion, discussing the experience of local people of Alqueva and presentation of information about Erasmus priorities.

Google docs software was used to design and format the E-Book, ensuring it is easily navigable and accessible across devices.

# PART I

# 1. SOME STRATEGIES AND PRIORITIES OF UE FOR WORK WITH YOUTH

## 1.1 SUMMARY OF THE EU YOUTH STRATEGY 2019-2027

### EU Youth Strategy:

**1 Empowerment and Participation:** The strategy aims to enhance young people's involvement in decision-making processes at local, national, and EU levels, promoting active citizenship.

**2 Education and Training:** Emphasizes the importance of quality education and lifelong learning, ensuring that young people have access to skills that meet the demands of the job market.

**3 Social Inclusion:** Focuses on reducing inequalities and promoting inclusivity, ensuring that all young people, regardless of their background, have opportunities to thrive.

**4 Health and Well-being:** Prioritizes the mental and physical health of youth, addressing issues like mental health support, healthy lifestyles, and access to services.

**5 Digital Transformation:** Encourages the development of digital skills and access to technology, preparing young people for a digital economy and fostering innovation.

**6 Sustainability and Climate Action:** Engages youth in environmental sustainability efforts, empowering them to lead initiatives that combat climate change.

**7 Mobility and Exchange Programs:** Promotes opportunities for youth mobility within and beyond the EU, enhancing cultural exchange and fostering understanding among diverse communities.

**8 Youth Work Recognition:** Acknowledges the role of youth work in personal and social development, advocating for better support and professional recognition for youth workers.



**9 Collaboration with Stakeholders:** Encourages partnerships among various stakeholders, including governments, NGOs, and the private sector, to create a holistic support system for youth.

**10 Monitoring and Evaluation:** Implements mechanisms to track progress and impact, ensuring that the strategy evolves based on feedback from young people themselves.

## 1.2 YOUTH GOALS

The European Youth Strategy is the framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2019-2027) which addresses young people's social, economic, and civic needs, aiming to create a unified, inclusive, and sustainable future for youth across Europe. It includes three main pillars that have been developed for the EYS—Engage, Connect, and Empower—guided by 11 key goals.

1. **Engage:** focuses on encouraging youth civic participation, fostering democracy and active citizenship.
2. **Connect** aims to build solidarity and intercultural understanding among European youth through collaboration and shared values.
3. **Empower** is about equipping young people with skills and opportunities for personal growth and societal contribution.

These pillars guide the **11 goals:** EU connection, gender equality, inclusion, information access, mental health, rural opportunities, quality employment, education, democratic spaces, green awareness, and access to EU programs.

This training course focuses on rural areas and the youth living in them. The goals we should focus on could be Eu Connection, rural opportunities, democratic spaces and access to EU programs. (EU connection, Rural opportunities, Democratic space, Access to EU programs)

1. **Connecting EU with youth:** The EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 seeks to address euroscepticism by enhancing youth engagement, education, and trust in EU processes. It emphasizes improving participatory mechanisms, ensuring access to youth-friendly information, and increasing education about the EU across all settings. The strategy also calls for fair representation, increased funding for youth programs, and regular assessments of the impact and transparency of EU policies:

- Building a bridge between EU and youth (youth involvement and dialogue)
- youth-friendly information
- Introduce and increase related education

**2. Equality of all genders and gender sensitive approaches:** The strategy aims to combat gender-based discrimination by promoting equal rights and opportunities for all genders, including non-binary and LGBTQI+ youth. It focuses on raising awareness of gender inequality, eliminating stereotypes, and addressing gender-based violence. Key goals include ensuring equal pay, access to education, and tackling structural discrimination in the labor market.

- Eliminate stereotypical gender roles and embrace diverse gender identities in education systems
- Equal pay for equal work
- End gender-based violence
- Ensure equal rights, access and opportunities in the labor market

**3. Inclusive Societies:** The strategy focuses on combating discrimination and promoting inclusion for marginalized young people by ensuring legal protection and equal access to opportunities. It emphasizes strengthening outreach, supporting educators, and providing resources to foster social cohesion and dialogue. Key measures include fair work conditions, universal healthcare, and involving marginalized youth in decision-making processes that affect their rights and wellbeing.

- Discrimination, experience prejudice and hate crimes
- Provide legal protection and enforce international legal instruments

**4. Information and constructive dialogue:** The strategy aims to empower young people to be critical and responsible consumers and creators of information, with the ability to identify and report misinformation, hate speech, and discrimination. It promotes respectful, non-violent dialogue and ensures access to clear, ethical, and youth-friendly information. Additionally, it emphasizes equipping educators, parents, and carers with media literacy skills to support young people in navigating digital spaces.

- Empower young people to be critical and responsible users and producers of information. Ensure young people could recognize and report repeatedly misleading news and verify the accuracy of news sources used. Ensure young people can recognize and report hate speech and discrimination online and offline.
- Ensure young people can engage in respectful, tolerant and non-violent dialogue, online and offline.
- Ensure easy access to understandable youth-friendly information that follows codes of ethics and quality standards.

- Ensure parents and carers, and all those involved with educating and training young people are equipped with media and digital literacy skills and that they are reliable information sources for young people.

**5. Mental Health & Wellbeing:** The strategy addresses the growing concern over youth mental health by promoting inclusive, high-quality mental health services and fostering prevention through education and self-awareness. It emphasizes supporting the rights of those with mental health issues, providing mental health training for professionals and families, and fighting stigma through awareness programs. Key goals include developing an intersectional approach to care, ensuring well-funded treatment, and promoting less competitive mindsets to improve overall wellbeing.

- Development of self-awareness and less competitive mindsets
- Rights to work and to study of people with mental health issues
- High quality mental health provision across all medical institutions.
- Prevention measures that ensure young people better mental wellbeing.
- Fight stigma about mental health issues
- Developing awareness programmes

**6. Moving Rural Youth Forward:** The strategy aims to promote equality for young people in rural areas by ensuring adequate infrastructure, sustainable job creation, and access to high-quality education. It emphasizes the decentralization of activities that involve young people to foster inclusion and benefit local communities, while also encouraging their participation in decision-making processes. Additionally, the strategy seeks to enhance the image of rural areas and protect rural traditions.

- Appropriate Infrastructure
- Provide incentives
- Quality jobs
- Ensure the protection and sustainability of rural areas

**7. Quality Employment for all:** The strategy addresses high youth unemployment and exploitative working conditions by advocating for quality jobs that ensure fair wages, social protection, and equal treatment in the labor market. It emphasizes the importance of skill development, practical experience, and the recognition of competencies gained through various learning opportunities, including internships and volunteering. Additionally, the strategy calls for the active involvement of young people and youth organizations in shaping employment policies, along with providing them access to quality information and support for navigating the evolving labor market.

- Fair working conditions

- Equal opportunities to develop Skills
- Ensure participation of youth organizations in decision-making
- Ensure access to information

**8. Quality Learning:** The strategy emphasizes the importance of education as a foundation for active citizenship, inclusivity, and employability by advocating for universal access to quality learning and lifelong education. It promotes the recognition of non-formal education, the development of interpersonal and intercultural skills, and the implementation of learner-centered methods that foster critical thinking and creativity. Additionally, the strategy aims to equip young people with essential life skills and provide citizenship education to enhance their understanding of political systems, democracy, and human rights, encouraging active participation in their communities.

- Education as a key for active citizenship
- Student-centered learning
- Ensure life-longing learning access
- Equal and universal access to quality learning.
- Methods to develop personal skills, creativity and learning.
- Provide young people with solid knowledge on political systems
- Promote active civil participation

**9. Space and Participation for All:** The strategy aims to enhance youth engagement in decision-making processes by ensuring young people can influence all aspects of society through accessible mechanisms and structures. It emphasizes the importance of providing safe physical and virtual spaces for youth participation, as well as increasing their representation in electoral processes and decision-making bodies. Additionally, the strategy advocates for sustainable funding and the development of quality youth work to strengthen youth organizations and provide relevant information that empowers young people to engage actively in their communities.

### 1.3. EUROPEAN YOUTH WORK AGENDA

The objective of the European youth work agenda is to promote inclusive and innovative higher education, addressing society's challenges.

The initiative focuses on several core areas, including **enhancing student mobility and international exchange opportunities, ensuring the quality and standards of higher education, and expanding the integration of digital technologies in learning environments**. By doing so, it aims to develop frameworks and policies that support sustainable, accessible, and equitable education systems.

Moreover, the initiative prioritizes engagement from a diverse range of stakeholders to ensure a well-rounded perspective and significant impact. This comprehensive strategy is designed to create a higher education landscape that not only meets current demands but also anticipates future societal needs.

# PART II

## **1. HORIZONTAL PRIORITIES FOR ERASMUS+ PROGRAM**

### **2. Inclusion for All** (Gender Equality, inclusive, Rural Youth)

- Areas: promoting equal opportunities and access, promote inclusion, promote diversity, promote equity, include young participants with fewer opportunities (geographical, economic, social, geographic differences, etc.).

### **3. Digital Transformation** (Quality Employment and Learning)

- Areas: use of electronic and digital platforms, group use in WhatsApp (calls, messages, etc.), design of materials and documents exclusively in digital support, disseminate materials and documents designed in the project exclusively by digital means, etc.

### **4. Environment and climate change**

- Areas: promote responsible behavior, which contribute to the preservation of the environment and its sustainability, encourage the commitment to recycle packaging and other materials already used, organize tours through the forest and other forest spaces (highlighting its importance and the need to preserve (them), encourage young volunteers in rural areas as a contribution to sustainability and minimization of impacts on the environment. etc.

### **5. Participation and Democracy** (EU and Youth, Space, Youth Organization)

- Areas: promoting active citizenship and ethics in lifelong learning, developing social and intercultural skills, developing critical thinking and media literacy, etc.

## 2. PROPOSALS FOR PARTICIPATION AND VOLUNTEERING IN ERASMUS+

### 2.1 INCLUSION FOR ALL

#### 2.1.1 What does it mean?

Inclusion and diversity are a priority of the Erasmus+ projects. Inclusion means: “the idea that everyone should be able to use the same facilities, take part in the same activities, and enjoy the same experiences” and diversity means: “the practice or quality of including or involving people from a range of different social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientation”. These two words mark some of the biggest problems we face now-a-days, maybe we’ve been facing them since humans existed.

#### 2.1.2 History

To get a better understanding of the history we must think about when it started. Maybe it was with the Homo sapiens 300,000 years ago when they only wanted to be with their own blood, maybe the ancient societies that brought culture, religion and ethnicity to life. The colonialism and resistance that brought cultural exchanges but also oppression, brought enslaved and indigenous people with it. The first movement was the civil rights movement in 1950s – 1960s in the USA. In Europe after the second World War many European countries had a lot of movements advocating against racism and for the rights of immigrants and ethnic minorities, especially in countries that owned colonies. For example, fight for equal rights movement color racism in the UK with the Brixton riots. But unfortunately, since there was a big impact of Fascism and the Soviet Union. There are still big scars we need to heal in our society, which is what we should fight for today.

#### 2.1.3 Who is not included?

As a first thought in a conversation, we could say there is a really hard time including immigrants because of language barrier, communication styles, cultural backgrounds, and generational differences. Most of the time people can come from a place of unknown and fear it, for example we have Italy as great example of it. We can see a big division from inside the country itself, the north and the south. In the north they have more opportunities and often look down on the opposite side, this brings inequality in the infrastructures such as educational, health care and economical resources. Examples like this prove the difficulty to unify the Nations. If we look at the numbers in Europe only if we look at the numbers, we have on European defavorises are concerning; 10% -15% immigrants (2022), since Ukrainian war started 8 million more refugees; 25% of the population has some form of physical, phycological, sensory or intellectual disability; around 30% of the population is retired. Based on our numbers, 70% of the European population is not given the opportunity to be included. Perhaps no one is truly included in the society.



### *2.1.4 Main objectives*

The promotion of inclusion and diversity for immigrants faces many challenges, largely due to cultural attitudes and the current government's policies. For example, in many European Countries people feel fear and rivalry towards foreigners, who are often seen as a threat to local jobs. This mistrust leads to the marginalization of immigrants, making it hard for them to integrate into society. As a result, many immigrants end up living in “ghettos,” forced to stay in neighborhoods that locals gradually leave. Consequently, they often form their own communities, distancing themselves from local culture and social life.

Most undocumented immigrants in Europe are refugees, from North Africa in Italy because of the geographical closeness; from African countries and Eastern Europe in Portugal; Ukrainian in Poland; asylum seekers from Syria and Roma in Croatia; undocumented Moldovans in Romania; immigrants from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq in Greece. All of them experience poor condition living in the receiving Country. The racism present in Europe is often due to a lack of information and education in critical thinking. Many older people are afraid of individuals of color because of the prejudices that developed during the fascist and soviet era. At the same time, younger generations are encouraged by government messages to see these immigrants as enemies and scapegoats for economic and unemployment issues—problems that should be directed towards government decisions about how to use European funds (Italy has access to €240 billion from the PNRR to improve living conditions).

### **Racism and Misinformation**

This mistrust of immigrants among younger people is often due to a lack of education, as many of them are not highly educated. Additionally, this skepticism is fueled by the right-wing populist government, which does little to encourage informed discussion and critical thinking. Instead, it promotes misinformation through censorship and manipulation of news from the mass media. Taking Italy as an example, Since Meloni's government began on October 22nd, 2022, there have been restrictions on freedom of information and press freedom. Reports show that Italy has fallen from 41st to 46th place out of 108 countries regarding press freedom. During a journalists' strike in May 2024, journalist Enrica Agostini said, “I had never experienced censorship like this before.” These efforts to misinform contribute to the marginalization of immigrants and increase racism against them.

## **Government Influence on Education and Media**

The marginalization of first-generation immigrants is also seen in their job conditions, as their work opportunities are usually limited to low-skilled jobs. Many of them work off the books, in poor conditions, and earn less than €4 per hour, without any job protections. (This is illustrated by the tragic case of Indian worker Jasvir Singh, who died in the summer of 2024 due to bad working conditions.)

The social integration of many undocumented immigrants from Africa shows differences between the northern and southern parts of Italy. In northern Italy, which has better infrastructure and job opportunities, first-generation immigrants can often find work, even in low-level roles. In contrast, many immigrants in the southern regions remain unemployed and may live on the streets.

Additionally, many cities lack volunteer organizations that could help immigrants integrate into society or provide opportunities for them to get involved in local activities. Many cities in countries like Italy do not even offer basic courses in the official language of the host country for these immigrants.

As diversity grows so does racism and discrimination, as we try to fight this problem there is an increasing generational problem since as it was stated before different generations tend to believe in different things. People tend to resist change as older adults may not be able to understand the differences of generational impulse that was a big change since the technological revolution that brought faster and faster change to it, the elderly struggle with this new technology, against the vision of the younger that tend to overlook traditional ways which makes it harder to connect and collaborate. The older they get the less active they get even though this isn't true for everyone. But in the end as a collective group we can try and close this gap through intergenerational learning.

Another problematic issue in the generational gap and diversity is the fact that young people seem to be leaving small towns to opt for big cities and better opportunities. Having to find ways for younger generations to choose to stay in their hometown is an important part of our purpose, as is spreading awareness through us for the issue.

## **Educational Disparities**

### **Inequalities in Education**

When discussing educational problems, it is essential to consider various factors that contribute to inequality and hinder effective learning. We learned that there are a lot of discrepancies when it comes to learning. Unfortunately, there aren't the same opportunities for everyone, even in the same country there are always disparities when it comes to learning. The curriculum sometimes isn't even the same, especially in universities which makes it detrimental for those who attend it. Sometimes maybe the curriculum is the same but because they are in smaller cities, they end up being undervalued. Moreover, even when those conditions are aligned, Europe still faces unequal educational needs and rights, particularly for individuals with disabilities, those living in poverty, and those affected by war. Currently the EU has a directive only covering equal employment opportunities, but not one that guarantees equal opportunities in all aspects of society.

Looking at the disadvantages of European education there are a couple of obvious ones. In terms of cultural differences, The Czech Republic is popular among applicants from many countries of the world due to the mentality of its inhabitants. However, there are still cultural differences that you will inevitably have to get used to. Language barriers can be hard to cross.

### **Language Barriers**

The most reliable way to get admitted to a state-funded education program of a Czech university is to devote a year to studying Czech through specialized classes. However, even after receiving the B2 level certificate, it takes time to warm up to talking. You will be able to chat and joke freely about three or four years into living in the country.

### **Successful Models**

Finland, Canada, and the Netherlands lead in addressing the educational needs of special needs students with inclusive policies, well-trained teachers, and early intervention programs. These nations show that inclusive education is achievable when societies invest in the potential of every child.

## **Role of NGOs**

### **Importance of NGOs**

Non-governmental organizations are nonprofit organizations, operating independently of governmental bodies, to help overcome some of the social, environmental, and economic problems of the world. The fact that their work must service the public rather than provide profit gives mission to these agencies as they work within specific areas: human rights, healthcare, education, care for and conservation of the environment, disaster relief, and community development. The NGOs support all the possible needs of the disadvantaged sectors of society, while simultaneously fighting for policy changes in the most backward areas where governmental assistance is minimal or nil. Grassroots projects, public campaigns, partnerships with local and international organizations-NGOs shout out about pressing issues, see social progress made, and forge lasting community change throughout the world. Much of their work is sustained by donations, grants, and volunteer efforts, so they can be flexible and responsive to emerging global needs.

A commitment to inclusion and diversity breeds NGOs and target groups out of the commitment to marginals in society, ensuring equal opportunities for all. Thus, it is in aspects such as education, health, economic empowerment, and human rights that NGOs try to develop programs inclusive of the different needs of diverse populations based on gender, age, disability, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. That is the nature of their initiatives: to bring down barriers, work toward social equity, and celebrate diversity, ensuring that vulnerable groups—such as women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and indigenous communities—get access to resources and support, which will give them a chance to succeed. The NGOs face varied challenges and have specific needs in their pursuit of increasing their effect and sustainability. Among these, the main challenge remains that of funding instability: a lack of predictable income cripples the execution of long-term planning and projects. The NGOs, therefore, need diverse and reliable sources of funding, such as grants, donations, and earned revenue, to provide them with financial resilience. Accountability and transparency issues are widespread and mostly break the trust in donors, which calls for better governance and financial transparency. Cultural mismatch between NGOs and local communities gets in the way of engagement; design of programs requires, hence, culturally informed approaches. Resource constraints, such as inadequate staffing and skill gaps, bring down quality programs and point out capacity-building initiatives to ensure adequately trained teams. Added to these are the operational risks in many regions due to government restrictions and political interference; thus, legal and advocacy support is indispensable in overcoming

such risks. Third, most NGOs face challenges in impact measurement because of the limitation of tools. The ability to have good evaluation methods is therefore important to track and illustrate progress to stakeholders. Lastly, competition in the sector for funding results in duplication, hence the need for better partnerships that allow for greater collaboration and shared results. Meeting such needs might empower NGOs to overcome obstacles in their path and drive sustainable high-impact change.

### **Effective Solutions for NGOs**

There exist several effective solutions that can be put into use to address these challenges, enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of NGOs. First is the diversification of funding sources by seeking government grants, corporate sponsorships, individual donations, and social enterprises, which will help stabilize financial support and reduce dependency on one avenue of support. Strong accountability and transparency built with strong governance structures, periodic financial audits, and open communication with donors and communities will engage more support. Further, culturally informed programming—following a principle that involves local communities in the design and implementation of initiatives—ensures that solutions are appropriate and effective. Capacity-building investments in staff training enhance capability; legal advocacy and support facilitate navigating regulatory frameworks and challenging restrictive laws. The development of clear impact measurement frameworks will enable NGOs to assess program effectiveness and communicate their successes to stakeholders. Hosting collaborations and partnerships with other NGOs and private sector entities ensures resource sharing and less competition in funding, turning out wholesome solutions. Technology in fundraising and management of projects boosts efficiency, as does aware campaigning that brings the public in to engage support. Above all, setting up social enterprises that resonate with the mission of the NGO will yield sustainable revenue streams. They will help an NGO increase its strength and sustainability in its operations and enhance its potential to bring about constructive change within the communities in which it works.

NGOs are at work in Italy, Greece, Portugal, Croatia, and Romania, performing the most valuable of tasks in support of vulnerable populations. Unfortunately, many often face extraordinary challenges that make their missions truly daunting. In Italy, for instance, NGOs like Emergency and Save the Children must struggle with instability in funding due to changing government support and shifting donor priorities, which prevents them from expanding their services to those in need. The perennial refugee crisis in Greece places an intense burden on NGOs such as Doctors Without Borders, fighting against government restrictions and scarce resources in attempts to provide basic medical care for desperate migrants in search of safety and health. While in

Portugal, victim support agencies like APAV are facing increased demands due to rising crime rates, under-resourcing and thin staffing have made the response in keeping up with expanding needs extremely difficult. Civic Initiatives in Croatia experience political interference and a lack of interest by the public; this dampens their efforts to advocate for social change and community empowerment. NGOs, therefore, like the Romani Criss in Romania, must face dual tasks: first, fighting for an alienated community and deeply ingrained discrimination that often complicates efforts to effectively offer basic services to its members. Such challenges illustrate how continued support and community involvement are required to further enhance the effectiveness of NGOs working in the communities so they may continue their much-needed work in addressing multifaceted problems within their societies.

## **Regional Challenges in Europe**

### **Civic Participation Disparities**

Inside of the countries there is a substantial discrepancy between the countries inside themselves where there is rural and urban life. By looking at some surveys we can see that in 2019 59% urban aged 15-30 rural 47% rural engaged in civic activities, the youth participation came to bring a difference since more and more young people seem to be involved but also it still isn't enough. The age demographic rate shows that there are more elderly people than younger people and especially in rural areas. Also, volunteering in these areas tends to be less even though it's just 10% less, according to the European commission youth report (42% in urban life and 30% in rural). There seems to be a need for more infrastructure to take care of social inclusiveness problems.

### **Civic Participation Disparities**

In Europe youth is offered a wide range of volunteering programs from environmental conservation projects to social initiatives that support marginalized groups. The problem is that those programs are not spread equally through all parts of European countries. Some European towns that have many students attending universities there can really have an impact if the volunteering is well spread and organized. There are also a lot of smaller rural parts which need volunteers. If there aren't students or young people who live there it is hard to find volunteers. That problem can be fixed if volunteers from towns in the nearest area could have organized activities where those are needed. Opportunities available through European student organizations are Erasmus Student Network (ESN), Civic Service Programs, European Voluntary Service (EVS), Student-led NGOs.

Through those many actions happen. For example, activities with old people or people with disabilities, making small learning courses for people to learn a new skill or language, students can also help children with learning or homework.

### **LGBTQ+ Rights**

Across Europe, LGBTQ+ rights have seen significant disparities, with some countries advancing in recognition and protection, while others are regressing. Many right-wing governments reflect traditional views of family, which often penalizes LGBTQ+ families in terms of access to rights and protections. Non-biological parents often struggle to gain acknowledgement, leading to issues such as the invalidation of birth certificates for children born abroad, which hampers their legal rights.

These challenges reflect a broader trend of right-wing policies that promote a traditional vision of the family. This perspective penalizes rainbow families, limiting their access to essential rights and protections, which results in systemic discrimination against LGBTQ+ communities. The existing stigma in society contributes to an environment where discussions about gender diversity are often avoided in schools. This lack of dialogue denies young people the opportunity to engage with important topics through comprehensive sexual education and civic education programs.

### **Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

The European Commission is committed to advancing the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities across the EU, ensuring they can move freely, participate in political life, and live independently. By the end of 2023, a proposed European Disability Card aims to facilitate the mutual recognition of disability status among Member States, enhancing mobility and rights for disabled individuals. Furthermore, the Commission is working to ensure that people with disabilities can actively participate in the electoral process.

The strategy also prioritizes non-discrimination and equal opportunities. It seeks to protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination and violence, ensuring they have equitable access to justice, education, culture, sports, tourism, health services, and employment. However, significant barriers remain. In 26 countries, individuals can lose their legal capacity, affecting their ability to make fundamental decisions about their lives. In 7 countries, those under guardianship are disenfranchised, and in 15, individuals with intellectual disabilities face restrictions on standing for election. Only 5 countries provide full voting rights and accessibility for disabled voters. The living situations of adults with disabilities highlight these challenges: in 21 countries, few live independently, often remaining with parents who become primary caregivers instead of fulfilling their familial roles. While 1.1 million children with intellectual disabilities attend mainstream schools—benefiting from inclusive environments—700,000 are still

in special schools, missing out on the advantages of integrated education, and 20,000 receive no education at all.

Employment opportunities are equally concerning. Less than 10% of individuals with intellectual disabilities are employed, compared to a 50% employment rate for all people with disabilities and 75% for those without disabilities. This lack of support not only hampers individual autonomy but also impacts family dynamics, often requiring family members—predominantly women—to leave the workforce to provide care. This strategy aims to create a more inclusive Europe, where all individuals, regardless of disability, can thrive and fully participate in society.

### *2.1.5 Initiatives that can be promoted by different institutions at local, regional national and European level*

- **Local Level:** Communities can implement intergenerational integration programs that pair younger and older residents with immigrants, fostering mutual understanding and reducing prejudices. Local schools and community centers can host workshops and activities where different generations collaborate, allowing for cultural exchange and shared learning experiences.
- **Regional Level:** Regional authorities can support these initiatives by providing funding and resources, such as training for facilitators and materials for educational sessions. They can also encourage partnerships between schools, NGOs, and local businesses to facilitate these programs, ensuring they reach a diverse audience.
- **National Level:** National governments can develop policies promoting intergenerational learning as a strategy for combating racism and xenophobia. They can provide grants for pilot projects, create awareness campaigns highlighting the benefits of diversity, and integrate these programs into national educational curricula to enhance social cohesion.
- **European Level:** The European Union can play a crucial role by funding large-scale intergenerational integration initiatives across member states. By facilitating the exchange of successful practices and resources, the EU can encourage collaboration between regions facing similar challenges. Additionally, the EU can create a platform for sharing research and strategies that effectively address integration issues, fostering a unified approach to diversity across Europe.



Concluding for the inclusion and diversity we find that as a solution to make this integration easier increase funding for mandatory schooling, which is the only universal experience that all citizens are expected to share. Since school is at the core of educational development, it is essential that it serves as a foundation for building active citizenship. Educational institutions must equip young people with the necessary tools to develop critical thinking skills, the ability to distinguish between accurate information and misinformation, and to know how to pursue reliable sources.

To promote the establishment of volunteer associations, particularly in small towns and rural areas, is essential for raising awareness about active citizenship. This initiative will encourage young people to participate in local volunteer programs, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment within their communities. Over the coming years, these efforts can lead to increased community involvement and a more engaged citizenry.

Some of our ideas are recommendations enhancing education and awareness by promoting educational programs that encourage critical thinking and understanding of diversity among all generations.

Support integration initiatives by increasing funding for volunteer organizations that help immigrants integrate into society through language classes and community involvement. To improve employment conditions by implementing policies to protect the rights of immigrant workers and ensure fair wages and safe working conditions. And reinforce press freedom by advocating for the protection of freedom of information and encouraging responsible media reporting on immigration issues. And, to counter these negative trends, it is crucial to invest in education. Incorporating sexual and civic education into school curricula is essential, as is providing workplace training that raises awareness about gender diversity issues. These initiatives can foster a more inclusive environment and promote understanding and cooperation regarding LGBTQ+ rights.

## 2.2 DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

### 2.2.1 What does it mean?

Digital transformation is the process by which organizations use digital technologies to create new — or modify existing — processes, cultures, and customer experiences to meet changing business and market requirements. This transformation leverages technologies such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and data analytics to streamline operations, improve customer engagement, increase flexibility, and drive innovation. Digital transformation is not only about adopting new technology but also about rethinking traditional business models, enhancing collaboration, and fostering a more agile and data-driven organizational culture.

Digital technologies are transforming everyday life, and the EU's industrial and digital strategies are designed to make this shift beneficial for both people and businesses. These strategies also contribute to the EU's goal of becoming climate-neutral by 2050. The European Commission is focused on strengthening the single market to keep industries resilient and globally competitive. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups are central to this approach, with a focus on building an environment where European entrepreneurs can thrive and innovate.

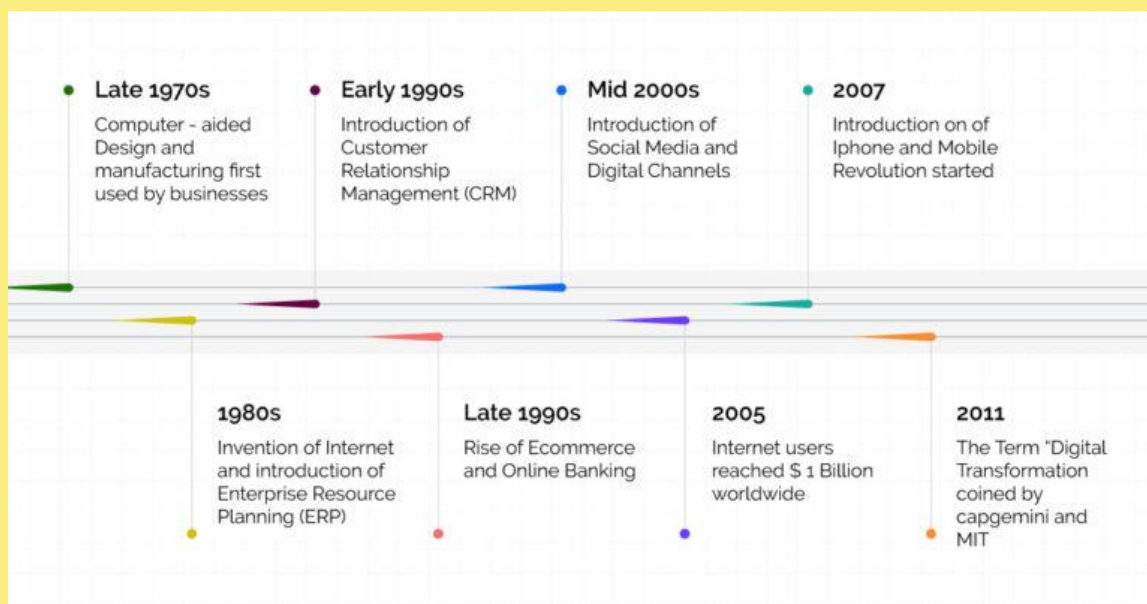
[https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/industry/strategy/digital-transformation\\_en?prefLang=it](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/industry/strategy/digital-transformation_en?prefLang=it)

### 2.2.2 History

The roots of digital transformation go back several decades, but its importance has intensified in recent years. It began gaining traction in the late 1970s with the development of computer-aided design (CAD) and manufacturing systems, which marked an initial shift toward digitizing business processes. In the 1980s, this progress continued with the rise of enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, followed by customer relationship management (CRM) systems in the 1990s, which enabled businesses to improve operations and enhance customer engagement.

In the late 1990s, eCommerce and online banking emerged as internet connectivity improved, allowing these services to shift from offline to online channels. This period also saw the World Wide Web connecting companies and customers through websites, setting off the stage for digital engagement.

With the rise of social media in the mid-2000s, communication between businesses and customers transformed dramatically, opening new avenues for customer interaction. The release of the iPhone and other mobile technologies soon after further accelerated digital transformation, introducing mobile and social platforms that expanded digital possibilities for both businesses and consumers. This ushered in a wave of innovation and reshaped business models across industries, as organizations adapted to an increasingly connected and data-driven world.



<https://techeela.com/technology/history-of-digital-transformation/>

Digitalization affects many aspects of everyday life, reshaping how we work, communicate, manage finances, and even access healthcare. For instance, digital platforms allow employees to work remotely, often leading to flexible schedules and improved work-life balance. Meanwhile, digital banking has made it easier to manage finances, from opening accounts online to making contactless payments. Digitalization in public services is also making it simpler for citizens to complete tasks like filing taxes or applying for government assistance online.

In healthcare, telemedicine and health apps offer remote consultations, enabling patients to access medical advice and monitoring tools from home, which is especially helpful for people in remote areas. Education, too, has been transformed as online resources and digital classrooms allow learning anytime and anywhere, expanding access for students worldwide. However, with these conveniences come challenges, such as digital privacy concerns and the need to bridge the digital divide so that everyone can access these tools equitably.

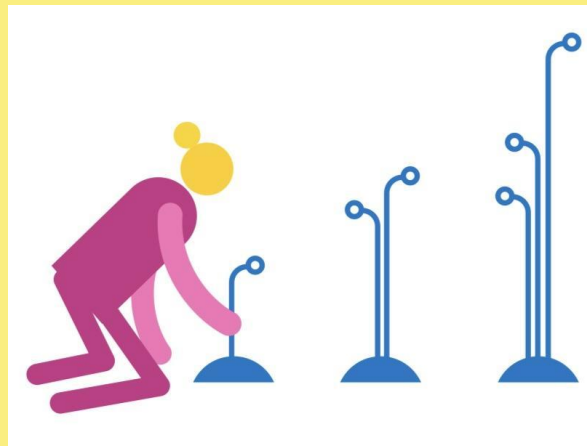
A recent example of digitalization's impact was seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital tools proved essential across various areas, from education to work, allowing activities to continue remotely. However, many countries were not fully prepared for such rapid change and had to accelerate digital transformations to meet the demand. This shift led to significant investments in digital platforms, infrastructure, and skills, helping organizations and institutions adapt swiftly to new ways of operating in a largely virtual environment.

The article from “Frontiers in Psychology” discusses how digitalization affects various aspects of life, particularly emphasizing the rise of what the authors call a “survival personality” during the COVID-19 pandemic. This personality type is characterized by resilience, adaptability, and a positive response to digital shifts in work, socializing, and education. The research identifies five main outcomes of digitalization: improved flexibility, increased mental load, social disconnection, adaptability, and heightened digital skill demands. It suggests that these effects influence psychological well-being and individual adaptability in a rapidly digitizing world.

[https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1230192/  
full](https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1230192/full)

Today, the biggest challenge is keeping up with innovation and helping different generations to adapt their needs to it. For example, older generations need practical guidance in the new world of digitalization to learn the basics and take advantage of new tools. On the other side, younger generations, growing up in an already digitized world, need to learn how to navigate a space that can offer many opportunities for growth and information but can also be very dangerous from a psychological standpoint.

### 2.2.3 How can it happen?



Digital transformation for young people can happen by providing them with access, skills, and support, preparing them to be leaders in a digital world and equipping them to be not only consumers but also creators and innovators in the digital age.

The digital era reshapes our global narrative, transforming communication and decision-making. Beyond sharing opinions, digital participation drives policy, activism, education, and global collaboration and holds the potential for positive change and innovation. While opportunities are abundant, challenges like information overload, filter bubbles, and the digital divide require media literacy and critical thinking.

Initiating digital participation demands more than just technical ability, it requires a cultural shift—a transition from a reliance on tools to an adaptive utilization of them.

Educators, policymakers, and individuals must foster a culture that prioritizes meaningful interaction over mere digital presence. In this narrative of interconnected voices, our role in digital participation is pivotal. By purchasing technology responsibly, fostering inclusive spaces, and bridging divides, each contribution converges into a symphony of ideas, insights, and empowerment.

To make this change, it's needed to have clear the key factors driving this new transformation:

**1. Access to Digital Education and Skills Training:**

Young people need opportunities to learn digital skills from an early age. This can include integrating topics such as programming, data analysis, digital design, and cybersecurity into school and university curricula, as well as providing access to online courses, workshops, and bootcamps.

**2. Encouraging Digital Creativity and Entrepreneurship:**

Digital transformation allows young people to create their own projects, businesses, or initiatives using digital platforms. With access to design tools, social media, e-commerce platforms, and other resources, they can launch their own businesses, create content, and monetize their skills online.

**3. Access to Technology and Infrastructure:**

Access to devices, quality connectivity, and technological tools is essential. Government and NGO initiatives can help provide these resources, ensuring that young people, regardless of their location or economic situation, can guarantee equal opportunities in the digital world.

**4. Fostering a Continuous Learning Mindset:**

Technology is constantly evolving, and digital transformation requires young people to be adaptable. Encouraging a mindset of continuous learning and adaptability will help them stay updated on new technologies and work methods.

**5. Building Digital Networks and Communities:**

Through social media, forums, and online groups, young people can connect with others and experts worldwide. These connections allow them to exchange ideas, collaborate on projects, and gain mentorship, facilitating their participation in the global digital economy.

**6. Promoting Digital Employment and Job Opportunities:**

Companies can create specific opportunities for young people in digital areas such as programming, web design, digital marketing, and data analysis. Governments and private companies can collaborate on internships, remote jobs, and training programs in emerging technologies.

### **7. Encouraging Ethical Values and Digital Responsibility:**

It's important for young people to understand the ethical aspects of digitalization, such as data privacy, responsible technology use, and environmental impact. This fosters a conscious and sustainable digital transformation.

### **8. Developing Inclusive and Diverse Digital Policies:**

It's essential for digital transformation initiatives to be inclusive, ensuring that all young people, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or economic background, have equal access and opportunities in the digital world.

#### *2.2.4 Opportunities*

Through its tools, digital technology offers various opportunities for enhancing experiences and accessibility across many fields

First, it can promote **global collaboration**. It goes beyond borders, enabling individuals and communities worldwide to collaborate seamlessly, exchange insights, and collectively tackle global challenges in real-time because Digital Participation allows individuals and communities to collaborate, share insights, and collectively address global challenges on a continuous and immediate basis.

Another opportunity is direct **engagement**, it means leveraging information and communication technology, it facilitates direct and immediate interactions between citizens and governments. Platforms such as social media can be used as direct channels, allowing individuals to engage with policymakers and express opinions on pertinent issues.

Another benefit that can be obtained is cost efficiency. Digital participation significantly reduces the time and resource costs incurred by governments and citizens. Its efficiency in mobilizing the masses surpasses traditional means, resulting in streamlined communication and engagement processes.

<https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/DigitalCooperation-report-for%20web.pdf>

### 2.2.5 Strategies

There are different strategies which can help young people become protagonists of digital transformation, equipping them with the skills and resources needed to seize opportunities in an increasingly digital world. Some of them are

- **New Industrial Strategy for Europe:** the general and broad EU vision on industry founded on the twin green and digital transitions.

[https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/european-industrial-strategy\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/european-industrial-strategy_en)

- **Green Deal Industrial Plan:** strategy to make the EU a leader in the net-zero technology sector by supporting the green transition of industry.

[https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/green-deal-industrial-plan\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/green-deal-industrial-plan_en)

- **Web 4.0 and virtual worlds:** EU strategy on the integration between digital and real objects and environments, and enhanced interactions between humans and machines.

[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_23\\_3718](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_3718)

- **European strategy for data:** Strategy to make the EU a leader in data-driven society by creating a single market for data that respects EU values and rights. It aims to foster data sharing and innovation, while ensuring data protection and sovereignty.

<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/strategy-data>

- **Blockchain Strategy:** Strategy to support a 'gold standard' for blockchain technology in Europe that embraces European values and ideals in its legal and regulatory framework.

<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/blockchain-strategy>

- **EU Strategy on Standardization:** Actions to make standardization a driver of European competitiveness and resilience. This is to ensure that standards support our investments in green and digital transitions and embedding democratic values in technology applications.

[https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/single-market/european-standards/standardisation-policy/standardisation-strategy\\_en](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/single-market/european-standards/standardisation-policy/standardisation-strategy_en)



[https://participationpool.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/SALTO\\_Digital\\_Transformation.pdf](https://participationpool.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/SALTO_Digital_Transformation.pdf)  
[https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030_en)  
<https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/33221/file/Digital%20Learning%20and%20Transformation%20of%20Education%20Strategy.pdf>

### *2.2.6 What role do organizations and youth workers play in encouraging it and working on it?*

The **EU Agenda 2030** is a comprehensive framework aimed at advancing the European Union's sustainable development goals in line with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This initiative focuses on creating a more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient Europe, addressing various critical areas such as climate change, social equality, and economic growth. For these reasons we should analyze and improve some digital targets for the EU agenda 2030.

The aspects to increase in the main areas are skills, government, infrastructures and business on the different levels of our European community.

#### → **Local level**

At the local level, a good example of community support in digitalization is the EUSOUDIGITAL project in Portugal. This initiative aims to promote digital literacy and access, helping communities engage with digital tools effectively. By focusing on training and resources, the project seeks to empower individuals and foster inclusivity in the digital age. Their main aim is to help adults take their first steps online and use the internet. The goal is to train 30,000 volunteers so that they can provide basic digital training and create 1,500 digital skills training centers in partnership with local authorities and organizations across the country. This project will help increase digital literacy, sharing experience between different generations to combat isolation. It can also promote safe internet use and facilitate job search and access to digital services.  
<https://www.eusoudigital.pt/>

→ **Regional level**

At the Regional level it is important to raise the voice at the regional areas to include the local initiatives in their administration policies trying to support the dialogue. This can be achieved through a collaborative approach involving three key stakeholders: **regional governments, youth associations, and local communities**. One effective example of regional-level initiatives for youth participation is the Youth Participation Strategy implemented in various European regions, which aims to actively involve young people in decision-making processes. For instance, some regions have created youth councils that serve as platforms for young people to voice their concerns and contribute to local governance. These councils often work closely with regional governments to influence policies that affect their communities.

→ **National level**

The EU roadmap for this decade emphasizes several critical aspects to enhance digital transformation across its member states. A primary focus is on fostering basic digital competences for all citizens, particularly aiding older populations in navigating the technological landscape.

Initiatives like Portugal's "ID.GOV.PT", launched in 2012, and Italy's "SpID" and "IO app", developed between 2018 and 2024, exemplify efforts to improve digital literacy and access to public services. Additionally, the roadmap advocates for the digitalization of public services, including the implementation of efficient digital identity systems that facilitate interactions between citizens and government agencies. Another significant component is the digital transformation of health services, which aims to enhance patient access and improve healthcare data management. Furthermore, the EU is committed to fostering a robust digital economy by supporting startups and aspiring unicorn companies, creating an environment conducive to innovation and investment.

→ **European level**

At the European level, effective cooperation among various entities is crucial for the successful implementation of the Digital Single Market. This cooperation hinges on the appropriate utilization of European policies and funds at multiple levels. Each level of governance must contribute to harmonizing investments from the EU budget, supporting overarching missions, and ensuring connectivity within the European Digital Single Market.

For instance, the implementation of the "Digital Services Act" exemplifies a collaborative effort among EU member states, businesses, and regulatory bodies. This legislation aims to create a safer digital space, ensuring accountability for online platforms while fostering innovation. By aligning resources and strategies across national and regional levels, countries can effectively comply with these regulations, share best practices, and enhance

their digital economies. Furthermore, initiatives such as the “European Digital Innovation Hubs” facilitate local partnerships that help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) access digital technologies, thereby boosting competitiveness and fostering economic growth throughout the region. Another example of collaboration, on a European level, to encourage digital transformation, can be the training courses organized by the Erasmus+ projects. During these experiences youth but also entrepreneurs can deep themselves into the topic of new technologies.

### *2.2.7 Proposals for Enhancing Digital Transformation*

#### **Access to digital tutoring and helping**

One of the possible proposals we have considered for various municipalities, particularly to be promoted in the rural areas of different countries, is to create specific courses and assistance for those in need through a dedicated tutoring service to help with the use of technologies, which are now necessary for many bureaucratic aspects of life.

A good example is countries that have introduced the use of digital identities; in Italy, to sign referendum proposals, one must access their personal citizen's file. A country with such a characteristic should simultaneously guarantee places, in every area of the state, to access computers and receive assistance in using them for democratic participation purposes. This way, everyone can have easier access to the democratic processes of the country.

The focal points to concentrate on would therefore include:

1. **Digital Literacy Training:** Establishing courses aimed at enhancing digital skills among citizens, particularly in rural areas, to ensure they can navigate essential technologies and digital platforms.
2. **Tutoring and Support Services:** Creating dedicated tutoring services to provide personalized assistance in using technology for various bureaucratic processes, helping citizens become more comfortable and proficient.
3. **Access to Technology:** Ensuring that communities have access to computers and the internet, especially in rural regions, to facilitate participation in democratic processes and online services.
4. **Digital Identity Utilization:** Promoting the use of digital identities and educating citizens on their importance for accessing government services, like signing referendum proposals or other official documents.

5. **Democratic Participation:** Fostering an environment where all citizens can easily engage in democratic processes, thus enhancing civic participation and awareness of rights and responsibilities.

These points can serve as a comprehensive framework to improve digital inclusion and empower citizens in the digital age.

### **Digital Education for Youth in school**

Many educational systems are integrating digital skills into their curricula, emphasizing not only technical skills but also critical thinking and digital citizenship. This approach ensures that students learn how to use technology responsibly and effectively. One of the topics that should be explored more deeply in these courses is understanding issues like cyberbullying and providing tools that enable young people to recognize fake news and filter the vast amount of information they encounter daily on the internet. These skills acquired at school should then be extended to the family environment, perhaps by introducing the possibility of holding workshops with both young people and parents.

Here are some practical examples of how this workshop could work and which topics they could discuss:

#### **1. Cyberbullying Awareness and Prevention Workshop:**

Host joint sessions where parents and children can learn about the effects of cyberbullying, how to identify it, and the steps to report it. Role-playing scenarios could be used to help families recognize different types of online bullying and practice ways to respond. The possible outcomes from the workshop: This would build empathy and communication between parents and children on a difficult topic, helping parents to understand the online environments their children interact with and foster open discussions about challenges they might face.

#### **2. Fake News Identification and Critical Thinking Workshop:**

Use real-life examples to teach families how to fact-check information, recognize trustworthy sources, and identify misinformation. This could include practical exercises like comparing news articles from different sources or practicing online fact-checking together.

Parents and children would gain tools to critically assess information, a skill that can reduce the spread of misinformation and help families make more informed decisions.

### **3. Digital Literacy Labs:**

Create hands-on labs where parents and children can learn to use social media responsibly, set up privacy settings, or use digital tools together. This could also include guiding parents through parental controls and safety settings on various platforms. Both generations would feel more comfortable navigating online spaces, and parents could gain a better understanding of the digital tools their children are using daily.

### **4. Monthly Family Tech Talks:**

Organize monthly tech talks or Q&A sessions where families can come together to discuss trending topics in digital media, such as new apps, privacy updates, or emerging online risks.

These regular check-ins could make technology discussions a normal part of family life, helping children feel more open to talking with their parents about online experiences and challenges.

By integrating digital education in both school and home environments, children and parents can collaboratively build safer and more informed digital practices. These types of initiatives can also strengthen family bonds and make digital safety a shared responsibility making the process of safe and controlled digitalization faster.

### **Utilize TIK TOK to engage young people**

TikTok and the other socials have become an ideal platform for NGOs to connect with young people (ages 18-30), offering unique ways to raise awareness and inspire action. The platform's user-friendly format allows NGOs to create easily relatable and engaging content that can convey their mission through storytelling, showcase impactful projects, and highlight their purpose in a way that resonates with younger audiences. By following current trends, NGOs can keep their messaging relevant and maximize their reach. Engaging influencers who have a strong following among young people can further amplify their message, helping them gain visibility and trust within this demographic.

Utilizing popular and relevant hashtags also enhances content discoverability, allowing the NGO's cause to reach those actively interested in similar topics. Posting strategies tailored to boost engagement—such as interactive posts and calls to action—encourage users to participate and spread the message. Educational live videos can bring urgent issues, like climate change and poverty, to the forefront, offering young people the chance to learn and take part in solutions. Additionally, promoting event opportunities like youth exchanges or training programs via TikTok helps mobilize and involve young audiences, nurturing a generation that's informed, engaged, and ready to contribute.

Our last point is that these new tools can also help engage younger generations in topics that may otherwise feel distant to them. Digital platforms and interactive technologies serve as powerful resources that, when used thoughtfully, can bring young people closer to causes often perceived as outdated or unrelated to their lives. For example, Emergency, an Italian NGO, uses digitalization to foster such connections. Emergency provides free, high-quality care to people affected by conflict and poverty in a sustainable way: building healthcare facilities, training local personnel, and conducting search and rescue missions in the Mediterranean Sea. By employing augmented reality (AR) headsets, they allow users to experience an immersive journey into their humanitarian missions. With the AR headset, users can virtually step onto a Sea-Watch ship during a Mediterranean rescue mission or explore one of Emergency's hospitals, offering a firsthand perspective on their impact. This use of digital tools is a prime example of how technology can transform distant realities into engaging, relatable experiences for young audiences. <https://en.emergency.it/>

Another valuable application of technology is in the cultural sector, such as at archaeological sites or museums. Here we should give the possibility to the visitors to experience virtual reconstructions of ancient sites or artifacts. By using augmented or virtual reality, visitors can see and interact with digital recreations of historical places as they were in their original form. For example, in an archaeological site, users could use AR glasses or mobile apps to visualize a reconstructed ancient building or see how artifacts were originally used. This approach enhances educational experiences and deepens visitors' connection to cultural heritage, making history feel more immediate and engaging. An excellent example of this technology in practice is at the Papal Palace in Avignon, France. Visitors are provided with tablets that display a virtual reconstruction of the palace's interiors, which were once richly decorated but are now mostly empty. Through these devices, visitors can visualize the historical settings, complete with furnishings, artwork, and architectural details, as they would have appeared in the past. This use of digital reconstruction helps bring the history of the palace to life, providing an immersive cultural experience and allowing visitors to appreciate the site's original splendor.

## 2.3 SUSTAINABILITY: Green Transition

### 2.3.1 What is it?

The Green Transition is a core EU initiative aimed at transforming Europe into the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. The EU strategy calls for collective action against climate change, emphasizing that sustainability is an obligation for all of the population, and in this case particularly young people, and noticing the impact of our actions. The strategy aims to empower youth by providing opportunities for volunteering in the environmental sector.

### 2.3.2 History

The EU's strategy on climate action has deep historical roots in its longstanding commitment to sustainability and environmental protection, dating back to the 1970s, including its first Environmental Action Program in 1973, to significant climate agreements like the Kyoto Protocol by 1990 where the EU played a crucial role in establishing international standards, and shaping a shared commitment among member states to greenhouse gas reduction.

In 2011 the EU intended to reduce emissions by up to 95% by 2050 using the "Roadmap for a Competitive Low-Carbon Europe". This sets the stage for a series of policies and commitments, leading to the establishment of the European Green Deal in 2019. The 2011 "Roadmap for a Competitive Low-Carbon Europe" introduced the EU's intent to reduce emissions by up to 95% by 2050. This sets the stage for a series of policies and commitments, leading to the establishment of the European Green Deal in 2019. The Green Deal strengthened this commitment by proposing net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and enacting the European Climate Law, making these targets legally binding. It also laid out detailed plans for renewable energy investment, sustainable mobility, and energy-efficient buildings to support an inclusive, green transition across industries and sectors.

In addition to domestic initiatives, the EU has been active internationally, advocating climate diplomacy through the UN and the Paris Agreement. Recent strategies reflect this broader scope, including the EU's Adaptation Strategy for managing climate impact and the European Climate Pact, which aims to foster public involvement. The EU's approach continues to prioritize technological innovation and grassroots participation to ensure that its long-term vision for climate neutrality is achieved by 2050, in line with its leading role in global climate action.

### 2.3.3 EU Strategy

The strategy that the EU has, outlines a multi-faceted approach to tracking the climate change through collective responsibility, with a strong focus on youth empowerment and international collaboration:

- **Collective responsibility and youth engagement:** Calls on young people to be aware of how their choices impact the environment, as a collective responsibility. In this case the practical applications that can be useful about this strategy could be digital storytelling campaigns by young ambassadors. Raising awareness is crucial, especially when you consider the target audience and provide relatable role models they can identify with.
- **Youth Empowerment through practical environmental engagement:** Encourages young people to actively participate in sustainability efforts through hands-on learning experiences. Educational workshops, camps, and internships with local businesses provide youth with practical skills in climate action, waste reduction, and energy efficiency. By engaging directly in environmental projects, young people gain the knowledge and tools needed to champion future efforts in environmental protection while serving as relatable role models for their communities.
- **Green Infrastructure and Youth-Led Conservation:** Promotes eco-friendly infrastructure and youth participation in conservation, making sustainable choices more accessible. Through green initiatives like renewable energy, public transportation, and recycling facilities, communities can reduce their carbon footprints. Youth-led conservation programs, including habitat restoration and tree planting, alongside sustainable mobility events like cycling and carpooling, foster environmental responsibility and inspire collective action toward a greener future.
- **Global Collaboration and Youth Engagement:** Emphasizes the need for international cooperation on climate action, encouraging nations to align on phasing out unsustainable practices. By engaging young people in EU environmental initiatives and forums, this approach amplifies youth voices in policymaking and fosters cross-border knowledge sharing, promoting consistent environmental standards and a unified push toward a sustainable global economy.
- **Investing in Youth and Sustainable Technology:** Focuses on expanding research in sustainable technologies while fostering youth involvement through entrepreneurship programs. By supporting innovation in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and waste reduction, this approach not only addresses climate challenges but also empowers young entrepreneurs to lead in creating practical, eco-friendly solutions that drive both environmental progress and economic growth.



All these initiatives can be promoted by a different institution at local, regional and European level:

**→ Local Level**

From the local level youth should be encouraged to participate in community clean-up events, tree-planting drives, and eco-friendly workshops. Establishing environmental clubs in schools or communities.

In this case the role of organizations and YWs: They can make a partnership with schools or community centers to provide resources, education, and support for local environmental initiatives. Offer mentorship for youth-led community projects.

- Exemple: Porta-a-Porta (PAP)

The door-to-door selective collection (PaP) is a recycling system based on collecting garbage at the doorstep of homes in the municipality. This process takes place on set days and at specific times, depending on the type of waste being collected. The door-to-door collection system increases both the quantity of waste collected and the quality of waste separation.

(Bellonch, G., Castellarnau, L., Jiménez Velasco, L., & Wu, D. (2012). Recollida selectiva porta a porta.)

**→ Regional Level**

At the regional level we should organize inter-community environmental campaigns, regional eco-festivals, or collaborative projects focusing on water and air quality. Promote regional recycling and waste reduction programs.

The role of organizations and YWs should work with local government agencies and NGOs to scale up successful local projects to the regional level. Provide workshops on environmental policy and youth advocacy.

**→ National Level**

On a national level we must advocate for green policies, participate in national environmental campaigns, or join environmental youth councils. Promote green entrepreneurship and innovation among youth.

The role of organizations and YWs is mostly giving support to young people in connecting with national policymakers, offering guidance on launching advocacy campaigns, and providing platforms for youth voices in environmental policymaking.

## → European Level

On a European level we should encourage youth participation in EU environmental programs, collaborate on cross-border environmental projects, or engage in EU-wide green challenges.

The role of organizations and YWs: It should help youth connect with European programs like Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe for green innovation projects, support cross-cultural environmental exchanges, and foster a sense of EU-wide environmental responsibility.

- **VINTED** - Vinted is a Lithuania-based online marketplace that allows users to buy, sell, and exchange secondhand clothing and accessories. Founded in 2008, Vinted promotes sustainable fashion by encouraging the reuse and recycling of pre-owned items, helping to reduce waste and the environmental impact of fast fashion. With millions of users across Europe and beyond, Vinted has become one of the largest platforms for secondhand fashion, offering a simple, user-friendly experience for those looking to shop more sustainably.
- **EOL (Croatia)**- Ecological Organization Lipa, non-governmental, non-profit association founded in 2001, EOL is a full member of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements IFOAM and its regional organization for the Mediterranean, focused on programs and projects related to rural development (mill, fair) and nature protection.
- **HUMANA**: Humana is a popular second-hand retail chain in Europe that sells affordable, pre-owned clothing and accessories. Known for its focus on sustainable fashion, Humana operates numerous stores across countries like Germany, Spain, and Italy. The stores are usually run by **Humana People to People**, a network of organizations focused on social and environmental causes. Proceeds from the stores often support development projects in areas like education, health, and sustainable agriculture, primarily in Africa and Asia. Humana promotes recycling and upcycling, offering a diverse range of vintage and trendy items, and helping to reduce textile waste.

### 2.3.4 Some Examples

#### 1. Youth & Climate (Europe)

Youth for Climate, part of the Fridays for Future movement, coordinates climate strikes and activism events across many EU countries.

- **Initiatives:** Organizes marches, school strikes, and lobbying events at the EU level, amplifying youth voices on climate policy issues and encouraging EU policymakers to adopt more ambitious climate goals.

#### 2. Generation Climate Europe (GCE)

GCE is the largest coalition of youth-led NGOs advocating climate and environmental policy within the EU.

- **Initiatives:** GCE members participate in EU policy dialogues and create campaigns on topics like the Green Deal, climate justice, and biodiversity protection. They also provide resources for young people to get involved in climate policy advocacy across Europe.



#### 3. European Youth Parliament (EYP)

EYP provides young people across Europe with a platform to discuss and propose solutions to pressing European issues, including climate change.

- **Initiatives:** Holds sessions where youth representatives from EU countries debate and propose policy recommendations on climate action, sustainable development, and renewable energy. EYP is a unique forum for youth to gain exposure to European policy making and environmental advocacy.



#### 4. European Solidarity Corps (ESC)

The ESC, funded by the EU, offers young Europeans paid placements in environmental volunteering and internships across Europe.

- **Initiatives:** Young people can join environmental projects like conservation work, eco-tourism, and green community development. ESC offers direct engagement in hands-on sustainability work, helping youth gain experience while contributing to climate action efforts.



#### 5. Let's Do It World (Europe)

Known for its global World Cleanup Day, Let's Do It World coordinates waste reduction campaigns and cleanups across EU countries.

- **Initiatives:** Organizes World Cleanup Day, a large-scale effort to clean up waste and raise awareness of pollution. Youth from all EU countries participate in local cleanup events, often with support from schools, local councils, and environmental organizations.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=le7yYsY1rWI>

#### 6. Youth and Environment Europe (YEE)

YEE is a European network of youth-led environmental organizations focusing on sustainability and conservation.

- **Initiatives:** YEE supports youth projects in environmental education, biodiversity, and renewable energy. They also organize training and workshops to strengthen the capacity of young environmentalists in leadership, advocacy, and practical conservation skills.



## **7. The Green European Foundation (GEF) Youth Network**

GEF, affiliated with the European Green Party, empowers youth activists interested in environmental policy and green governance.

- **Initiatives:** Runs the “European Green Activist Training,” a program that educates young Europeans on EU green policies and equips them with skills in advocacy and green policy development. Youth involved often go on to influence green initiatives in their local communities.



**GREEN EUROPEAN  
FOUNDATION**

## **8. Eco-Schools by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE)**

Eco-Schools is a youth-oriented program implemented by FEE across EU member states, promoting environmental education in schools.

- **Initiatives:** Schools in the Eco-Schools network complete projects on waste reduction, energy conservation, and biodiversity. Students lead initiatives within their schools, such as recycling programs and energy-saving campaigns, to achieve Eco-Schools certification.



## 9. Young Friends of the Earth Europe (YFoEE)

YFoEE is the youth division of Friends of the Earth Europe, a grassroots environmental organization with a strong youth engagement focus.

- **Initiatives:** YFoEE organizes climate justice campaigns, training sessions, and educational events that focus on sustainable agriculture, energy, and climate policies. Youth members work on cross-border projects to influence EU environmental policies and raise awareness of climate justice issues.



## 10. EU Green Week (Annual Event)

EU Green Week is an annual conference organized by the European Commission, dedicated to EU environmental policies and initiatives.

- **Initiatives:** Features events across the EU focused on themes like biodiversity, climate action, and sustainable agriculture. Youth-focused events, including discussions, workshops, and networking opportunities, encourage young people to engage with EU environmental policy and innovation.



## 11. Clean Up Europe (Let's Clean Up Europe)

This EU-coordinated initiative organizes cleanup events throughout Europe each year to tackle litter and promote waste reduction.

- **Initiatives:** Youth are encouraged to participate in local cleanup events and educational workshops on waste management. Many schools and community organizations take part, emphasizing youth engagement and local environmental action.



## 12. Climate-KIC Young Innovators (Europe)

EIT Climate-KIC, an EU-funded organization, runs the Young Innovators program to involve youth in sustainable innovation.

- **Initiatives:** Young Innovators equip students with tools and training to tackle real-world climate challenges. They use innovative design thinking methods to create sustainable solutions, often in collaboration with schools and local governments across EU member states.

### 2.3.4 Primary sources

- [European Commission](#)
- [Climate Action](#)
- [2050 long-term strategy overview](#).

## 2.4 PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRACY

### 2.4.1 What it is?

Youth participation is an engagement of young people in their local communities. It is frequently used as a shorthand for youth involvement in a variety of contexts, such as decision-making, sports, education, and any other activity in which young people are not traditionally involved.

### 2.4.2 How can Youth participation occur?

1. Establishing spaces where youth can freely express their opinions, ideas, and concerns. Examples include youth councils, online forums, workshops, and community meetings. ***(Inclusive Platforms) - open mic, workshops, meetings in different regions etc.***
2. Encouraging young people to lead projects, campaigns, or events. This fosters ownership, builds leadership skills, and allows them to address issues that matter to them directly. ***(Youth-Led Initiatives) small groups for specific topics could be good.***
3. Involving youth in committees or boards alongside adults, where they have real decision-making power. This ensures that their insights are considered in policies and programs affecting their communities. ***(Collaborative Decision-Making)***
4. Youth tend to communicate more effectively with their peers. Initiatives that promote peer-led education and outreach can facilitate better participation, as young people feel more comfortable engaging with others their age. ***(Peer-to-Peer Engagement)***



5. Social media platforms, apps, and other digital tools can be leveraged to engage youth. Online surveys, polls, virtual meetings, and campaigns can make participation more accessible and widespread. **(Use of Digital Tools)**

#### *2.4.3 Role of Organization and Youth Workers in Encouraging Youth Participation*

1. Youth organizations and YWs must ensure that the spaces they provide are safe, inclusive, and respectful, encouraging all youth to speak up without fear of judgment or discrimination. For example, having a zero-discrimination policy in the organization for harassment, gender or sexual orientation-based discrimination etc. (Race, weight, disability, ... )
2. Providing training and resources to young people, equipping them with the skills and confidence to participate effectively. This can include workshops on communication, leadership, project management, and advocacy. For example, well-informed documentation for new volunteers or participants to inform them about the organization. Providing training and resources related to the organization mission regularly.
3. Youth workers can mentor young people, guiding them on how to navigate decision-making processes, develop ideas, and implement projects. This support helps build resilience and problem-solving skills. For example, providing one-to-one consultation if needed.
4. Organizations can connect youth with stakeholders, policymakers, and other community groups. This encourages collaboration, where youth voices can be heard and considered in broader communities or policy-making discussions. For example, formal and non-formal meetings with other organizations (working on different topics to enhance intersectionality), study visits, youth exchanges, etc.
5. Ensuring that participation opportunities are accessible to all youth, regardless of their background, socio-economic status, gender, or ability. This can include providing translation services, transport, and addressing digital divides. For example, gender neutral toilets, accessible office or working spaces and transportations for disabled people, language accessibility (making events with foreign languages).

#### 2.4.4. Proposals for Enhancing Youth Participation

1. Establish advisory boards where young people are involved in organizational decision-making, offering their perspectives on ongoing projects and initiatives.  
**Youth Committee.**
2. Encourage youth to use social media and other platforms to lead awareness campaigns on issues they care about, using creative content like videos, podcasts, and blogs. **Providing digital spaces for their own issues or problems with their voice.**
3. Organize regular workshops that teach practical skills (e.g., **public speaking, digital literacy, project planning, moderation, mediation etc.**) to empower youth to take more active roles in their communities.
4. Collaborate with **educational institutions** to promote student councils, debate clubs, and volunteer programs that foster civic engagement and leadership from a young age.
5. Use creative forms of expression (e.g., **music, dance, theater**) to engage youth, allowing them to share their messages in a way that feels authentic and impactful to each other.

By putting these strategies into practice, organizations and youth workers could ensure that youth involvement becomes an essential aspect of community development, enabling young people to make significant and active contributions to society.



**“As the world becomes more interconnected, youth often struggle to have their voices heard and their actions recognized. Economic uncertainty, social inequalities, and limited access to education hinder their ability to engage meaningfully in civic life.”**

**“Empowering young people through activism and volunteering is vital. By providing them with the right tools and opportunities, we can inspire them to take ownership of the issues they care about, from climate change to social justice. This e-book serves as a guide for promoting youth engagement, exploring strategies and resources that equip young individuals to advocate for themselves and their communities. By investing in their activism, we foster a more inclusive and engaged society, ultimately strengthening our democracies.”**

