



YOUTH-ID

DIGITAL HANDBOOK FOR YOUTH WORKERS



Co-funded by
the European Union





Youth ID:

Building Youth capacities on Inclusive community Design through participatory
and intersectional training
Project 101244943



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INTRODUCTION



About the Youth ID Project

The **Youth ID** project was developed in response to a growing need to strengthen young people's participation in democratic life and community development across Europe. Co-funded by the **Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union**, the project brings together partner organisations committed to empowering young people and supporting youth workers with practical methods for inclusive participation, civic engagement, and collaborative community action.

Across Europe, young people are increasingly encouraged to contribute to shaping policies and services that affect their lives. However, meaningful participation remains uneven. Many young people still experience limited opportunities to influence decision-making processes, while others face additional barriers linked to discrimination, social exclusion, economic disadvantage, disability, migration status, or geographical isolation. These challenges are particularly evident in local governance, community planning, and civic participation: young people's perspectives are often underrepresented despite their valuable knowledge and lived experiences.



The Youth ID project seeks to address these gaps. How? By promoting participatory approaches that enable young people to become active contributors to their communities. Rather than treating participation as a one-off consultation exercise, the project promotes continuous engagement. It also recognises the crucial role of youth workers as facilitators who create safe, inclusive spaces where young people can develop confidence, acquire civic competences, and translate ideas into concrete community initiatives.

This handbook is one of the main outcomes of the project. It has been designed as a practical resource that transforms the project's experience, research, and methodologies into accessible guidance that can be applied in a wide variety of youth work settings.



Why Was This Handbook Developed?

The development of this handbook is based on three needs identified during the preparation of the Youth ID project.

1. Many young people continue to have limited influence over decisions that affect their daily lives. While opportunities for participation formally exist in many communities, these are often inaccessible, poorly communicated, or insufficiently inclusive. Young people may lack information about democratic processes, feel that their opinions are not valued, or have few opportunities to develop the confidence and skills necessary to participate effectively.

2. Participation opportunities are not experienced equally by all young people. Those living in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods, rural communities, or socially excluded environments often encounter additional structural barriers. Young people with migrant or refugee backgrounds may experience linguistic, cultural, or administrative obstacles, while Roma youth frequently face discrimination and unequal access to educational and civic opportunities. These intersecting barriers reduce opportunities for meaningful engagement and risk excluding valuable perspectives from community decision-making.

3. Many youth organisations—particularly small, local organisations—operate with limited financial resources, small staff teams, and restricted access to specialised training. As a result, youth workers often require practical, adaptable methods that can be implemented without expensive equipment or extensive technical expertise.



The Youth ID project responds to these needs by providing **practical tools that are inclusive, flexible, and accessible**. The approaches presented throughout this handbook are designed to work in different cultural and organisational contexts and can be adapted to both formal and non-formal education settings.

Who Is This Handbook For?

This handbook has been developed primarily for youth workers, youth educators, facilitators, trainers, community practitioners, and organisations that support young people's participation and civic engagement.

Its methods and activities are intended to benefit all young people, with particular attention given to groups that often experience barriers to participation, including:

- young people living in disadvantaged urban areas;
- young people from rural and remote communities;
- migrants, refugees, and young people with migrant backgrounds;
- Roma youth;
- young people facing social, economic, educational, or cultural disadvantage.

Although youth workers are the primary users of this handbook, its tools have been designed to place young people at the centre of every activity. The methods encourage participants to identify local challenges, work collaboratively, contribute to decision-making processes, and develop solutions that respond to the realities of their own communities.

How to Use This Handbook

The handbook combines practical guidance with adaptable methodologies that can be used independently or as part of longer learning programmes. Each section introduces key concepts and activities, facilitation techniques, examples, and reflection questions that support practical implementation.

Readers are encouraged to adapt the materials according to their organisational capacity, participant profile, and local context. There is no requirement to follow the chapters sequentially: organisations may select the sections most relevant to their current needs while returning to others as their experience develops.

Special attention has been given to the realities faced by smaller organisations with limited resources. The emphasis is on participation rather than technology, ensuring that meaningful youth engagement remains achievable regardless of organisational size or budget.

Competences Supported by the Handbook

The handbook contributes to the development of a range of professional and civic competences aligned with the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) framework. These include (but are not limited to):

- communication, collaboration and creativity aimed at youths
- planning youth programmes
- applying civic skills for social innovation
- integrating of community outreach
- promoting inclusion
- facilitating participatory decision-making

These competences support both youth workers' professional practice and young people's development as active, engaged citizens capable of contributing positively to their communities.

Why Participatory and Inclusive Design Matters

The approaches presented throughout this handbook are based on the understanding that the most sustainable solutions emerge when people are actively involved in shaping them. Participatory design encourages young people to move beyond consultation. For this, they need to become genuine partners in identifying challenges, generating ideas, making decisions, and implementing change. In youth work, this strengthens democratic participation and increases young people's sense of ownership, confidence, and responsibility.

Equally important is ensuring that participation is genuinely inclusive. Meaningful participation requires more than bringing young people into the same room. It consists in creating environments where different experiences are respected, barriers are recognised, and every voice has an opportunity to influence outcomes.

The chapters that follow build on these principles by combining European values, participatory methodologies, inclusive practices, collaborative planning tools, and transnational peer learning into a practical resource for everyday youth work. Together, they aim to support youth workers in creating opportunities for young people to participate actively in democratic life, contribute to their communities, and become confident agents of positive social change.



SECTION 1

Core EU Values and Democratic Engagement

1.1 Brief history and essence of EU values

Europe's shared values did not emerge by accident — they were built in direct response to catastrophe. The devastation of two World Wars in the 20th century demonstrated that nationalism, authoritarianism, and the systematic erosion of human rights could lead to unprecedented human suffering. In the aftermath, European nations made a deliberate collective choice to construct a new political order grounded in cooperation, peace, and shared principles. As some researchers argue, the post-war European project was fundamentally a response to the failure of nation-states to protect the dignity and rights of their own citizens.

The founding steps were modest but deliberate. The 1951 Treaty of Paris established the European Coal and Steel Community among six nations, while the 1957 Treaty of Rome created the European Economic Community — an economic partnership designed to make war between member states not only unthinkable but materially impossible. What began as a pragmatic economic arrangement slowly grew into a political union grounded in common values. By 1993, the Maastricht Treaty formally established the European Union and introduced the concept of EU citizenship, meaning every national of a member state simultaneously became a citizen of Europe — with rights and responsibilities that crossed national borders.

Today, the EU's foundational values are enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), which states:

"The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail."

These are not aspirational declarations. They are legally binding across EU law and institutional practice — and they are the foundation that makes a project like Youth-ID possible through the Erasmus+ programme.



1.2 What defines civic awareness?

Civic awareness can be summarized as the knowledge and understanding of how society and government work, and of how individuals can take action and shape their communities. More specifically, we find three components of civic awareness:

1. **Knowing your rights and responsibilities** — understanding what you are entitled to (e.g., freedom of expression, access to education, the right to vote) and what you owe your community in return (e.g., respecting others' rights, participating in collective decisions).
2. **Understanding how decisions affect your daily life** — recognising that policies made at the local council, national parliament, or EU level have real consequences on your neighbourhood, school, housing, and public spaces.
3. **Feeling motivated and capable of acting** — not just knowing that participation is possible, but believing that your voice counts and that showing up makes a difference.

Research consistently confirms that civic awareness and democratic participation are deeply linked: young people who understand how political systems work are significantly more likely to engage in civic life, from voting to activism to community planning. A 2023 European Parliament study found that 46% of young Europeans had voted in the last local, national or European elections, while larger shares engaged in other forms of civic action — from signing petitions (35%) to joining youth organisations (14%).

For young people aged 16–30, civic awareness often starts not with grand political ideas, but with **concrete felt experiences**: Why is there no youth centre in my neighbourhood? Why does the bus not run on Sunday? Who decided that? The Council of Europe and European Commission both affirm that inclusive participatory experiences — especially those involving political processes — strengthen young people's affinity for democratic culture. As a youth worker, your role is to help young people connect these everyday frustrations to the larger systems — local governance, EU policy, civic rights — that shape them. **When young people can name the system, they can begin to change it.**

1.3 Why this matters for you — Translating EU values into daily realities

EU values can sound abstract — "democracy", "solidarity", "human rights" — until you see them operating in your own street. The table below shows how each foundational EU value manifests in everyday youth work settings and local life.

EU Value	What it looks like in daily life
Democracy	A school council where students vote on rules; a youth budget process where young people decide how community funds are allocated
Human rights	A young refugee's right to education and housing; freedom from discrimination in employment
Equality	Ensuring a youth club is accessible to disabled young people; making sure Roma youth are represented in local decision-making
Solidarity	Neighbours organising support for a family in crisis; youth organisations campaigning together across borders
Rule of law	A young person knowing they can challenge an unjust administrative decision through a formal complaint process
Human dignity	Treating every participant in your group with equal respect, regardless of background, education level, or language



REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES

1. Youth Participatory Budgeting in Strasbourg

In Strasbourg — ALDA's home city — the municipality has implemented participatory budgeting as part of its Pact for Democracy, allowing residents to propose and vote on urban improvement projects using part of the city's annual budget. Citizens, without age restriction, can submit proposals either through an online platform or in person; feasibility is assessed by a mixed group of citizens, administrators, and elected representatives. This is a direct, tangible application of democratic EU values at the local level. For the Budget Participatif Call of 2025, 16 projects were selected, most of them related to improving or revitalizing green spaces for the community. 2 million euros were allocated to be distributed among these winning projects located in neighborhoods across the city.

Youth participatory budgeting more broadly has been shown to strengthen young people's participation within formal decision-making spaces, expand their opportunities to exercise citizenship rights, and build their political confidence. When young people propose a project, see it evaluated, and watch it get funded, they experience democracy not as an abstract ideal but as a lived reality.

2. National Youth Participatory Budgeting in Portugal

Portugal became the first country in the world to implement Youth Participatory Budgeting (YPB) at national scale, approved by the Council of Ministers in 2017. Young people aged 14 to 30 across the country can submit ideas for investment projects in their communities through an online platform, deliberate collectively, and vote on which projects receive public funding. During the first two editions alone, over 800 project proposals were submitted, 40 participatory meetings were organised, and more than 15,000 young people from 142 municipalities participated either as project designers or as voters. The process was explicitly designed to develop young people's creativity, communication, negotiation, and teamwork skills in a practical, real-stakes environment — not as a simulation, but as actual public decision-making.

What youth workers can take from this: This example shows how youth participation can be institutionalised at scale without losing its grassroots character. Even at local level, connecting youth work to formal decision-making processes — however small the budget — builds genuine democratic competence.

3. Fridays for Future — Youth Climate Advocacy Across Europe

Starting in 2018 with Greta Thunberg's school strike in Sweden, Fridays for Future (FFF) grew into a continent-wide and global youth-led movement demanding political action on climate change. What makes it particularly relevant for youth workers is not only its scale, but its democratic impact. A 2024 study published in *Nature Human Behaviour* found that in Germany, higher levels of youth participation in FFF protests were directly linked to increased Green Party vote shares in those counties — driven by three measurable mechanisms: young people transmitting environmental awareness to their parents, increased social media activity by politicians, and greater local media coverage of climate issues. Young people, many of them below voting age, shifted political behaviour without casting a single ballot — through presence, voice, and collective action.

What youth workers can take from this: Democratic participation is not limited to elections or formal bodies. Supporting young people to organise, communicate, and advocate on issues they care about is itself a form of civic education with documented real-world impact.

REFLECTION PROMPTS FOR YOUTH WORKERS:



- *In your own work, when have young people felt that their voice didn't matter? What got in the way?*
- *What is one local decision coming up in the next six months where young people could meaningfully contribute?*

1.4 Quick tools to build civic awareness

Civic awareness does not develop automatically — it needs to be actively stimulated, especially among young people who may have had little exposure to democratic processes or who feel that public decisions are "not for them." This subsection presents a selection of short, accessible activities that youth workers can use to spark curiosity, open up conversation, and build a basic understanding of rights, responsibilities, and participation. Activities 1 to 4 below are retrieved directly from the EUth Compass E-Toolkit, a freely available methodological guide developed by five European NGOs through an Erasmus+ project, which compiles tested tools for civic education and democratic engagement with young people. Activity 5 is drawn from the Council of Europe's Compass manual for human rights education.



ACTIVITY 1: WHAT AND WHY — DEMOCRACY?

VALUE ADDRESSED

Understanding democracy and democratic EU values; building a positive perception of democracy.

DESCRIPTION

Description: The aim of this activity is to inform young people about democracy and democratic EU values and make them aware of their importance in today's world. The activity enables participants to challenge their knowledge about democracy and gain a positive perception of it. The youth worker prepares a Mentimeter presentation in advance using the questions provided in the toolkit, or creates new ones depending on the age of participants. Participants are invited to scan a QR code leading to Mentimeter or a similar quiz application. The youth worker then reads a story aloud: each paragraph has a corresponding question on Mentimeter to be answered by participants. After reading each paragraph, the youth worker gives participants time to answer, evaluates the responses, and provides the correct answer. The story must be informative rather than judgemental. At the end, participants are asked to individually evaluate their democracy knowledge and are encouraged to get involved in democratic actions.

TIPS FROM PRACTICE

It is highly recommended to keep Mentimeter open without showing participants the ongoing results, revealing only the final results of each question. This way participants will not answer based on the majority's answers, providing more accurate and authentic responses.

GROUP SIZE

10+ | Age: 16+ | Time: Around 20 minutes | Materials: Mentimeter or similar quiz application, a device enabling presentation, participants' mobile phones | Setting: Indoors

ACTIVITY 2: LINE OF THOUGHT

VALUE ADDRESSED

Freedom of expression; argumentation; tolerance and respect across different opinions

DESCRIPTION

While listening to controversial statements being read aloud, participants position themselves as agreeing, disagreeing, or having a neutral opinion about the given statement. After positioning themselves, the youth worker asks participants to provide arguments for their position. A debate between opposite sides unfolds as the youth worker gives space to people who want to speak. The activity promotes and builds skills such as listening, argumentation, tolerance, respect, and understanding. It helps build bridges between different opinions and find cohesive solutions. The space is divided into three parts; the youth worker reads a statement, participants move to their chosen position, and the youth worker then monitors that participants are listened to and respected and that the conversation flows smoothly without discrimination. Each statement should be discussed for no longer than 5 minutes.

Sample statements used in practice:

- *The media is very biased and cannot be trusted as a source of true information.*
- *People should be able to share any information online, even if it's false.*
- *Immigrants enrich societies with diversity and innovation.*
- *Freedom of speech should be restricted for those who promote anti-democratic values.*

TIPS FROM PRACTICE

The activity is simple to moderate, but statements tend to be controversial, which can lead to long and heated discussions. It is highly recommended that the youth worker conclude each discussion in a peaceful way, trying to negotiate and find a compromise.

GROUP SIZE

20+ | Age: 16+ | Time: 30–45 minutes | Materials: A large space with enough room for participants to stand and move easily | Setting: Indoors or outdoors, formal or non-formal

ACTIVITY 3: VIDEO VOICE

SOURCE

Agora Central Europe
(Czech Republic)
Theme: Civic
Participation / Digital
Skills

VALUE ADDRESSED

Active citizenship;
freedom of
expression; youth
voice in public
discourse

DESCRIPTION

Recording short videos is a natural activity for young people. Video Voice is a method designed to motivate young people to reflect on the issues they perceive around them — topics that interest and concern them but are not represented in public discourse. They develop their ideas into short videos that can serve as messages to politicians, school management, peers, or other decision-makers. Participants are divided into groups of 4–5 people and given a worksheet as a guide to help them reflect on topics that interest them (the worksheet does not have to be filled out). Each group records a video of a recommended length of 60–90 seconds, though this is not a strict requirement. Videos can take any format: a sketch, a discussion, an interview, or illustrations using paper and markers. Preparation, filming, and editing require at least 60 minutes. At the end, videos can be watched together if all participants and creators agree. A debrief circle follows where groups reflect on their experience and potential next steps.

TIPS FROM PRACTICE

The activity is also suitable for more passive participants who do not like to speak publicly. The youth worker should not limit participants too much or give too many instructions — participants are typically highly creative and self-directed. Ensure a safe space is established beforehand, and agree on the rules for publishing videos before the session begins.

GROUP SIZE

Unlimited (groups of 4–5) | Age: 13–20 | Time: 2 hours | Materials: Mobile phones, large sheets of paper, coloured markers | Setting: Indoors, outdoors, or a combination of both

ACTIVITY 4: SAFE SPACE BUILDING

VALUE ADDRESSED

Mutual respect; non-discrimination; the preconditions for genuine democratic participation

DESCRIPTION

A non-formal activity for a group of people to get to know each other and promote mutual respect and prevention of discriminatory behaviours before starting to work on joint activities. The activity has two steps. In Step 1, participants walk around the space. When the stop signal is called, they form small groups of 3 or 4. Each member says their name, where they are from, one thing they like to do, and one thing they want to say about themselves. Each sharing moment lasts 5 minutes and is repeated 3 times, with participants meeting different people each time. In Step 2, participants work in small groups to brainstorm answers to the prompt: "What does it take to create our own safe space?" Groups create a "Safe Wall" where all the key words and phrases are written, or together formulate the rules of the event to ensure a safe space. For more advanced participants, the prompt "How do I create a safe place?" can be used to encourage everyone to share how they personally behave to help create a safe environment.

TIPS FROM PRACTICE

The activity can spark some discussion — it is important to handle this without taking up too much time. The prevention potential of the activity is based on the participants' willingness to share their fears, vulnerabilities, or needs, so that the rest of the group becomes aware of topics or behaviours that may affect another member.

GROUP SIZE

9–50 | Age: 14+ | Time: 30 minutes | Materials: Billboards, coloured markers | Setting: Indoors or outdoors, in a spacious environment with nothing obstructing participants' free movement.

ACTIVITY 5: COMPASS — HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

VALUE ADDRESSED	DESCRIPTION
Human rights, dignity, equality, and democratic values	Compass is the Council of Europe's flagship manual for human rights education with young people. It contains over 60 fully documented activities covering a wide range of human rights themes — from discrimination and poverty to democracy and digital rights. Activities range from 45-minute discussions to multi-session projects, and are designed for use by youth workers with no prior specialist knowledge. The manual includes guidance on facilitation, debriefing, and adapting activities for different group needs. It is available in multiple languages and free to download.
GROUP SIZE	
Varies by activity Age: 13–25+ Time: 45 minutes to several hours depending on activity Materials: Vary by activity Setting: Indoors or outdoor.	



SECTION 1 — KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR YOUTH WORKERS

Before moving to Section 2, make sure the young people you work with can answer these three questions:

1. What are the core EU values, and where do I see them (or not) in my daily life?
2. What does it mean to be a civic actor — not just a citizen on paper?
3. What is one thing in my community I want to change, and who has the power to help me change it?

If they can answer these, they are ready to move from civic awareness into participatory design.



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SECTION 2

Participatory Design in Community Planning

2.1 Introduction to Participatory Design

Participatory design is a collaborative approach that actively involves the people who will be affected by a decision — residents, young people, community members — in the process of shaping the solutions that will impact their lives. The core idea is simple: the people who will live with a decision should be part of making it — from the beginning, not as an afterthought. Or in other words, the people most affected by a decision should have a hand in making it.

That difference — between being consulted and being genuinely involved — turns out to matter a lot in practice. When communities shape their own solutions, those solutions tend to actually get used. Participatory planning goes further than showing people a finished plan and asking for comments. It means sitting with communities while ideas are still rough, listening to what matters to them, and building decisions on that knowledge — together. Projects fail not because of bad intentions, but because the people designing the solution didn't actually understand the problem they were solving. As a youth worker, your role is to make sure that doesn't happen in the community initiatives you support.

The roots of participatory design stretch back to the 1960s, when growing dissatisfaction with top-down urban planning pushed a broader movement for community voice in decision-making. In Scandinavia during the 1970s, workers' rights movements pushed for people to be involved in designing their own environments — a principle that gradually expanded into urban planning, social innovation, and community development. Decades of practice across Europe have shown that this approach produces solutions communities actually use — because they helped build them. When applied to youth work, it transforms young people from being consulted — at best — to being active co-designers of the spaces, policies, and communities they inhabit.

Young people are routinely the last to be consulted about things that affect them most directly — how their school is organised, whether their neighbourhood has anywhere to go after dark, what public transport actually runs near them. This section is about giving youth workers the tools to change that dynamic.

2.2 Levels of Participation: Know Where You Stand

Before choosing methods, it is important to understand that not all participatory processes are equal. Four distinct levels of participation can be identified, ranging from minimal to substantial involvement. Knowing where your activity sits on this spectrum will help you set honest expectations with your group — and push for deeper engagement whenever possible.

Level	What it means	Example in youth work
Informing	Information is shared through a one-way channel; young people receive it passively	Posting meeting notes on a youth group's social media page
Consulting	Young people are asked for opinions through surveys or discussions; input may influence certain decisions but final authority rests elsewhere	Running a survey about a local park renovation
Involving	Young people actively participate in workshops and collaborative sessions; their ideas are incorporated and shape specific aspects of the project	Co-creation workshops where youth propose and refine community project ideas
Empowering	Young people are partners at every stage, from conceptualisation to implementation; they share both responsibility and decision-making authority	Youth groups leading a participatory budgeting process with the local municipality

The goal of Youth-ID is to move youth engagement consistently towards the involving and empowering levels. Empowered young people are not just participants — they are partners, co-creating outcomes and taking on genuine responsibility for the direction of the work. Getting there requires deliberate choices at every stage. And it requires telling participants honestly, upfront, how much power they actually have in the process — because if they find out later that the decision was already made, they will not come back.

2.3 Step-by-Step Process

The participatory design process doesn't begin with a solution waiting to be approved. It begins with a question — and with giving people the time and space to answer it honestly. Trust has to come before tools, and listening before planning.

This section presents a practical, six-stage process adapted from two tested frameworks: the Participatory Design Handbook developed by CoDesign Studio, a community-focused guide used in neighbourhood improvement and social inclusion projects; and the Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) framework, which places young people at the centre of identifying problems in their communities and taking concrete action to address them. Both frameworks share a core principle: communities are experts in their own environments, and no solution will be durable unless the people who will live with it are involved in shaping it from the start.

The process described here is deliberately non-linear. Youth workers should expect to loop back between stages — particularly between research, ideation, and prototyping — as new insights emerge. The goal at every stage is not perfection but genuine engagement: ensuring that young people and community members drive the direction, not just respond to it.

STAGE 1: PREPARE — BUILD RELATIONSHIPS BEFORE BUILDING SOLUTIONS

Prior to any activity, time must be invested in relationship-building, background research, and planning. In practice, most facilitators either skip it entirely or compress it into the first ten minutes of a workshop. That is usually where problems start.

Before any activity or workshop begins, time must be invested in relationship-building, background research, and planning. In practice, most facilitators either skip it entirely or compress it into the first ten minutes of a workshop. That is usually where problems start.

The youth worker should:

- Research the context: What is already known about the community? What challenges have been identified before? What attempts have been made to address them, and what happened?
- Map stakeholders: Who are the people most affected by the issue? Who has influence over it? Who is likely to cooperate — and who might resist change? (See also Section 2.5 on stakeholder mapping tools.)
- Build trust: Young people quickly notice if you are going through the motions. Show up consistently, follow through on what you say, and treat what they know as real knowledge — not just 'youth input'.
- Set clear expectations: Be transparent from the start about what the process will and will not be able to change. If young people take time to share ideas and nothing visibly changes, they won't come back — and they'll tell their peers not to bother either.

Practical tip: Hold one or two informal "getting to know the community" sessions before any structured workshop. A shared meal, a neighbourhood walk, or an open informal conversation can reveal more about a community's real needs than a formal needs assessment.

STAGE 2: IDENTIFY — DEFINE THE PROBLEM TOGETHER

One of the most common mistakes in community work is arriving with the problem already defined. The youth worker's job at this stage is to ask, not to tell. Young people are best positioned to identify what matters most to them, because they experience their community's challenges directly and daily.

In practice, this stage involves:

- Asking open questions in small group or one-to-one conversations: "What is the biggest challenge in your neighbourhood?" or "What is one thing you wish were different about your daily life here?"
- Collecting responses without filtering or evaluating them — at this stage, all answers are valid.
- Bringing findings back to the group and working together to identify patterns and priorities.
- Arriving at a shared problem statement — one sentence that captures the core issue the group will focus on, framed in a way that is specific enough to act on but open enough to allow creative solutions.

Example problem statement: *"Young people in this neighbourhood have nowhere safe and welcoming to spend time after school."*

Important note:

Avoid embedding a solution inside the problem statement. "We need a new youth centre" is a solution, not a problem definition. Keeping the statement open ensures the group can explore a genuine range of responses.

STAGE 3: RESEARCH — UNDERSTAND THE ISSUE IN DEPTH

Once a shared problem has been identified, the group investigates it more deeply before generating solutions. This is where young people stop being informants and become researchers. The YPAR framework is built on the idea that young people are capable of rigorously investigating their own communities — and that the findings are richer because of it.

Research methods that work well with youth groups include:

- Interviews with community members, local officials, shopkeepers, or neighbours
- Community mapping — participants draw or annotate maps of their neighbourhood, marking places they feel safe or unsafe, places they like or avoid, resources they use, and gaps they notice
- Photo documentation — participants photograph places, situations, or moments that illustrate the problem
- Focus groups — structured conversations in small groups around a specific question
- Observation — participants spend time in a specific location and record what they notice

The data collected should always be brought back to the group for shared analysis: *"What patterns do we see? What surprised us? What does this tell us about the real causes of the problem?"*

Low-tech adaptation: Community mapping can be done on a large sheet of paper with coloured pens. Photo documentation can use any mobile phone. Interviews can be conducted in any language and transcribed by hand. The quality of the research depends on the quality of the questions and the honesty of the conversations — not on the tools used.



STAGE 4: IDEATE — GENERATE SOLUTIONS WITHOUT JUDGEMENT

With a deep understanding of the problem and its causes, the group is now ready to generate ideas for solutions. This stage should be explicitly creative and judgement-free: the goal is quantity and diversity of ideas, not immediate quality. Filtering comes later.

Effective approaches for this stage include:

- Brainstorming rounds — each participant writes or draws ideas independently before sharing with the group, to prevent early ideas from dominating
- "How Might We...?" questions — reframing the problem as an open invitation: "How might we make the area around the school feel safer for young women after dark?"
- Inspiration from elsewhere — reviewing examples of how other communities have addressed similar problems (see the real-life examples in Section 1.3)
- Dot voting — after ideas are shared, participants place a limited number of sticky dots on the ideas they find most promising, producing a quick visual prioritisation without formal debate

Facilitation tip:

If the group jumps too quickly to one idea, use the question "What else might work?" at least three times before moving on. The most innovative solutions are rarely the first ones named.

STAGE 5: PROTOTYPE — MAKE IDEAS TANGIBLE

A prototype is a simple, rough representation of a proposed solution — enough to make an idea concrete and to invite feedback, but not so finished that it feels closed to modification. Prototypes in community settings can take many forms:

- A hand-drawn sketch of a redesigned public space
- A cardboard model of a community facility
- A written description of a new service or programme
- A storyboard showing how a proposed process would work step by step
- A short role-play or improvised scenario

When evaluating whether a prototype is ready to test, three questions are useful:

- Does this make sense to the people it is designed for?
- Is it realistic — could it actually be implemented in this context?
- Could it be achieved within a reasonable timeframe and budget?

Important principle:

A prototype that is rejected or significantly changed after testing is not a failure — it is a success. The purpose of prototyping is precisely to learn what does not work before investing significant time and resources.

STAGE 6: TEST, ACT, AND SHARE BACK

The final stage moves from ideas into action — and from action back into communication. The group presents its prototype or proposed solution to a wider audience: other youth, community members, or local decision-makers. Feedback is gathered, the solution is refined, and a plan for implementation or advocacy is developed.

This step is where many processes quietly fall apart. The youth worker presents findings to the municipality, ticks the box, and moves on. The young people who spent three sessions mapping their neighbourhood never hear anything again. Participants who gave their time and ideas deserve to know what happened with their input. This is both an ethical responsibility and a practical one: it builds the trust needed for future participation.

The action step can take many forms depending on the context:

- A community presentation or exhibition
- A proposal submitted to a local council or school board
- A peer-to-peer campaign or awareness initiative
- A physical intervention in a public space
- The launch of a youth-led service or activity

THE 6-STAGE PROCESS AT A GLANCE

Stage	Core Question	Main Activities	Approximate Time
1. Prepare	Who are we working with and what do we need to know?	Background research, stakeholder mapping, trust-building	Ongoing before launch
2. Identify	What is the real problem, in the community's own words?	Listening sessions, open conversations, problem statement	1–2 sessions
3. Research	What do we actually know about this problem?	Interviews, community mapping, photo documentation	2–4 sessions
4. Ideate	What could we do about it?	Brainstorming, "How Might We?", dot voting	1–2 sessions
5. Prototype	What would our solution look like?	Sketches, models, storyboards, role-play	1–2 sessions
6. Test, Act & Share Back	Does it work? Who needs to know?	Presentations, feedback sessions, advocacy, dissemination	Ongoing

2.4 Practical Tips for Facilitation and Handling Challenges

Things go wrong in participatory processes, even well-planned ones. The most common issues are promising more than you can deliver, ending up with the same voices every time, and losing participants between sessions because they heard nothing after the last one. The table below outlines the most frequent facilitation challenges in youth settings and practical responses.

Challenge	Why it happens	What to do
Silence / low participation	Participants feel unsafe or unsure what is expected	Use an icebreaker; establish ground rules together; allow anonymous sticky-note input before open discussion
One or two voices dominating	Power imbalances; unclear meeting objectives	Use speaking tokens or structured turns; split into pairs or small groups; invite quieter participants directly and warmly
Conflict or strong disagreement	Genuine differences in values or interests; lack of skilled facilitation	Name the disagreement without judgement; use the Start-Stop-Continue method; consider bringing in a neutral facilitator
Off-topic tangents	High energy or unmet needs surfacing	Use a visible "parking lot" on the wall for tangents; redirect with open questions
Disengagement between sessions	Lack of communication; no feedback on previous input	Send reminders within days of each session; share news, photos, and updates to sustain engagement
Language or literacy barriers	Multilingual groups or low literacy	Use visuals, drawing, and physical tools instead of text-heavy tasks; allow contributions in multiple languages

Group size and session structure

Groups of 4–6 tend to work better than larger ones in workshop settings — there is less room to hide, and quieter participants are more likely to contribute. Bring groups together in plenary after each working phase rather than at the very end. For full participatory design processes, spread the six stages across two or three separate sessions rather than rushing everything into one day. For intensive full-day events, plan at least 4 to 8 hours with structured breaks built in.



2.5 Participatory Methods to Use with Your Youth Groups

The following methods have each been tested across different European community engagement contexts and are well-suited to youth work settings. They are presented in order of complexity, from structured dialogue to full co-creation.

METHOD 1: OPERA

DESCRIPTION

OPERA addresses one of the most persistent problems in group work: the meeting where three people speak and twenty listen. The method is built to make that impossible.

It works by structuring the conversation so that individual thinking always comes before group discussion. Each participant first writes their ideas alone, in silence. Only then do they share — first in a pair, then to the room. By the time someone's idea reaches the wider group, it has already been tested and refined through one conversation. No one arrives at the plenary empty-handed.

THE SIX STEPS

1. The facilitator presents an open question to the group.
2. Each participant writes individual responses on sticky notes — 3 to 5 minutes, no talking.
3. Participants pair up and discuss their notes for 5 to 10 minutes, arriving at a joint proposal which they post on the OPERA board.
4. Each pair presents their proposal briefly — 1 to 2 minutes. Others listen; no responses yet.
5. All pairs rank the proposals on the board using sticker dots.
6. The facilitator rearranges the board, clustering similar ideas and bringing the highest-ranked proposals to the top, based on the group's instructions.

GROUP SIZE

5–50 | Time: 60–90 minutes | Materials: Post-its, markers, voting dots, a large wall surface

ONE THING TO WATCH

Pairs sometimes converge too quickly, dropping one person's idea to avoid conflict. Encourage pairs to post both ideas separately if they genuinely differ — the ranking stage will sort it out.



METHOD 2: NEWSPAPER OF TOMORROW

DESCRIPTION

Ask a group to agree on a shared vision and they will often talk in circles. Ask them to write the front page of a newspaper from five years in the future — one where the problem they are working on has been solved — and something different tends to happen.

The method works because it sidesteps the usual argument about whether a goal is realistic. Nobody is claiming this headline is true. They are imagining it — and in doing so, they often articulate aspirations they would have been too cautious to say directly.

HOW IT RUNS

Participants start by individually answering a few prompt questions about the topic on sticky notes. These are shared and discussed briefly in the group, surfacing the key themes. Each small group then writes one front-page headline — bold, present tense, as if the change has already happened — adds a short article beneath it, pulls in a quote or two from the sticky note discussion, and presents it to the room.

GROUP SIZE

Groups of 4–5 work well. The whole activity takes between one and three hours depending on how much discussion time is allowed. The only materials needed are paper, markers, and sticky notes — or a blank newspaper template if working online.

TIP

It runs well as an opening activity before more analytical work, or at the end of a process when a group needs to articulate what they are working towards.

METHOD 3: MOVING DEBATE

DESCRIPTION

A structured discussion method where participants vote with their feet. Two posters on opposite walls represent opposing positions — agree / disagree, or this is a problem / this is an opportunity. The facilitator reads a statement; participants move to the poster that reflects their view; a short discussion follows. The cycle repeats with new statements.

WHY IT TENDS TO WORK WELL WITH YOUTH GROUPS

Moving before speaking lowers the barrier considerably. A young person who would never volunteer an opinion in a sitting discussion will cross a room — and once they have done that, speaking feels easier. The method also makes the range of opinion in the room physically visible, which often surprises participants and shifts the tone of discussion that follows.

ACCESSIBILITY NOTE

For groups where physical movement is not possible, Mentimeter or a simple show of hands achieves a similar effect. The key element is the visible split — not the movement itself.

A FEW SUGGESTED STATEMENTS TO GET STARTED

"Young people in this city have real influence over decisions that affect them." "It is possible to change things here." "The people in power actually listen."

The most useful statements are the ones that divide the room.



METHOD 4: CO-CREATION WORKSHOP

DESCRIPTION

This is the most resource-intensive method in this section and also the one most likely to produce a concrete, community-owned output — a proposal, a document, a plan, or a set of shared principles that the group can actually use.

It runs across three separate sessions rather than one. That spacing is not incidental — it gives participants time to reflect between workshops, allows the facilitator to synthesise what emerged, and produces a result that feels genuinely built rather than rushed.

WORKSHOP 1

Define: The group maps what they do not yet understand about the issue and plots stakeholders — who supports change, who resists it, who is affected but not yet involved. The session ends with a shared list of the most important open questions.

WORKSHOP 2

Ideate and Prototype: Groups create a poster representing their vision: a title, the values behind it, what success looks like. They review existing examples — handbooks, plans, proposals from other contexts — and identify what works and what does not. In plenary, groups pitch their vision and the room votes. The winning prototype is a "best of all" construction, taking the strongest elements from each group's work.

WORKSHOP 3

Test: A semi-final version of the output is brought back to the group. The session produces a concrete list of improvements for the final version.

Level of participation:
Involving → Empowering

PRACTICAL NOTES

- Groups of 4–6 per table. Each table needs a facilitator — someone who supports the discussion without steering it.
- Keep sessions to 90 minutes if held in the evening; up to half a day if participants are available during the day.
- New participants can join at Workshop 2 or 3 without having attended the first session. Build in a brief catch-up at the start.

METHOD 5: WALKSHOP

DESCRIPTION

A walkshop is a workshop that takes place while walking. The group moves through a neighbourhood or public space together, stopping at specific points to discuss what they observe, document what they find, and map the gap between how a place looks and how it feels to the people who use it.

It sounds simple, and in many ways it is. But something shifts when people walk together rather than sit across from each other. Hierarchies soften, conversation flows differently, and participants notice things about their environment that would never come up in a room.

RUNNING ONE

Agree the route and purpose with participants in advance — not a surprise walk, but a collective investigation with a clear question behind it. Decide what to document: safety, accessibility, greenery, infrastructure, social life. Walk in small groups of two or three, stopping at pre-agreed points. Reconvene at the end to compare notes and build a shared map or diagram from what everyone found.

PRACTICAL DETAILS

Group size up to 15. Duration 1–3 hours. Materials: notebook, pen, and a map — a mobile phone for photos is useful but not essential. Wear appropriate footwear and plan for weather if going outdoors.

TIP

Works especially well as the research stage of the six-step process described in Section 2.3 — as a way of grounding a community mapping exercise in actual observation rather than memory or assumption.

METHOD 6: DESIGN THINKING HACKATHON (ADAPTED FOR YOUTH)

DESCRIPTION

The hackathon format originated in software development — a time-bounded sprint where teams build something from scratch and present it at the end. Adapted for community settings, the same logic applies: a clear problem, a fixed timeframe, mixed teams, and a public pitch at the end. The time pressure is deliberate. It forces decisions, prevents overthinking, and produces something tangible even in a half-day.

What makes it work in youth settings is the combination of autonomy and structure. Teams choose their own approach within a defined challenge. There is a beginning, a middle, and an end. There is an audience for the final pitch. These are conditions that many young people find motivating in ways that open-ended workshops sometimes do not.

CORE ELEMENTS

- Teams of 4–5, mixed backgrounds wherever possible
- A shared problem statement, introduced at the start
- Mentors or expert advisors who circulate and respond to questions — but do not direct
- A 5-minute pitch per team to close the session, with structured peer feedback

Time	Activity
15–30 min	Arrival and icebreaker
30 min	Welcome, team formation, problem briefing
15 min	Individual reflection
60–90 min	Team work: research, ideate, prototype
15 min	Break
45–60 min	Finalise solution and prepare pitch
30 min	Pitches and peer feedback
15 min	Debrief and next steps

SAMPLE HALF-DAY AGENDA

One thing to plan carefully: who gets invited and how. Diverse teams produce better results, but diversity does not happen automatically if the invitation only reaches the usual networks. Think about who is not in the room and how to reach them.

2.6 Moderating Dialogues, Decision-Making Modalities, and the Reciprocal Maieutic Approach

MODERATING INCLUSIVE DIALOGUES

Good facilitation is mostly invisible. When it works, people speak freely without worrying about being judged or ignored. Getting there takes preparation — and it means closing the loop every time, not just opening it. Feedback is essential for active participants as it validates their contribution — their ideas are not merely voiced but documented, becoming integral parts of the process. In practice, this means:

- Active listening: Reflect back what participants say before responding or moving on
- Open questions: Avoid yes/no questions; ask "What would happen if...?" or "Can you tell us more about...?"
- Balancing voices: Actively invite quieter participants; gently redirect dominant ones — equal airtime does not happen naturally, it must be facilitated
- Separating ideas from people: Focus on the content of the idea, not the person expressing it — this reduces defensiveness and keeps dialogue productive
- Closing the loop: Always communicate back to participants how their input was used. Nothing barriers the trust faster than people sharing ideas and never hearing what happened to them

DECISION-MAKING MODALITIES

Not all decisions need to be made the same way. Choose the right approach for the situation:

- Consensus: The group deliberates until a solution acceptable to all is found — not everyone's first preference, but something everyone can live with
- Dot voting: Each participant places a limited number of dots on preferred options — quick, visual, and democratic
- Five-finger consensus: Participants show 1–5 fingers to indicate their level of support: 5 = fully support; 3 = can live with it; 1 = strongly oppose with reasons
- Delegated decision: The group agrees to delegate a specific decision to a trusted sub-group, who reports back — useful for technical matters

Tip: Always be transparent about which decision-making method you are using and why. Young people are more likely to accept an outcome — even one they didn't personally prefer — when the process feels fair and is clearly explained.

THE RECIPROCAL MAIEUTIC APPROACH (RMA)

One of the most powerful tools for facilitating genuine dialogue with young people is the Reciprocal Maieutic Approach (RMA), developed by Italian social activist and educator Danilo Dolci beginning in the 1950s in Sicily.

The term maieutic comes from the ancient Greek concept used by Socrates — the "midwife of knowledge" — the idea that knowledge is not transmitted from teacher to student, but drawn out from within each person through dialogue. Dolci took this further: where Socrates' approach was unidirectional, the RMA is reciprocal — knowledge emerges from the mutual questioning of all participants, including the facilitator. In practice, the RMA:

- Starts from participants' own lived experiences, not abstract theory
- Uses structured open questioning where everyone — including you as the facilitator — can ask and be asked
- Trusts that the resources for change exist within the community itself
- Values nonviolent communication: listening carefully, expressing oneself honestly, and respecting others when speaking
- Treats creativity and cooperation as essential elements of democratic participation

RMA in practice — A simple exercise:

Divide the group into pairs. One person shares a short experience related to their community (e.g., "A time I felt my neighbourhood didn't work for me"). The other listens without interrupting, then asks one open question to help the first person go deeper. Roles then reverse. In plenary, each person shares not their own experience, but what they learned from listening to their partner — a powerful act of empathy and collective knowledge-building.

SECTION 2 — KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR YOUTH WORKERS

Before moving to Section 3, reflect on the following:

1. At which level of participation are your current activities? What would it take to move one level higher?
2. Which of the six methods best fits your local context — in terms of group size, time available, and the type of output you need?
3. Which stage of the six-step process is most challenging in your community, and how would you address it?
4. How might the Reciprocal Maieutic Approach change the dynamic in your next group session?



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SECTION 3

Intersectionality and inclusion practices

3.1 Understanding Intersectionality

Since the term was introduced in the late 1980s by scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, intersectionality has become a key framework for understanding how systems of power shape people's lives. While interpretations and uses vary, a key insight is broadly shared: social identities – gender, race, class and disability among others – do not exist as separate or additive factors. Rather, they intersect and interact, shaping unique positions of privilege or discrimination within broader power relations.

What does this mean in practice?

Consider how gender operates in the labor market. A woman worker might face gender bias, but her experiences – opportunities for promotion, pay differences, access to childcare – differ significantly when race, class, or disability are taken into account simultaneously. An intersectional analysis reveals why immigrant women, for example, are overrepresented in precarious jobs compared to both immigrant men and native-born women. The same labor market mechanisms that associate women with care and domestic work also consider immigrant workers as more flexible and less protected. When these two dimensions intersect, they produce a specific channeling: immigrant women are more likely to be directed into low-paid, informal care sectors. In this way, their position is not just more disadvantaged, but qualitatively different, because it is defined by how these identities combine to organize access to work, types of employment available, and levels of security.

Why intersectionality for participation?

Young people from marginalised backgrounds are underrepresented in participatory initiatives. They are less likely to be invited, less likely to attend, and when they do participate, their contributions are often symbolic or treated as less credible. Standard approaches to participation typically address barriers one at a time – gender-focused initiatives look at sexism, anti-racist initiatives look at racism, disability inclusion looks at ableism – systematically leaving out those who face more complex, intersecting ones.

Collins and Bilge illustrate this through the example of African American women activists in the 1960s and 1970s, whose needs – jobs, education, healthcare – were overlooked by the most significant movements of the time. The civil rights movement prioritised race, feminism prioritised gender, unions prioritised class. As a result, issues specific to black women – their concentration in domestic work, the particular forms of workplace exploitation they faced, their lack of access to childcare – were taken up by none of these movements. They remained invisible until race, gender, and class were analyzed together.

Intersectionality then enables us to map social divisions and understand how they interact to produce specific patterns of exclusion and privilege. Understanding these patterns in turn helps us design initiatives that respond to the complexity of overlapping disadvantages. In participatory processes, this means asking not just whether young people are present, but which young people are missing, what keeps them out, and how they are heard when they do participate: questions that guide us to look at how specific combinations of gender, ethnicity, class, and disability shape access and credibility.

3.2 Barriers to inclusion

We have seen how intersectionality provides a lens to understand how social divisions interact to shape privilege and marginalisation, and to guide more effective action. We now focus on the first practical step: what to look for, and how to look, when identifying the barriers young people face in participatory processes. The barriers outlined here are common but not exhaustive, and should not be used as a checklist. As explained later, they are starting points that need to be read in relation to one another, in order to capture a more nuanced understanding of how young people's participation can be hindered.

Barrier	What is it?	What to look for?
Material	Participation entails costs – money, energy, time – that become real structural filters. A young person with caregiving responsibilities may face obstacles both because care duties demand significant time and attention, and because arranging support or covering associated costs, such as childcare, can be challenging.	<i>Who can afford to be present? Who cannot? What would enable their presence? Have we asked, or merely assumed disinterest?</i>
Digital	Passing through factors such as access to devices, connectivity, and digital skills, participation that moves online without alternatives excludes those least likely to have reliable access, such as young people from low-income backgrounds or rural areas.	<i>Do we assume universal digital access? What offline alternatives exist?</i>
Accessibility	Inaccessibility can be physical (e.g. stairs, narrow doors, lack of accessible toilets), sensory (e.g. absence of sign language interpretation or captions), cognitive (e.g. jargon, complex forms, unpredictable schedules), or related to environmental factors that may be overwhelming (e.g. fluorescent lighting, noise, implicit social rules that are never explained). Language can further hinder accessibility when participants don't speak it and no translation is provided.	<i>Is the space physically accessible? Are materials available in multiple formats? Have we consulted participants about their needs? Do we assume everyone experiences the environment the same way? Is translation provided?</i>

Barrier	What is it?	What to look for?
Stereotypes and power dynamics	Stereotypes and social hierarchies influence who is listened to and who speaks. Confident participants or those familiar with institutional norms tend to dominate, while quieter or less privileged individuals may remain silent. For example, a young woman may be interrupted more often, and a young Roma person may be dismissed before being heard. These dynamics can turn discussions from listening into competition, reinforcing existing power imbalances.	<i>Who speaks most? Who hesitates? Who is interrupted? Is the goal understanding or winning? Whose ideas are taken up? What assumptions might be shaping how different participants are heard? What narratives about their communities inform expectations?</i>
What counts as knowledge	What is considered "valid knowledge" is also shaped by power: technical expertise is often regarded as the only form of "evidence", while knowledge from outside dominant frameworks – experiential, embodied, vernacular – is often dismissed as "anecdotal" and systematically devalued. Moreover, young people may not be recognized as credible knowledge producers simply because they are young (testimonial injustice). Even when marginalized voices speak, their ideas may be filtered out because they do not align with what is considered feasible or legitimate.	<i>Who is believed? Who is doubted? Whose knowledge counts as "evidence"? Whose as "anecdotal"? What happens to ideas that don't fit the framework? What remains unsaid? Is silence read as disengagement – or as something else? Whose ways of knowing are completely absent from the conversation?</i>

Barrier	What is it?	What to look for?
Broken loops	When young people are invited to speak but cannot influence decisions, their participation becomes merely symbolic: this is known as tokenism: simulated participation while power remains elsewhere. Similarly, when participants never learn what happens to their contributions, participation becomes extractive: time, energy, and knowledge are taken without closing the loop. For those already facing different barriers, these mechanisms compound exclusion and reduce motivation to return.	<i>What happens to ideas after they are shared? Do participants see their input used? Is there a feedback loop? Do young people know what was done with their ideas? If ideas were not used, is that explained?</i>

HOW TO USE THIS TABLE INTERSECTIONALLY?



HOW TO USE THIS TABLE INTERSECTIONALLY?

This table maps common barriers to participation, but an intersectional perspective requires looking at how these barriers combine in shaping different young people's experiences. The focus therefore shifts from "which barriers?" to "how do they interact in practice?". Below are some practical tips on how to do this.

1. **Trace how barriers connect.** Look at more than one barrier from the table and ask how they might operate together for a specific young person. Instead of asking "is there a language barrier?" ask "how does the language barrier combine with material costs and stereotypes?".
2. **Observe dynamics in the room:** notice who speaks most, who is interrupted, whose ideas are picked up. Then connect these observations to the barriers in the table: are stereotypes shaping who is credited? Are power dynamics silencing quieter participants?
3. **Pay attention to who is missing.** If you look only at gender, you might see that young women are present. If you add ethnicity or/and disability, you might notice that only some young women are present.
4. **Consider how context changes barriers.** A lack of transport does not affect a young person in a city with accessible public transit the same way it affects one in a rural area with none. A language barrier may disappear when interpretation is provided, but reappear if the interpreter is not trusted. Power dynamics shift with context: a young person who speaks easily in a peer group may fall silent in a room with institutional authorities.

3.3: Inclusive strategies and dialogic practices

This section moves from understanding intersecting barriers to building strategies for action. Here you will find practical tools for making participation inclusive, with a strong focus on dialogic practices: structured ways of speaking and listening that acknowledge power and create conditions for everyone to be heard. The strategies are organized around key moments in a participatory process: defining the problem, deciding who participates, co-designing and decision-making, implementation and evaluation.

3.3.1 Strategies across the participatory process

Phase	What to look for	Strategies
Defining the problem	<i>Who defined what matters? Who is present in this phase and who is missing? Whose experience counts as knowledge?</i>	• Problem-posing workshops: start from lived experience and move towards root causes of the issue analysed; instead of pre-defined questions, use “codes” (e.g. photographs, case studies) to represent the problem. • Reciprocal maieutic workshops: guide the group to give birth to its own understanding through collective questioning. • Identity mapping: work with participants to map and reflect on identities, identifying any missing perspectives.
Deciding who participates	<i>Who is reached by usual channels? What barriers keep people out? Who does outreach, and where?</i>	• Peer outreach: involve young people from target communities as outreach workers and let them lead. • Barrier mapping: ask directly “what stops you from coming?” and act on what you hear, but be honest on what you cannot change • Multiple participation levels: offer light, medium, and heavy involvement so people can engage according to their capacity.

Phase	What to look for	Strategies
Co-designing and deliberating	<i>Who speaks? Who is heard? Who is doubted? Who feels safe? What happens when disagreement emerges?</i>	• Turn-taking practices: might involve holding a talking piece, silent reflection before speaking, mandatory check-in where everyone speaks even if only their names, or speaking in pairs before joining the group. • Listening-centred practices: empathy circles and radical listening, where participants speak without interruption and the others reflect back what they heard rather than give advice. • Creative practices: legislative theatre, poster dialogue, storytelling as co-research offer alternatives or support to formal discussion. • Questioning practices: using reflective questioning where systems of power are explicitly named.
Making decisions	<i>How are decisions made? Are they transparent and accountable?</i>	• Clear decision process: agree together from the outset on how decisions will be made (e.g., consensus, dot-voting). • Build accountability: after decisions, track who benefits, who is left out, and report back.

Phase	What to look for	Strategies
Implementing, evaluating, and feeding back	<i>Do ideas reach decision-makers? What comes back to participants? Are facilitators/those with institutional power filtering or opening doors? Who defines success? Whose knowledge counts?</i>	• Mandatory feedback: decision-makers should respond to proposals with what will be done, what will not, and why. • Intermediaries: practitioners and those with institutional power should use their position to open doors, not extracting or filtering ideas. • Accountability tracker: keep track of commitments and progress (e.g., policy change tracker). • Translate for audiences: two versions of policy brief – one for decision-makers (short, actionable), one for the community (accessible, shareable). • Co-define success criteria: ask at the beginning "how will we know this was worthwhile?" • Creative evaluation methods: integrate reflective journals, poetry, podcasts, drawings, photography or other creative methods to document and analyse one's own experiences, uncovering insights that more formal methods might miss. • Accessible restitution: share findings back in forms participants can use: simple graphs, stories, videos, exhibitions.



3.3.2 Structured dialogue and facilitation guidelines

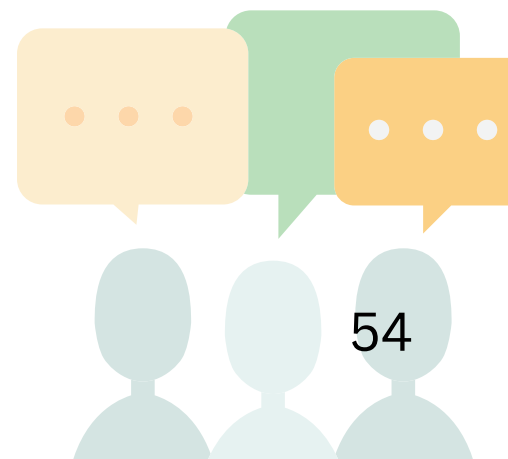
Why structured dialogue?

In Section 3.2 we mapped barriers that hinder young people's participation, and we have seen that making a process accessible in material terms – transport, timing, translation – is necessary, but it is not enough. Injustice does not disappear when people enter a room. Once inside, dialogue – whether used to define a problem, move to action, or evaluate outcomes – tends to reproduce the same hierarchies that exist outside. These hierarchies are shaped by gender, ethnicity, class, disability, and their intersections. Without deliberate structure, those who are already seen as credible – because they are perceived as older, male, from a dominant group, or fluent in institutional language – tend to dominate, while others stay silent. Structured dialogue responds to this by redistributing speaking time, validating different ways of knowing, and creating conditions where those usually silenced can be heard.

Facilitating dialogue across power differences

Before dialogue starts:

- **Build trust:** This means investing time in getting to know participants, showing care and genuine interest in their lives.
- **Create safe spaces:** Create safe spaces by recognizing that spaces of participation are never neutral, but shaped by cultural, economic, and social dynamics. For this reason, they should be explicitly co-constructed to be truly inclusive.
- **Consider separate preparatory spaces for marginalized groups.** Women, minority youth, and other marginalized groups may benefit from dedicated spaces before entering mixed forums (UN Peacebuilding, 2025), so they can participate from a position of strength.
- **Co-create group agreements.** At the beginning, work with participants to establish simple rules that encourage respect, active listening, and openness.





During dialogue:

- **Value multiple ways of contributing.** Actively foster a context where diverse modes of knowing and expressing knowledge – from formal language to stories, images, silence, emotion – are equally recognized and respected.
- **Ask questions about experience,** rather than opinion. Instead of "what do you think?" ask "what have you lived?" or "can you tell a story about that?" Lived experience is knowledge and actually grounds the conversation in real stakes, shifting focus from "right or wrong" to mutual understanding.
- **Read the room.** Pay attention to who speaks and who is silent, who is interrupted, whose ideas are taken up. Adjust accordingly and explicitly intervene when necessary.

Managing conflict

- **Treat conflict as information, not as a problem.** When disagreement emerges, it reveals what is at stake, what values are in play, what experiences have been silenced. Ask: "What does this disagreement tell us about different experiences in this group?"
- **Do not rush to consensus.** Consensus can be a way of silencing dissent. Let disagreement sit. Ask: "What are we learning from not agreeing?"
- **Protect those with less power when conflict escalates.** If conflict becomes a personal attack, stop the conversation, revisit group agreements. Speak privately with those involved. If no alternative solutions are available, and if one person's behaviour is putting others at risk, or if the conversation is escalating into a highly heated or aggressive exchange, ask them to leave.

The facilitator's role and power

- **Be explicit about your power.** Facilitators are not neutral: they have power over the agenda, over whose voices are amplified, over what happens when conflict emerges. Instead of pretending this power does not exist, use it responsibly by naming your positionality.
- **Use power to protect, not to dominate.** When someone with less power is interrupted, intervene: "Let's let them finish." When conflict becomes an attack, pause.
- **Position yourself as a co-learner.** State that your role is not to provide answers but to facilitate the group's collective exploration. This disrupts the hierarchical teacher-student dynamic and models openness to being changed by others.

Quick reference: dialogic principles in action

These principles cut across everything we have discussed. Use them as a quick check for your practice.

Principle	In practice...
Epistemic justice	Start from lived experience, value stories, silence, emotion, movement – not just linear argument.
Power awareness	Notice who speaks and who doesn't. Redistribute airtime. Name systems of power when they emerge – not as accusations, but as forces to understand collectively.
Non-extractivism	Always close the loop. Tell people what happened with their ideas. If their ideas were not used, explain why.
Flexibility	Offer different ways to participate. Adapt pacing. Ask not "why can't they participate?" but "what are we not offering?"
Radical openness	Be willing to be changed by what you hear. Listen with the intention of learning, not convincing.
Care	Build in time for relationships, not just tasks. Check in with participants individually after intense sessions. Co-create agreements for confidentiality and mutual support



3.4: Real-World Examples and Adaptations



SINCRONY Project

SINCRONY (interSectional iNClusion in delibeRation and participatiON with Youth) is a Horizon Europe project where ALDA -our partner in this project- works alongside 7 universities and a communications partner. The focus: how to include young people experiencing overlapping social disadvantage in deliberative and participatory processes, not just in theory but in actual governance and school settings.

What sets it apart is who builds the tools. Youth workers are co-researchers. Young people shape the methodology. The training materials get tested in practice before they're finished. That's a different starting point than most inclusion frameworks, which are written for practitioners rather than with them.

INSPIRE Project

This EU project develops participatory spaces together with young people and marginalised groups, using methods such as storytelling, theatre, and co-design workshops instead of only formal discussions. This project shows that participation becomes more inclusive when young people help design the process and when different forms of expression are allowed.

Palermo Youth Advisory Board

The YAB is a group of young people aged 15–25 who work with CESIE's Rights and Justice Unit. Members plan youth interventions, organise peer training and activities, contribute to projects and take part in training and conferences across Europe. They have represented youth at the European Parliament and developed training materials on comprehensive sexuality education (LOVE ACT).

H.E.Y! Project

H.E.Y! (Helping and Empowering Youth) was running in the years after COVID-19 when the social damage to young people with fewer opportunities was becoming hard to ignore.

The project worked with a positive youth development approach: youth workers got digital tools and peer consultation frameworks; young people got structured support across education, employment, housing, and civic participation. But the detail worth noting for this section is the population it reached. These were young people facing layered exclusion, economic pressure on top of housing instability on top of health consequences, in combinations that most standard participation models are simply not built to handle.

Climentines

This project connects environmental and climate education with the inclusion of young people from diverse, lower-income, and rural backgrounds.

Mainstream environmental movements are often dominated by urban youth with higher academic and economic capital, creating a barrier for underserved youth who are often the most directly affected by local ecological or infrastructure issues but are left out of mainstream green advocacy.

To lower the barrier to this traditionally "elite" topic, the project trains youth workers to shift the focus from abstract global policies to immediate, everyday realities—such as local transport availability, waste management, or energy costs. By grounding environmental action in these tangible, lived experiences rather than highly technical or scientific discourse, CLIMEntines shows how complex global challenges can be made accessible and relevant to groups usually excluded from the conversation.

SPARK

This project helps small, local youth groups connect with each other across different countries. Often, grassroots organizations work completely alone and run out of resources quickly. SPARK helps them build lasting networks, share practical tools, and learn from one another. This ensures that these groups have the strength and support needed to keep helping young people in their communities over the long term, instead of just running one-off activities.

CIVIC

This project connects young people with their local governments to rebuild trust. Many young people feel disconnected from politicians and worry that their opinions are only asked for "to look good," without anyone actually listening. CivicConnect creates clear ways for youth to speak with local officials. Crucially, it ensures that institutions must give clear feedback on what they did with the young people's ideas, showing them that their voices can make a real difference.

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SECTION 4

Collaborative Bottom-Up Planning Tools

Collaborative bottom-up planning helps young people move from local concerns to collective action. As a youth worker, your role is not to decide the final solution but to hold the process. You help the group understand the issue, move from broad concerns to realistic priorities, and connect those priorities to actual routes for change.

4.1 Overview and Combining Tools

To make participation meaningful, you need a clear process. You can organise your group's work into three connected stages:

1. **Mapping:** Before the group acts, you must help them understand local reality. Instead of a general "young people are not heard," look for specifics: Is it a lack of transport? Inaccessible information? Or no clear route for presenting proposals?
2. **Prioritising:** Not every valid idea can be pursued at once. Help the group ask: Which issue matters most? What is realistic within our resources? Every decision involves trade-offs and shared responsibility.
3. **Advocating:** A good proposal needs an audience. Help the group identify decision-makers, allies, and the best format for communication (e.g., a meeting, a brief, or a petition).

In short:

A strong bottom-up process moves from:

- understanding the issue
- choosing what matters most
- acting through the right public route

A strong proposal needs three things:

- evidence from mapping
- focus from prioritising
- influence through advocacy

Practice example:

In PROM's youth participation work, especially in contexts linked to **youth councils** and **local youth governance**, the strongest interventions usually follow one simple sequence: first define the issue, then agree on one realistic priority, and only then move into dialogue with decision-makers. This makes participation more credible and more likely to lead to concrete results.

Practice tip:

If your group is losing energy after the mapping stage, do not force an immediate move into formal lobbying. Create **one achievable next step first**: a micro-action, a short meeting with one supportive adult ally, or one visible improvement in the local environment. **Small wins** often prepare the group for larger advocacy later.

4.2 Key Tools with Practical Guidance

This subsection focuses on three core tools to help your group move from ideas to a realistic proposal.

Tool	Main purpose	Best for	Group size	Time	Low-tech option
Participatory budgeting	Choosing between proposals	Prioritising limited resources	8–25	60–180 min	Paper proposal cards + wall voting
Advocacy mapping	Identifying power, allies, and access routes	Moving a proposal into institutions	4–15	45–90 min	Sticky notes on wall/floor map
Facilitation principles	Keeping the process inclusive and usable	Any planning session	8–15 ideal	45–120 min	Paper agenda, spoken instructions, simple turn-taking tools



TOOL 1: PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

This tool teaches that decision-making involves trade-offs. It doesn't have to involve large public funds; it can be a school mini-grant or a small project allocation.

- **How to do it:** Define the available budget -> Invite the group to generate proposals -> Check feasibility -> Present proposals clearly -> Decide together (e.g., through dot voting or ranking).

TOOL 2: ADVOCACY MAPPING

This helps the group understand who actually has the power to make a change. Avoid vague assumptions like "the city should do something."

- **How to do it:** List everyone connected to the issue. Sort them into: Decision-makers (formal authority), Gatekeepers (people who can open the door), Allies (people who support you), and Opponents (those who might resist).

TOOL 3: FACILITATION PRINCIPLES FOR PLANNING

To keep the process fair and productive, focus on:

1. **Clarity of purpose:** Ensure everyone knows what the session is for and what outcome is expected.
2. **Multiple ways to contribute:** Use pairs, small groups, or silent reflection so that everyone—not just the loudest voices—can participate.
3. **Visible conclusions:** Every session should end with a concrete next step, task list, or decision.

4.3 Practical Guide to Lobbying and Engaging Authorities

Lobbying is simply strategic communication. It means presenting a clear issue and a realistic proposal to the people who can help make change happen.

- **Step 1: Be clear about your "Ask".** If you cannot explain your request in two lines, it usually still needs refining.
- **Step 2: Identify the right door.** Often, a school director, a local councillor, or a youth officer is more effective than the Mayor.
- **Step 3: Prepare your evidence.** Photos of recurring barriers, results from your community mapping, or 20 signatures carry more weight than general complaints.
- **Step 4: The Elevator Pitch.** Prepare a 60-second message: We are [who]; we identified the problem [what]; we have evidence [how]; we ask for [specific action]; and we propose [next step].
- **Step 5: Choose the format.** Use a short introductory email, a formal meeting request, or a one-page policy brief.
- **Step 6: Follow up.** Within a few days of a meeting, send a thank-you note summarizing the agreed next steps. This creates a written record.

4.4 Measuring Success and Sustaining Efforts

Measurement helps you understand if you are moving from discussion to action.

Focus on four levels:

1. **Participation:** Did new or diverse voices join?
2. **Learning:** Do participants feel more confident engaging with authorities?
3. **Action:** Did the group produce a map, a shortlist of priorities, or a formal request?
4. **Continuity:** Is there a follow-up action or a link to a youth council or NGO?

How to sustain momentum:

- Close every activity with one concrete next step and a responsible person.
- Celebrate "small wins"—even just receiving a response from an official.
- Connect the group to existing local structures (e.g., Youth Councils) to ensure long-term impact.



SECTION 4 — KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR YOUTH WORKERS

Before moving to Section 5, reflect on the following:

1. Who is the most important ally in your community that you haven't spoken to yet?
2. Which small tool from this section can you test in your next meeting with young people?

Key Takeaways:

- Bottom-up planning is a sequence: mapping → prioritising → advocating.
- Lobbying is about evidence and persistence, not manipulation.
- Success includes participation and learning, not just policy change.





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SECTION 5

Promotion of Transnational Peer Learning

Transnational peer learning is a powerful approach for supporting young people to engage with democratic processes beyond their local context. By connecting youth across countries, youth workers can create spaces where experiences, challenges, and ideas are shared, compared, and transformed into collective learning.

This section supports you as youth workers in **designing, facilitating, and sustaining transnational peer learning experiences**, using accessible methods that can be integrated into everyday youth work practice. It contributes directly to **Specific Objective 5 (SO5)** by strengthening cross-border networks and encouraging long-term cooperation among young people and youth organisations.

5.1 Why Transnational Peer Learning Matters

Young people often experience local challenges, such as **limited participation in decision-making** or **lack of inclusive spaces**, as isolated issues. **Transnational peer learning** helps them recognise that many of these issues are shared across Europe. By engaging with diverse perspectives, young people develop a broader understanding of democracy and community planning.

Through structured exchange with peers from other countries, young people develop a broader understanding of **democracy, participation, and community planning**. They gain confidence in expressing their views, learn to listen to diverse perspectives, and begin to see themselves as active contributors at European level.

For youth workers, transnational peer learning enhances the quality of youth engagement activities. It introduces new ideas, encourages reflection on local practices, and strengthens the capacity to work inclusively in multicultural environments. Importantly, it also supports the development of key competences such as **communication, cooperation, and civic engagement**.

In short:

Transnational peer learning allows young people to:

- Compare local challenges with those faced by peers in other countries
- Learn from diverse cultural, social, and institutional contexts
- Develop communication, cooperation, and advocacy skills in a European setting
- Strengthen their sense of belonging and active citizenship at EU level

For youth workers, transnational learning:

- Enhances the quality and relevance of local activities
- Encourages innovation through the transfer of practices
- Supports inclusion by amplifying voices that are often underrepresented in decision-making

FOR EXAMPLE:



The **Rural Youth Parliament** Erasmus+ project brought young participants from Finland, France, Lithuania, and Romania together to explore participatory models and co-develop engagement tools for rural communities, enabling transfer of methods across contexts. Similarly, activities under the **European Youth Parliament (EYP)** — such as the Climate Youth Action Plan — have supported young Europeans in co-designing sustainability projects and bringing ideas developed in international debate settings back into local civic action.

Through international meetings and local simulations of youth parliaments, participants:

- Compared how rural municipalities engage (or fail to engage) young people
- Analysed barriers such as distance, limited services, and lack of youth representation
- Exchanged participatory tools used in different national contexts
- Co-developed proposals to strengthen youth voice in rural decision-making

Importantly, the project did not stop at discussion. After the transnational exchanges, partner organisations implemented **local youth parliament simulations**, workshops, and consultation events inspired by shared practices.

Why this matters for transnational peer learning:

Young people were able to recognise that rural exclusion is a shared European challenge, while also discovering concrete participation models used in other countries. The exchange of structured methods enabled replication and adaptation at local level.



The **Climate Youth Action Plan (CYAP)**, implemented within the European Youth Parliament network, connected young people from across Europe to collaboratively develop youth-led responses to climate challenges.

Through international sessions, thematic workshops, and local follow-up activities, participants:

- Worked in multinational committees to analyse environmental policy
- Compared national climate realities and youth activism approaches
- Drafted joint recommendations and action plans
- Piloted local sustainability initiatives in their communities

A key element of CYAP was its **peer-led structure**: young participants facilitated discussions, led committees, and co-created outputs. This strengthened ownership and confidence.

Many participants later transferred debate formats, structured deliberation methods, and sustainability project ideas to their schools, youth councils, or local organisations.

Why this matters for transnational peer learning:

The project illustrates how cross-border deliberation can move from policy discussion to tangible local initiatives. Participants not only learned about European climate governance, but also strengthened civic competences and leadership skills applicable in their everyday youth work contexts.

3

The **Youth Democracy Cohort** brings together governments, civil society organisations, and youth networks to strengthen youth participation in democratic processes worldwide. Through peer learning activities, research, and collaborative initiatives, the cohort enables young people and youth organisations from different countries to exchange experiences on civic engagement, democratic participation, and youth-led advocacy.

By participating in discussions, capacity-building activities, and collaborative initiatives, youth actors can compare national approaches to youth participation and learn from practices developed in other contexts. This exchange helps youth organisations and young leaders adapt successful participation tools and initiatives within their own communities.

Why this matters for transnational peer learning:

The Youth Democracy Cohort demonstrates how international networks can create continuous spaces for exchange between youth actors across different countries. By sharing practices, discussing common democratic challenges, and learning from diverse national experiences, participants strengthen their capacity to promote youth participation and democratic engagement within their own communities.

REFLECTION PROMPTS FOR YOUTH WORKERS:



- *How often do young people in your activities interact with peers from other countries?*
- *What added value could a transnational exchange bring to their local initiatives?*

5.2 Building and Facilitating Peer Exchanges

Effective transnational peer learning does not depend on complex project structures or extensive travel. What matters most is **intentional design, clear learning objectives**, and **active facilitation**.

The first step is to define a shared learning focus that is meaningful for all participants. Topics should be rooted in young people's lived experiences, such as youth participation in local decision-making, access to inclusive public spaces, or youth-led initiatives in urban and rural contexts. A clear thematic focus helps participants engage more deeply and ensures exchanges remain relevant.

Once the theme is defined, you should consider how to match peer groups across countries. Attention should be paid to age, experience level, and diversity of backgrounds. A balanced group allows young people to feel both represented and challenged by different perspectives.

Facilitation plays a central role in transforming exchange into learning. Rather than unstructured conversations, you are encouraged to use guided formats that support reflection and dialogue. Story-sharing, small-group discussions, and collaborative problem-solving exercises help participants move beyond surface-level interaction and engage critically with each other's experiences.

In short		
Step 1: Define a shared learning focus Choose a clear and relatable theme, such as: • Youth participation in community decision-making • Inclusive public spaces • Youth-led initiatives in urban or rural areas Tip: Topics should connect to young people's lived experiences and local realities.	Step 2: Match peer groups When forming transnational groups, consider: • Age range and experience level • Inclusion of young people from diverse backgrounds • Balance between similar challenges and different contexts	Step 3: Facilitate structured peer exchange Use simple formats to guide interaction: • Small-group discussions with guiding questions • Storytelling sessions ("What worked / What didn't") • Joint problem-solving exercises



PRACTICAL EXERCISE – MINI PEER EXCHANGE

You can run this activity either online or offline to build trust and start a cross-border dialogue.

PURPOSE

To help young people present local challenges and receive feedback from international peers.

GROUP SIZE

8–15 participants (ideally 4–5 from each country).

CHALLENGES & TIPS

- *Language barriers*: use simple English and visuals
- *Low participation*: use smaller groups
- *Unequal engagement*: give everyone a speaking turn (ensure real participation by asking participants to submit questions or topics in advance, assign roles to each participant, like note-taker, timekeeper, presenter, etc.)

MATERIALS

Digital whiteboard (e.g., Miro) or physical post-its, a video conferencing tool (e.g., Google Meet, Zoom), simple translation tools (e.g., Google Translate, DeepL, Zoom live transcription), participative tools (e.g., Slido)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Introduction** (10 mins): Host a quick round to set expectations and build a safe space.
2. **Sharing Phase** (20 mins): Each national group presents one local community challenge using visuals.
3. **Peer Feedback** (20 mins): Groups rotate to offer solutions or "fresh eyes" on each other's challenges or short stories or use anonymous tools (e.g., Slido) for questions or polls.
4. **Reflection** (10 mins): You lead a short discussion on what was learned and how it can be applied locally. Have follow ups through email to highlight contributions from some participants that didn't participate much.

5.3 Digital and Accessible Formats

Digital tools play a crucial role in making transnational peer learning accessible, especially for young people who may face barriers to mobility. Online collaboration platforms allow youth workers to organise exchanges, support group work, and maintain contact over time.

When selecting digital tools, simplicity and accessibility should be prioritised. You should provide clear guidance on how tools will be used and allow time for participants to become familiar with them (e.g., by providing free and accessible YouTube tutorials). Combining live sessions with asynchronous activities, such as shared boards or discussion spaces, can accommodate different schedules and comfort levels.

It is essential to consider **inclusion** when working digitally. Differences in digital skills, access to devices, or internet connectivity can affect participation. You as youth workers should assess these factors in advance and adapt formats to ensure no participant is excluded.

Purpose:

To support collaboration and maintain connections across countries.

Tools:

- Video conferencing tools (Google Meet, Zoom, Microsoft Teams)
- Messaging platforms (Slack, WhatsApp)
- Shared documents or boards (Miro, Mural, Google Docs)

Tips:

- Keep tools simple and intuitive
- Provide clear instructions
- Combine live and flexible participation

In short:

Commonly used tools include:

- Collaborative boards for brainstorming and mapping ideas (Slido)
- Messaging platforms for informal exchange and coordination
- Video conferencing tools for live discussions and workshops

Good practice tips:

- Keep tools simple and intuitive
- Provide clear instructions in advance
- Ensure accessibility (language, timing, digital skills)
- Combine synchronous (live) and asynchronous activities

Inclusion reminder:

Not all young people have equal digital access. Assess potential barriers and adapt formats accordingly.



5.4 Turning Peer Learning into Concrete Action

One of the main challenges in transnational learning is ensuring continuity. Short exchanges can be inspiring, but their impact is significantly increased when they are part of a longer learning journey.

Purpose:

To transform learning into real outcomes and continued engagement.

What you can do:

- Create small cross-country working groups
- Set shared goals or small local actions
- Organise follow-up sessions
- Encourage young people to present what they learned locally

An example of a longer-term approach is the “**advocacy marathon**”, in which young people collaborate over several weeks to explore a shared issue.

When to use it:

When you want young people to work on a shared issue over time.

How it works:

1. Identify a common topic
2. Exchange national perspectives
3. Develop joint messages or ideas
4. Apply them locally (e.g., events, campaigns)

What it develops:

- Teamwork
- Policy awareness
- Confidence in advocacy

Challenges & Tips:

- Loss of motivation: Keep sessions short and regular
- Unclear outcomes: Set small, achievable goals
- Drop-out: Assign roles and responsibilities

In short:

For youth workers, transnational peer learning should be:

- Creating small thematic working groups across countries
- Setting shared goals or micro-actions at local level
- Organising periodic follow-up sessions
- Encouraging youth-led dissemination (presentations, social media, local events)

Example approach – “Advocacy Marathon”:

Young people collaborate over several weeks to:

- Identify a shared issue
- Exchange national perspectives
- Develop joint messages or recommendations
- Present outcomes to local or European stakeholders (e.g., Equipo Europa)

This approach strengthens **policy awareness**, teamwork, and confidence in advocacy.

To maximise impact, transnational peer learning should aim for **continuity**, not just single events. For **transnational peer learning** to be meaningful, it should be closely connected to everyday youth work practice. You are encouraged to link cross-border exchanges to **local community planning activities**, ongoing youth initiatives, or civic engagement processes. Local youth councils, for example, can also play an important role in linking youth participation to democratic governance at the community level. According to the Council of Europe resource on local youth councils as advocates for democracy strengthening the capacity of local youth councils enables young people to represent youth interests, advocate for youth rights, and actively participate in democratic processes within their municipalities.

By doing so, young people can apply what they have learned in a European context to their own communities. This reinforces the relevance of transnational learning and supports the development of competences aligned with the ESCO framework, including **communication**, **collaboration**, and **civic participation**.

In short:

For youth workers, transnational peer learning should be:

- Embedded in regular activities
- Connected to local community planning processes
- Used as a motivational tool for sustained participation

Key competences supported (ESCO-aligned):

- Effective communication across cultures
- Collaboration and teamwork
- Civic engagement and advocacy
- Digital collaboration skills



SECTION 5 — KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR YOUTH WORKERS

Final reflection:

1. How can you transform a short exchange into a lasting learning journey for young people in your context?

Key takeaways:

- Transnational peer learning strengthens youth participation and European citizenship.
- Meaningful exchange does not depend on scale, but on structure and facilitation.
- Digital tools can enhance accessibility and continuity.
- Youth workers play a key role in translating European exchange into local impact



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Co-funded by
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Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

