



European  
Commission

**Youth in Action**  
mobilising  
the potential  
of young  
Europeans

# Youth Democracy:

## building a vibrant society

**Y**outh Democracy projects aim at boosting young people's involvement in the democratic process at local, regional and European level. The objective is to provide young people with ideas about and experiences of democracy, and to spark new national and transnational networks and exchanges of good practice. Youth Democracy projects improve young people's understanding of how democracy works, helping them to make the most of their right to participate in the decision-making structures of a democratic society.

Youth Democracy projects have provided the opportunity for thousands of young people to develop a sense of engagement in public and community life, and to tackle issues of importance to them, ranging from the rights of young refugees and migrants to youth unemployment and the functioning of the EU. Their participation has brought them into contact with policymakers, scientists, and established



▶▶ civil society organisations. These projects have empowered young people through volunteering, through involvement in local community matters, and through acquiring skills — in debate and presentation, in media techniques and in multicultural dialogue. The participants have learnt to analyse political or social issues critically, and to make their voices heard. The projects represent concrete achievements in building active citizenship at local and European levels, and in promoting a sense of responsibility and an understanding of democracy.

European cooperation in the youth field promotes continuous dialogue between young people and policymakers, encouraging the exchange of good practice and supporting structured dialogue. These national and transnational youth seminars feature dynamic, non-formal learning experiences that contribute to young people's education, and to their knowledge and awareness of the European and international contexts. This fact sheet presents some examples of the hundreds of projects completed so far.



## Some of the many Youth Democracy projects completed so far

### 1. Engaging young people in Bulgarian decision-making

This project aimed to identify how to increase active participation and youth employment in small and remote towns in Bulgaria. The youth dimension of local government policy influences the resources and conditions for young people's development; inadequate policies adversely affect the development of young people's potential, and can intensify migration from the countryside into cities.

Research was conducted on the factors that determine the choice of hometowns and discussions were organised with decision-makers on their vision for employment, education and training, housing policy, transport, recreation and healthcare. A related survey on the attitudes of university students from smaller towns revealed that nearly half did not wish to return home after graduation. The attractions of security and safety, support from the family and a cleaner environment were not sufficient for most of the

respondents to compensate for the lack of well-paid work, the limited social life and variety of contacts, and poorer access to health services, education and transport. The young people became involved with local governments in the development of municipal youth strategies.

At a national youth meeting in Sofia in October 2010, 70 young people presented and shared local level experiences and developed recommendations for the national youth strategy and the Europe 2020 strategy. They discussed with decision-makers issues related to economic activities and entrepreneurship, employment and career development, recreation, youth volunteering, and political participation and civic activism at the local and national levels. The key recommendations were that disadvantaged young people need messages and strategies to combat stereotypes and to encourage a culture of dialogue and social connectivity, and that bridges should be built to make it possible to contribute to the life of the local community and to policy development.

*Disadvantaged young people need messages and strategies to combat stereotypes and to encourage a culture of dialogue and social connectivity*

The project activities demonstrated that youth policies are developed not only by organisations and institutions in the capital city but also with the participation of organisations from remote and small towns. A project video was produced and published on YouTube.

**Project funded by**

the Youth in Action national agency in Bulgaria

**Organisation:**

Woman's Alliance for Development Foundation, Bulgaria.

## 1 TESTIMONIALS



*'I've learnt that no matter how big or small a town is, we can still realise our dreams and goals.'*

*'I received useful information about how young people can become engaged in civic and community life, and how to be proud of ourselves and our ambitions.'*

## 2. Reviewing the neighbourhood

Rotterdam's local government supported 15 young people undergoing vocational training so that for nine months, starting in late 2010, they could review their neighbourhood in terms of youth work, young people and the police, and local youth participation. After training, the participants carried out research, through interviewing peers, neighbours and local youth workers. The results were presented to local policymakers and youth workers in a series of meetings, focusing on the police's treatment of youngsters on the street, the use and misuse of soft drugs by youngsters, and what youngsters feel about

the value and inclusiveness of youth services in their neighbourhood.

Further work was carried out on childrens' rights and on organising a national conference on youth work. Structured dialogue between young people and policymakers was developed, promoting long-term cooperation between them. There was also significant visibility through the dissemination of the results by means of a film and a brochure.

**Project funded by**

the Youth in Action national agency in the Netherlands

**Organisation:**

Gemeente Rotterdam Dienst J05, the Netherlands.

*Results focused on what youngsters feel about the value and inclusiveness of youth services in their neighbourhood*

## 3. Towards youth employment in Portugal

'Reflection for action — towards youth employment' is part of the EU structured dialogue on youth employment. From 24 January to 30 March 2011, regional meetings took place in Portugal in Madeira, the Azores, the north, the centre and Alentejo/Algarve, as a run-up to a national event. Three hundred young people living in Portugal, 15–30 years old, from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds and geographical origins, were involved alongside decision-makers and experts, to discuss priorities and measures that should be developed at EU level.

The focus was on information and communication, producing materials to promote the project and creating merchandising and an exhibition, as well as a website. Non-formal education was integral to the project. The outcomes were publicised through a CD, and a guide setting out young people's rights and duties in Portugal and the EU in the area of employment, as well as their opportunities. The results included increased empowerment of youth and youth organisations.

**Project funded by**

the Youth in Action national agency in Portugal

**Organisation:**

Conselho Nacional de Juventude, Portugal.

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## 4. What difference does politics make?

That was the subject discussed at Hansa high school in Stralsund (Germany) during a debate between pupils and politicians on 12 May 2009. The panel discussion was moderated by two school students, and involved politicians from the main parties active on the German political scene. Top of the agenda was the election to the European Parliament in June 2009; however, Turkey's application for EU membership was the most controversial topic.

The event was a part of a broad youth campaign, 'Euro wahl gang', financed by the Youth in Action programme — 100 young people, trained as moderators in communication and organisation techniques,

travelled across Germany to organise debates between pupils and politicians at schools. The campaign targeted 18-year-olds who were eligible to vote for the first time in 2009.

**Project funded by**

the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency in Brussels.

**Partner organisations:**

Kumulus e.V., Germany; Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence for European Integration, FU Berlin, Germany; Jugendpresse Deutschland e.V., Germany.

*The campaign targeted 18-year-olds who were eligible to vote for the first time in 2009*

## 4 TESTIMONIALS

*'The 1.5 hour discussion was very important for me. I found it interesting to see how the politicians interact with each other, especially politicians who represent very different opinions.'*

*It highlighted young people's desire to influence decision-making through better cooperation with local authorities*

## 5. Young Slovenes make plans for their future

A national youth event in Otočec (Slovenia) followed 10 preparatory regional debates organised in 2010, designed to promote structured dialogue between young people and policymakers, and to strengthen the working relationship between local, national and European authorities and young people at all levels. The national youth council of Slovenia steered and coordinated the project, with support from its member organisations and local youth councils, who prepared the regional debates and fed results from local to national level. A wide range of young people and a broad spectrum of youth organisations were represented at regional debates.

Seventy-five participants in a national youth event discussed issues ranging from creativity and innovation among young people to the meaning of European citizenship, social inclusion, and youth autonomy — and in particular creating opportunities for young people with fewer opportunities. They presented a resolution to senior national and European figures who took part in the proceedings. The 'Resolution for active, reactive and creative cooperation of

young people in creating the social reality' envisaged restructuring education so as to increase cooperation with youth organisations, and to encourage young people to become involved. It highlighted young people's desire to influence decision-making through better cooperation with local authorities and local youth councils and youth centres, ensuring better access to information.

Throughout the entire project — in preparing suggestions, debating, bringing in amendments, and voting — they simulated parliament procedures, and the decisions they adopted represented what they believed to be necessary to provide for young people to participate as partners in Slovenian society. The participants benefited from non-formal learning experience and gained a greater understanding of the social context within which they live. And at the national event, the EU in general and Youth in Action in particular were presented to the participants, and opportunities open to young people within the EU were explained.

**Project funded by**  
the Youth in Action national agency in Estonia

**Organisation:**  
Mladinski svet Slovenije, Slovenia.

## 5 TESTIMONIALS

*'I liked the simulation of the parliament. We were divided into four parliamentary groups and we had to present our common positions and defend our decisions. Each of us had the opportunity to express ourselves.'*

*'I learnt how difficult it is to find a compromise and present a joint opinion that would suit everyone. I also learnt that a group of people can work well together only if all members are willing to participate, can clearly express themselves, have good knowledge of the theme of discussion and good arguments, and are willing to make compromises.'*

*'This seminar really gave me the feeling that I can do something, that it is within my power to make a difference, to initiate a change — as a young person and as an individual.'*



*The project gave the young people involved a clearer view of what belonging to Europe means*

## 6. Schuman remembered

To mark the 60th anniversary of the Schuman declaration, more than 100 young people from France, Luxembourg and Poland came together in Luxembourg from 17 to 21 May 2010 to reflect on how the ideas that inspired Robert Schuman continue to influence the operation of the EU and its institutions. Using the digital ENa library and in a series of seminars and visits to the EU institutions, they looked in particular at the evolution of the Schengen area and the traditions of multicultural dialogue.

The project gave the young people involved a clearer view of what belonging to Europe means, and a sense of European citizenship. The focus was on the values of solidarity and respect between people that were at the heart of the construction of the EU, and that remain indispensable today.

**Project funded by**  
the Youth in Action national agency in Luxembourg

**Partner organisations:**  
CVCE (Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe), Luxembourg; Centre d'études et de recherche européennes Robert Schumann, Luxembourg; CIDEM, France; Fondation Robert Schuman, France; European Integration Club in the Complex of Schools in Wojkowice, Poland; the Polish Robert Schuman Foundation, Poland.



## 7. Debating climate change in Poland and Norway

Fifty-nine young people from Norway, Lithuania, Poland and the UK took part in international climate camps and meetings in Norway and Poland in 2009 and 2010. They discussed climate change with national politicians and prominent scientists, including the Norwegian Minister for the Environment, and for many of the young people this was the first time they had had the opportunity for exchanges at such a level. They presented climate projects from their home countries and exchanged experiences. They developed recommendations on issues such as the need for more cycle paths, more ecological public transport and public buildings, wider public education on environment-friendly behaviour, and the promotion of local produce. They were also involved in the development of the Klimapark2469 established in Norway in 2009, which has become an arena to show the history of climate, and to raise awareness of climate change. Here they learnt about climate

changes connected with meteorology or archaeology, and, in addition to workshops, they made trips to glaciers.

The project developed the knowledge that these young people had about climate change, and allowed them to build and take part in a network, as well as to communicate the knowledge they acquired. They learnt about local and global climate challenges, what each person can do to contribute to climate action, and how to influence the European debate on environment and climate. The project received media coverage and participants were interviewed on radio, and video films and photos taken during the climate camps were used in publicising the project.

**Project funded by**  
the Youth in Action national agency in Norway

**Partner organisations:**  
Oppland fylkeskommune- ungdommens fylkesting, Norway; Nasjonalparkriket Natur & Ungdom, Norway; Secretariat for Youth Affairs, western Pomerania, Poland; Rada Młodzieży Województwa Zachodniopomorskiego, Poland.

*They learnt about local and global climate challenges and how to influence the European debate on environment and climate*

### 7 TESTIMONIALS

*‘Now I know more about global warming and how to combat it. It was a very good lesson in communicating in other languages for both sides. We broke the ice and got to know each other better.’*

*‘I hope the project can grow and include more young people from the whole of Europe, and give youth a strong international voice, since this concerns our future.’*



## 8. Young migrants find their place in Utrecht and Lisbon

Eighteen young people who grew up in the poorest migrant outskirts of Lisbon and Utrecht had the opportunity to make their voices heard thanks to an innovative project called ‘Under construction’. They came together with experts in employment, youth organisations, trade unions and institutions and were able to state their views. The six-month project in 2008 and 2009 helped prepare each of them individually, in creating work which illustrated their lives and attitudes.

The participants first introduced themselves over the Internet, and told their own story about who they are, where they live and what their world looks like, using multimedia techniques. During the project

they were taught how to handle a camera and how to introduce music. They visited each others’ country to find out more about what being European means — and what Europe’s history means too, since both countries have a colonial past and now have a large number of immigrants, many of them disadvantaged. It made the young people involved more aware of their place in democratic life and in Europe. Project participants learnt that ‘Europe’ is not something abstract, which has nothing to do with them. It helped to position them in Europe, and to take responsibility in decision-making as citizens of a democratic Europe.

**Project funded by**  
the Youth in Action national agency in the Netherlands

**Partner organisations:**  
Stichting ZOEY, the Netherlands; HKU Utrecht-School of Music and Technology, the Netherlands; Junta de Freguesia do Lumiar, Spain.

*Project participants learnt that ‘Europe’ is not something abstract which has nothing to do with them*

### 8 TESTIMONIALS

*‘Two of the Dutch participants entered a television talent show and performed the song they wrote during the project.’*

*‘When they were making short video clips, you could see them becoming more self-confident. The youth workers said that the most insecure young people were now blooming, and that the other group members became friendlier.’*

*‘Two of the Dutch participants were very enthusiastic and said how glad they were to have been part of the project and how much they had learnt from what they did and who they met. One year after the meeting, they are still in contact with the friends they made in Portugal.’*

*The young people involved became more aware of democratic mechanisms and better equipped to pose questions on issues relating to their everyday lives and their future*

## 9. Learning how democracy works in Hungary and Romania

The 'Voice of youth' was a 14-month project that took place in 2010 and 2011 in Debrecen (Hungary) with 20 young people from Hungary and Romania, helping them to understand and influence public life. It allowed young people not only to find their voice, but also to deliver their message. Using non-formal learning methods, the participants worked in seminars on issues ranging from the way that municipalities work to the influence of media on consumption. They attended the sittings of city councils, and organised discussions, consultations and interviews with decision-makers, advisors, public actors and journalists. They also attended committee meetings of youth organisations to experience how the negotiations are conducted and lower-level decisions made, and how these feed into higher-level policymaking.

They also developed democratic skills in a camp, holding workshops on public speaking to a range of target groups, conducting team-building activities, and preparing for participation in a youth festival. There they operated an 'I have opinion!' democracy tent offering games on the theme of democracy to involve more youngsters, and on-stage activities where more than 500 young people could share their opinions on aspects of youth policy and the audi-



ence could vote. They also ran an information desk to inform visitors to the festival about their rights and the scope of the Youth in Action programme. The participants prepared several films on the activities of the project, and transmitted the results through their own youth channels to their peers and through classic media channels, such as press releases and TV interviews, to a wider audience, including local inhabitants.

The project strengthened active participation in public life among young people, and increased their social consciousness and capacity to shape opinions. The young people involved became more aware of democratic mechanisms and better equipped to pose questions on issues relating to their everyday lives and their future. The activities were subsequently adopted by local high school youth councils and were carried out by pupils. Student unions and NGOs also used the non-formal methods of the

project to strengthen public commitment and active participation among young people.

**Project funded by**  
the Youth in Action national agency in Hungary

**Partner organisations:**  
Hang-Kép Kulturális Egyesület, Hungary; Hajdúsági Hallgatókért és Civilekért Egyesület, Hungary; Asociația Pentru Tinerii și Studenții din Partium (PIHE), Romania; Uniunea Studenților Maghiari din județul Bihor, Romania.

*The result was that these deaf young people could speak for themselves in a unique and powerful voice*

## 10. New confidence in speaking their mind

Better integration of young people with hearing and speaking difficulties was the central theme of this project. It helped 40 youngsters from Poland and Romania to demonstrate the range of their abilities and talents, and to show that youngsters should be more involved in their local communities, despite their disabilities. It used the photovoice methodology to make their silent voices loud and public, so that the young people could more easily express their needs and ideas, discuss their problems, and seek solutions to them.

After relevant training at home, the young people involved in the project met in Bucharest for a four-day workshop, where they were helped to create short films to express their problems and opinions

and prepare for public attention. A touring exhibition showed the best results in Bucharest, Craiova, Cluj and Warsaw. The result was that these young people, many from inner-city or remote rural areas where unemployment and poverty are widespread, and who were often socially excluded, could speak for themselves with a unique and powerful voice, delivering a clear message that they wanted to be part of their local communities. They increased their self-confidence, gained experience in team work, developed their communication skills, and increased their independence, creativity and critical thinking skills.

**Project funded by**  
the Youth in Action national agency in Romania

**Partner organisations:**  
Asociația Euroarte, Romania; Asociația Vasiliada, Romania; Informal group: Polish Intercultural Group, Poland; Informal group: Silent Voices, Poland.

## 10 TESTIMONIALS



‘We want to show that these young people exist among us and, moreover, that they’re great people who need to be integrated.’

‘This project reached its goal, to prove to the world that we are capable of doing lots of good things, and we are proud of it.’

‘This project was one of the most beautiful experiences of my life. I learnt about photography and about teamwork, and I had the pleasure of discovery. It’s wonderful when you have good and patient trainers.’

Youth Democracy is part of the Youth in Action programme of the European Union

Youth Exchanges

Youth Initiatives

Youth Democracy

Youth Volunteering

Youth Support

# Youth in Action

## mobilising the potential of young Europeans

Youth in Action is the European Union programme that has helped young people since 2007, through non-formal learning and wider mobility, to boost their skills as well as giving them new opportunities to develop their personal capacities. It is open to all young people, regardless of their educational, social and cultural backgrounds. It encourages intercultural dialogue and the inclusion of all young people, particularly those with fewer opportunities. It strengthens European values everywhere it operates — in the EU and in 140 countries beyond. It funds a wide variety of youth activities, including exchanges, initiatives, democracy projects, and a voluntary service. It also supports youth workers and civil society organisations through training and networking, and promotes European cooperation in the youth field.

### Noticeable results

Youth in Action has a global budget of EUR 885 million for the 2007–13 period, and by the end of 2010 it had fully used the EUR 549 million allocated so far. Its basic premise is that investment in young people is the best business case for the European Union and it is also the way to make a success of the European integration project. Over the four years 2007–10, more than 527 000 persons took part (390 000 young people and 137 000 youth workers); 61 000 project applications were submitted and 30 100 projects were approved for grants; and Youth in Action involved around 20 000 youth organisations, informal groups of young people, or public bodies every year as promoters of projects. The intense involvement of non-governmental organisations and social enterprises is a stimulating example for young people of what it means to be an active player in society, and many participants in projects later become involved themselves in social work.

The projects supported range widely across youth activities — everything from raising the profile of young people in the media and giving them more of a say, to organising environmental protection projects at local level, creating documentaries on social issues such as young people with HIV or exclusion of minorities, or helping inmates in young offenders' institutions to boost their own self-esteem and to make efforts themselves to integrate into their community and into wider society.

### A significant impact

Youth in Action has had a demonstrable impact on the hundreds of thousands of young people it has involved. The programme has enabled many of them to experience other countries first hand, thus developing a greater sense of openness and understanding of other cultures. And it has provided the young people who have taken part with new skills and confidence.

This is all the more important since for many of the projects, the participants are deliberately selected from communities and social groups with fewer opportunities. The whole programme has a strong social dimension. It makes specific provision for involving young people from disadvantaged groups (with disabilities, health problems, or social, economic or geographic obstacles, unemployed, with educational difficulties, such as early school leavers, or from different cultural backgrounds). The engagement of many different social groups is important in ensuring that the European integration project is not restricted only to elites in European society.

### Attractive learning

Youth in Action makes extensive use of non-formal learning, through attractive methods (such as workshops, interviews or simulations), and based on personal experience outside schools. This promotes individual-based teaching, with the emphasis on talents and strengths. Professional facilitators ensure the learning process is conducted mainly by young people themselves, through participation and peer learning. The non-formal learning experience that Youth in Action provides is recognised through a specific certificate called a Youthpass.

In the different environment offered by projects, young people discover their own potential and abilities, and exercise new levels of independence and decision-making. The experience boosts their personal development and widens their horizons, helping them make choices about their further personal and professional life. And they acquire competencies that are increasingly valuable in an evolving labour market ■

A survey in March 2011 among a representative sample of participants revealed that:

**91 %**

of young people considered participation increased their competences in foreign languages;

**75 %**

said they improved their abilities to identify opportunities for their personal or professional future;

**73 %**

declared they felt more European;

**92 %**

of youth workers considered they gained skills and knowledge they would not have otherwise acquired;

**73 %**

of youth organisations said they were doing more international projects.

### In addition

the 2010 survey showed that participants in the programme have a significantly higher voting record in European elections than their peers. For instance in 2009, **60 %** of participants voted, compared to an average of **29 %** for all young people across Europe.

**60 % / 29 %**

# Who can take part

## in Youth Democracy projects, and how do they work?

There are two types of project presented in this fact sheet: Youth Democracy projects; and meetings of young people and those active in the youth field (decision-makers, politicians, administration), mainly in implementing the structured dialogue.

Youth Democracy projects are aimed at people 13–30 years old. Applications can be made by non-profit/non-governmental organisations, local or regional public bodies, informal groups of young people, and European bodies active in the youth field.

Meetings of young people and those responsible for youth policy (either national or transnational) are for young people aged between 15 and 30. Applications can be made by non-profit/non-governmental organisations, local, regional or public bodies, or European bodies active in the youth field.

Participation is open to the 27 Member States of the European Union, as well as to Croatia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey (the programme countries). Projects can receive grants from national agencies in those countries or from the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency in Brussels.

### Youth Democracy in figures:

	2007	2008	2009	2010
Submitted projects	225	442	648	864
Funded projects	95	221	286	327
Successful grant applications (%)	42.2	50	44	37.8
Committed funds (million EUR)	2.451	6.117	7.912	9.077
Number of participants	13 252	22 172	24 655	32 134

Youth in Action: [http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.htm)



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