

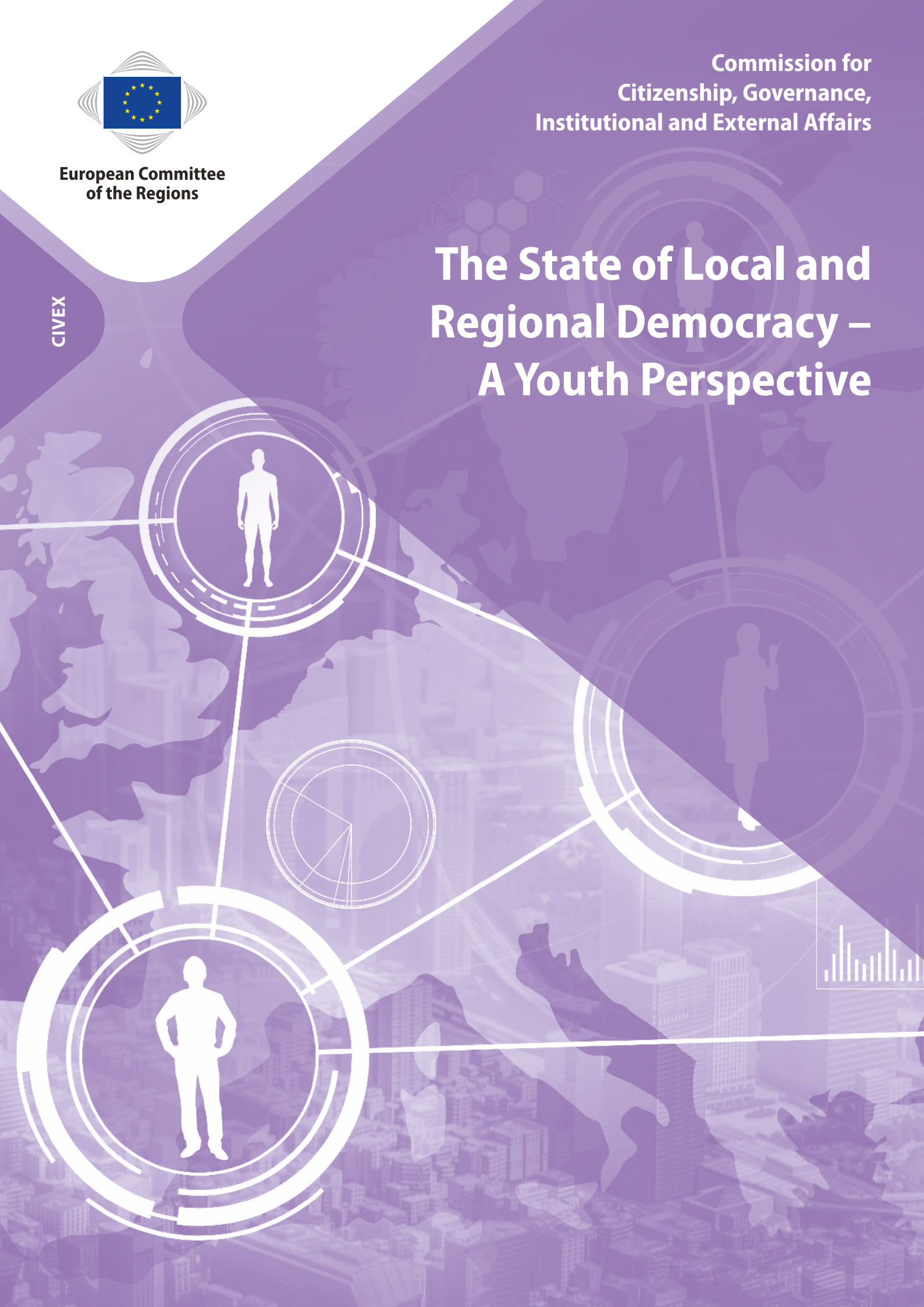


**European Committee
of the Regions**

**Commission for
Citizenship, Governance,
Institutional and External Affairs**

CIVEX

The State of Local and Regional Democracy – A Youth Perspective



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**This report was written by Dr Jean-Pierre Gauci, Dr Julinda
Beqiraj,
Anthony Wenton and Iris Anastasiadou (British Institute of
International and Comparative Law)**

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Introduction

Democratic societies depend on healthy engagement from and with their citizens, both during elections and between electoral cycles. The promotion of European democratic values and democratic participation is crucial, particularly when it comes to youth. Indeed, the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027, adopted by the European Council in 2018, builds upon three framework pillars: engaging, connecting and empowering youth.¹ It acknowledges that the future of the European project relies on younger generations and highlights that young people can reap the full benefits of EU actions only if these reflect their aspirations. Youth recognition of EU values (as set out in Art. 2 TEU), including human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and youth active engagement in political processes are paramount, as it is through democratic engagement that young people can help to shape the future they want to live in. A more active participation and investment in civic and democratic life at a local, regional, national and European level will foster more resilient societies and prosperity in the future for both the EU and for young people.

To enhance youth participation in democratic processes, it is important to understand what interests and motivates young people in relation to politics, as well as to identify and address potential obstacles to their participation. Such an understanding is crucial in the context of the European Year of Youth 2022, and beyond, in shaping the activities of political and civic institutions aimed at promoting the active citizenship of young people. An important step in this regard was the particular encouragement given to young people to share their ideas in the citizen-led discussions and debates of the Conference on the Future of Europe. The objective to increase citizens' participation and youth involvement in democracy at EU level and to ensure that their voices are also heard in between elections features prominently in its conclusions. Also, at the European Summit of Regions and Cities on 3–4 March 2022, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) launched the process for drafting a charter on youth participation, with the aim of building and consolidating a youth-friendly democratic space to ensure that the voices of young people are formally, continuously and permanently represented in the EU, also highlighting that cities and regions must play a pivotal role in the process.

In support of the COR's ongoing work to foster youth democratic spaces, this study aims to provide further insights into the circumstances affecting young people's decisions on whether or not to participate in democratic processes.

¹ Resolution of the Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field: The European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027 [2018] OJ C456/1.

1. Aims, Methodology and Definitions

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The study explores how young EU citizens view the state of democracy at local and regional levels (with comparisons drawn with the national and European levels), how they engage in it, and which specific tools could further encourage their participation. The study also looks into new and innovative practices supporting youth participation and explores challenges hindering active and meaningful democratic participation.

Specifically, the study covers the following topics:

- State of play of formal and informal youth participation.
- Specific features of youth participation and engagement at local and regional levels.
- Approaches to nurturing and promoting basic democratic values.
- Main challenges hindering participation.
- Innovative means to encourage youth participation, at different levels.
- Success stories of instruments and strategies to enhance youth participation at the local and regional levels.
- Improving the effectiveness of consultative processes for young people.

1.2. Methodology

The study uses a mixed-methods approach including desk research—which engages with results from previous studies—and a survey that aims to capture young people’s attitudes and behaviours with respect to participation in democratic processes, both voting and broader engagement.

Desk Research

Desk research has included:

1. Analysis of existing data (including statistics available via Eurostat, Eurobarometer results and data available at the local, regional and national level, where accessible).
2. Literature review: an analysis of existing academic and grey literature focused on youth democratic participation in Europe and in specific European countries.

Survey and Responses

A survey questionnaire was developed for the purposes of this study. The questionnaire was administered online and disseminated through contacts in a database of regional and national organisations, with the help of the European Committee of the Regions.

The survey was aimed at gaining understanding and evidence of:

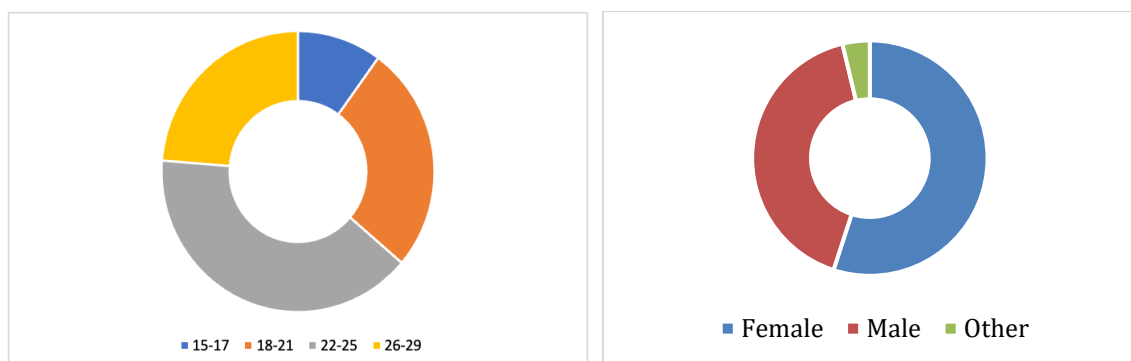
- the circumstances affecting young people's decisions on whether or not to participate in democratic processes at the local (e.g., city/town), regional (e.g., county, province), national and EU level;
- how young EU citizens view the state of democracy at local and regional levels and engage in it;
- which specific tools could further encourage youth participation, including new and innovative practices; and
- what the challenges are that hinder active and meaningful participation.

The survey consisted of 22 questions organised in three sections: (1) demographic and background information; (2) factors influencing decisions on democratic participation, including barriers to participation and innovative practices; and (3) forms of engagement in democratic debate.

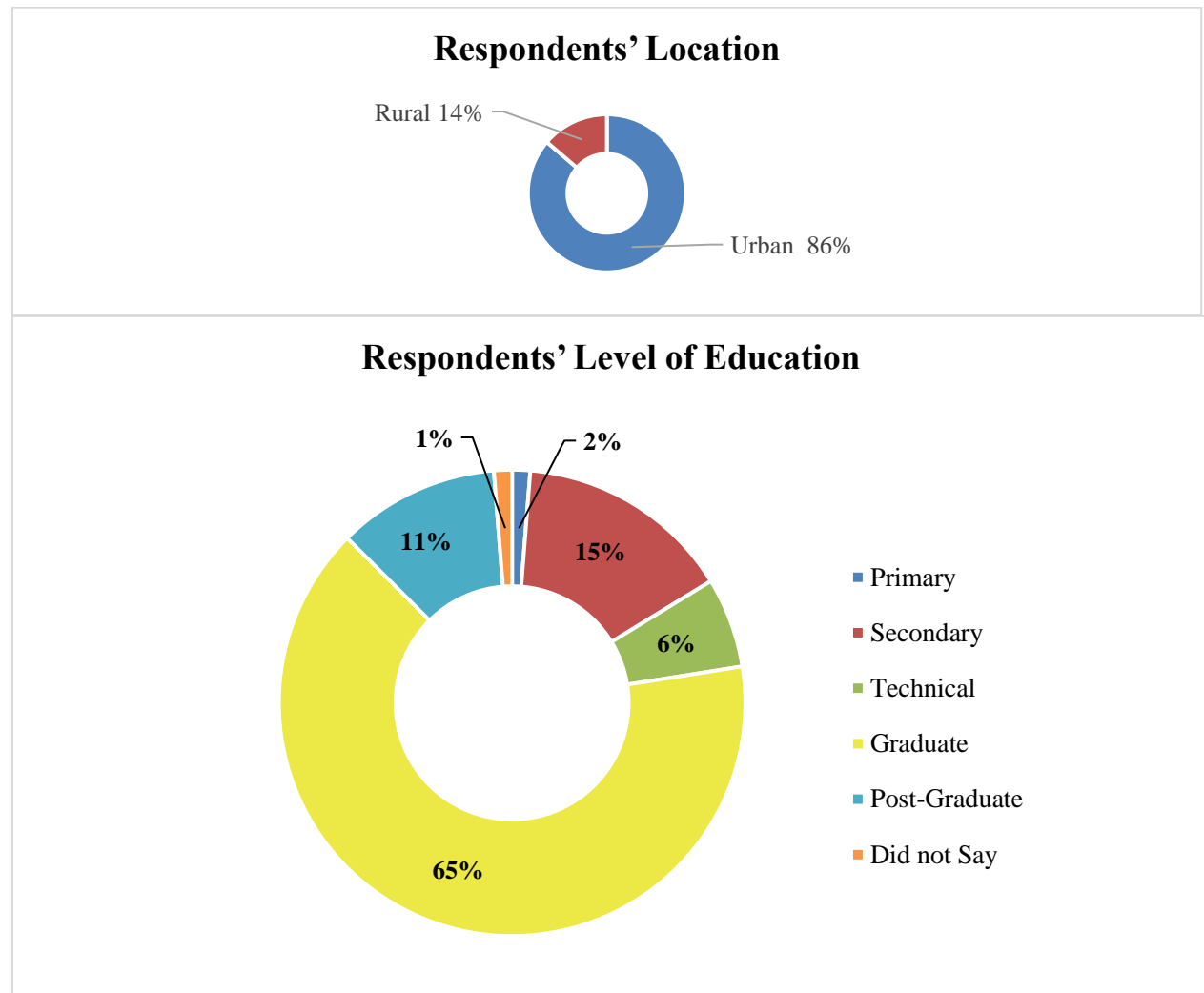
We collected responses from a total of 92 participants, 80 of which fell within the required age group. The breakdown of ages of participants is outlined in the Table and Chart below.

Age Group	No.	%
15–17	8	10
18–21	21	26.25
22–25	32	40
26–29	19	23.75

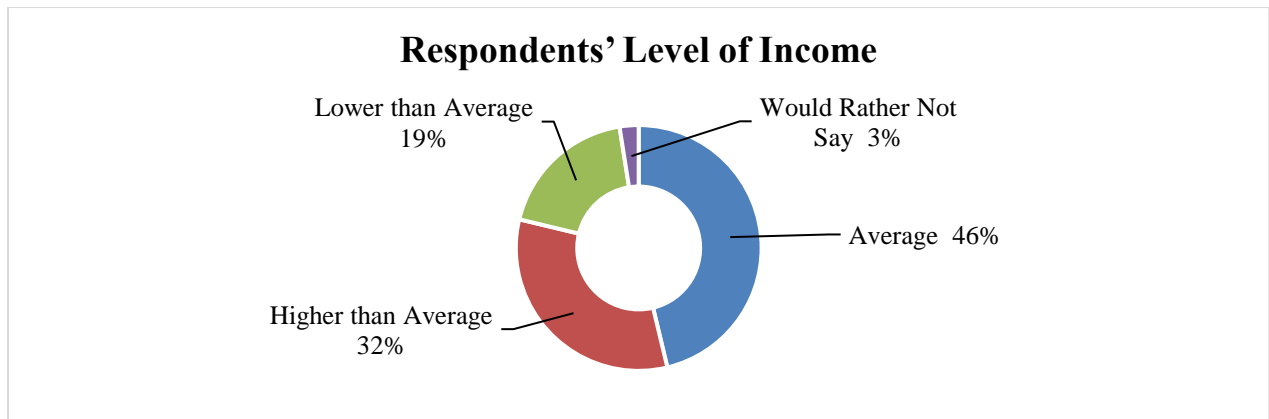
Survey Respondents by Age Group and Gender



Of the 80 respondents, 44 identified as female, 33 as male and 3 otherwise (see Chart 2 above). The vast majority (n=72) were most politically active in their country of nationality; whilst 5 were EU Nationals active in another EU Member State and 3 were third country nationals active in an EU Member State. The majority (n=69) lived in urban areas whilst some (11) lived in rural areas.



On level of education, most respondents held a graduate degree (n=52) with a further 9 respondents holding a post-graduate degree. 12 held a secondary level of education, 5 a technical qualification, whilst 1 held a primary level of education with a further 1 opting not to report their level of education. When asked about the level of income of their families, 37 reported this as being average (when compared to other people in the region), 26 reported the income level as higher than average, 15 as lower than average and 2 preferred not to respond.



1.3. Definitions

Youth: in line with EU policy, the study uses a definition of ‘young person’ as anyone between the ages of 15 and 29.

Democratic Participation: based on the reading of the relevant EU policies, for the purposes of this study, democratic participation is understood as referring broadly to any form of participation in or engagement with governance structures and processes. This includes electoral participation; participation in youth government and, more broadly, in youth-led organisations; as well as engagement with broader issues on the political agenda, including through participation in NGOs and other community organisations.

In particular, the study focuses on 3 forms/levels of participation:

1. Voting and other forms of electoral participation (at the local and regional levels, including in comparison to participation at the national and European levels).
2. Participation in youth councils, youth organisations and similar processes and engagement with NGOs.
3. Engagement, campaigning and advocacy, protests and petitions regarding key issues.

The study will contribute to a growing body of work that is building ‘a comprehensive picture of both the degree and the modes of youth political participation’.²

² See generally J Weiss, ‘What Is Youth Political Participation? Literature Review on Youth Political Participation and Political Attitudes’ (2020) 2 Frontiers in Political Science <<https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpos.2020.00001>>.

2. Factors Influencing Decisions on Democratic Participation

2.1. Background

Existing research on the topic³ reflects an apparent contradiction between the so called ‘disengagement paradigm’ and the ‘engagement paradigm’—where part of the literature talks about a dwindling engagement by young people, whilst the other talks about new and diverse forms of participation that reflect a growing engagement with democratic and political processes.

Existing literature suggests that many young people are already interested and engaged both politically and civically, as exemplified by their participation in the European Parliament elections in 2019. Their turnout significantly increased and exceeded the increase in turnout of other age groups (14% increase in the number of under 25s who voted and a 12% increase among 25–39-year-olds).⁴

Age	Voted 2014	Voted 2019
16/18–24	28%	42%
24–39	35%	47%
40–54	45%	52%
55+	51%	54%

However, data and research also suggest that young Europeans are, in general, still less likely to vote compared to other age groups.⁵ A significant number of young Europeans are still disengaged from traditional politics and disinclined to take part in formal political activities due to lack of interest, awareness and understanding of the issues at stake, or a sense that participation is futile.

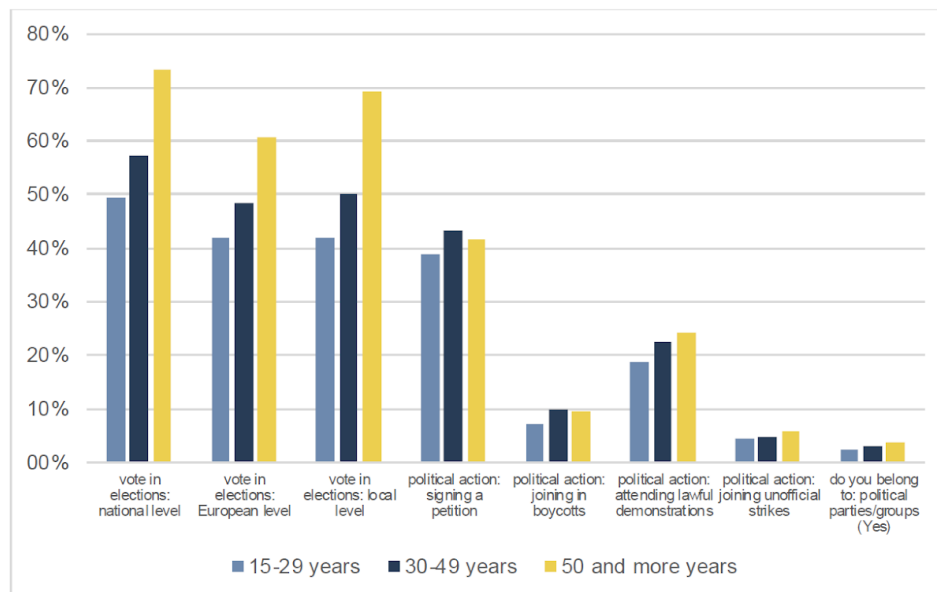
³ European Parliament Youth Survey Flash Eurobarometer (2021) <<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2021/youth-survey-2021/report.pdf>>; European Commission, ‘Report on the 2019 elections to the European Parliament’ COM(2020) 252 final; European Parliament Eurobarometer Survey 91.5: ‘THE 2019 POST-ELECTORAL SURVEY: HAVE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS ENTERED A NEW DIMENSION?’ (2019) <<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/42b98847-db51-11e9-9c4e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>>; European Commission Flash Eurobarometer 478: ‘How do we build a stronger, more united Europe? The views of young people’ (2019) <<https://www.kantarpublic.com/download/documents/155/Flash+Eurobarometer+-+Views+of+young+people>>.

⁴ European Parliament Eurobarometer Survey 91.5: ‘THE 2019 POST-ELECTORAL SURVEY: HAVE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS ENTERED A NEW DIMENSION?’ (2019).

⁵ EVS (2022). European Values Study 2017: Integrated Dataset (EVS 2017). GESIS, Cologne. ZA7500 Data file Version 5.0.0 <<https://doi.org/10.4232/1.13897>>. Cited in European Parliament, Directorate-General for Communication, T Deželan and D Moxon, *Influencing and understanding political participation patterns of young people: the European perspective* (European Parliament 2022) 7 <<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/740120>>.

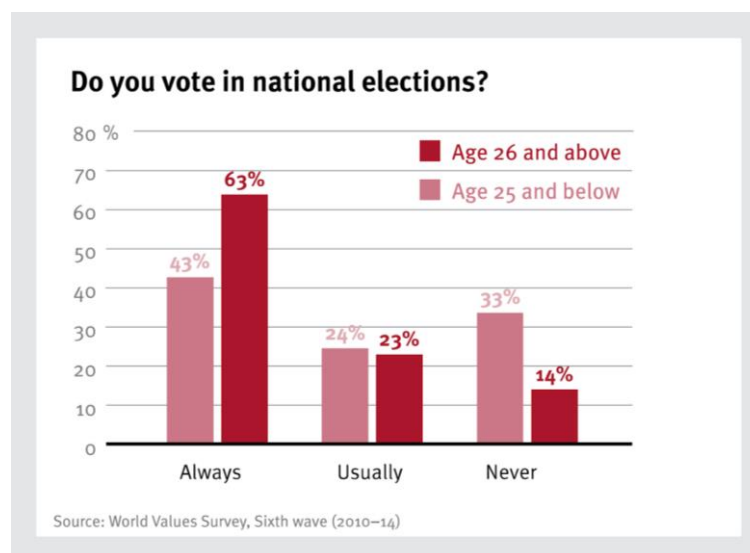
Disengagement of young people has been identified as a major challenge for some democracies in Europe.⁶

Forms of Political Engagement Across Age Groups



Source: *European Values Study 2017*

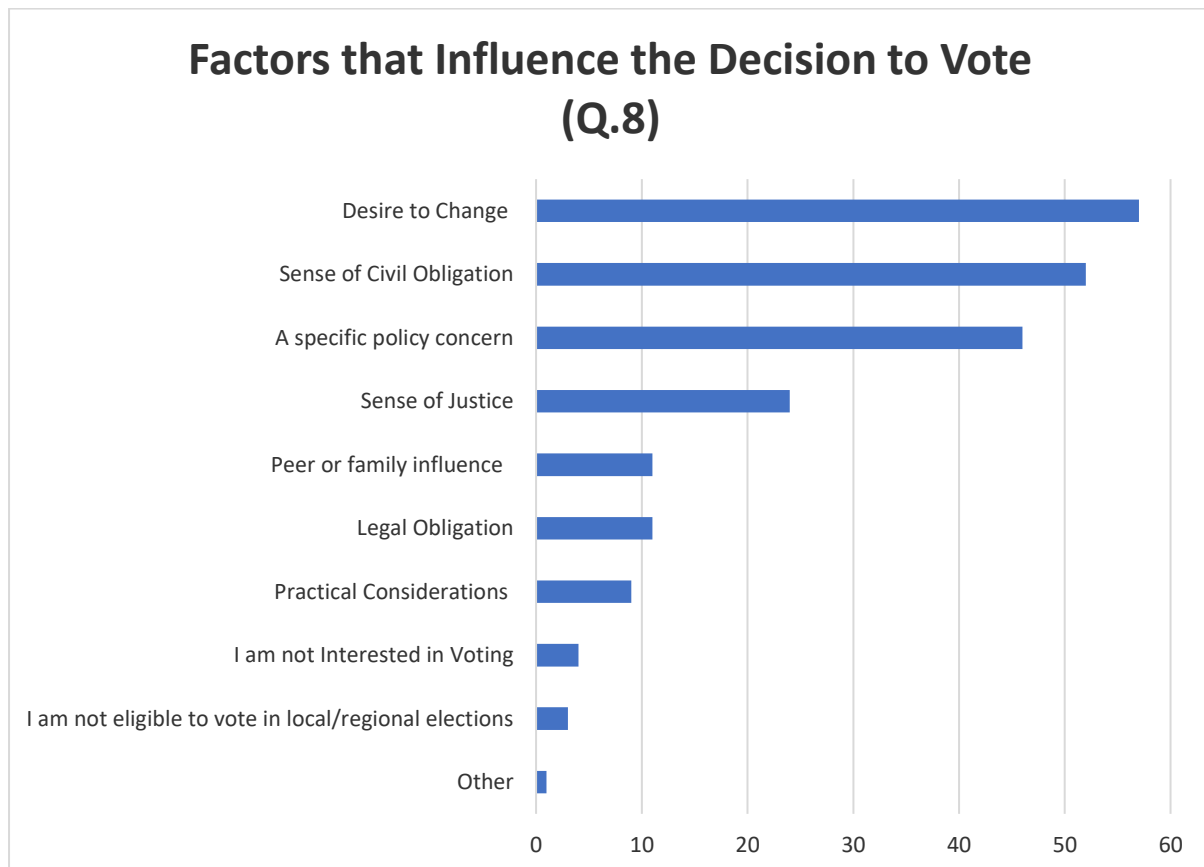
And this is not just a European problem. The sixth wave of the World Values Survey, conducted between 2010 and 2014 across 59 countries spanning all regions of the world, found that people aged 25 and under are significantly less likely to vote:⁷



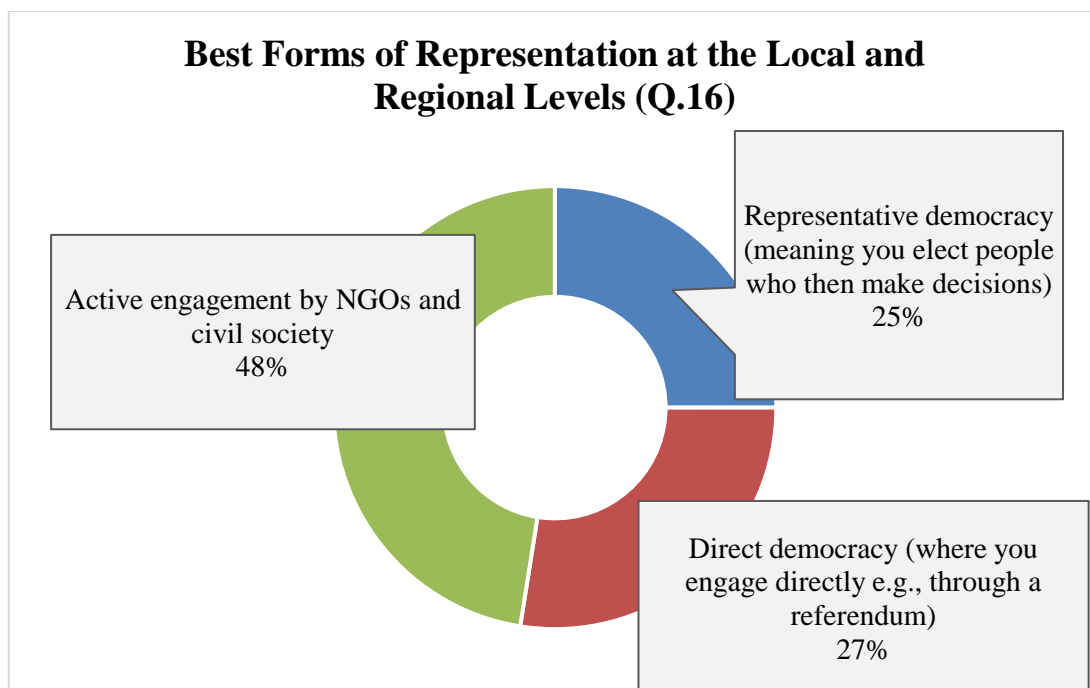
⁶ M Kitanova, 'Youth political participation in the EU: evidence from a cross-national analysis' (2020) 23 *Journal of Youth Studies* 819; E Zeglovits and J Aichholzer, 'Are People More Inclined to Vote at 16 than at 18? Evidence for the First-Time Voting Boost Among 16- to 25-Year-Olds in Austria' (2014) 24 *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 351, which further cites studies by Arzheimer (2006); Bhatti & Hansen (2012); Blais et al (2004); Blais & Rubenson (2013); Electoral Commission (2002); Fieldhouse et al (2007); Gallego (2009); Milner (2009); Rubenson et al (2004); Topf (1995); Wass (2007); Wattenberg (2002 and 2008).

⁷ A Solijonov, 'Voter Turnout Trends around the World' (International IDEA 2016) 39.

Thus, it is important to understand what interests and motivates young people in relation to politics, as well as to identify potential obstacles to their participation. While the vast majority of the relevant literature focuses on voting as the primary yardstick of youth participation, it is important to also carefully consider the countless other modalities of engagement. On voting, some of the key motivations identified by our survey respondents included: the desire to change something (n=57), a sense of civil obligation (n=52) and a specific policy concern (n=46).



Importantly, however, when asked how their views are best represented at the local and regional levels, the largest number (n=38) of our survey participants noted active engagement in NGOs as being the answer. 22 selected direct democracy whilst 20 identified representative democracy. This reflects a need to consider participation in much broader terms than whether an individual or group votes in particular elections, covering all forms of engagement in the political life of the country, locality or region.



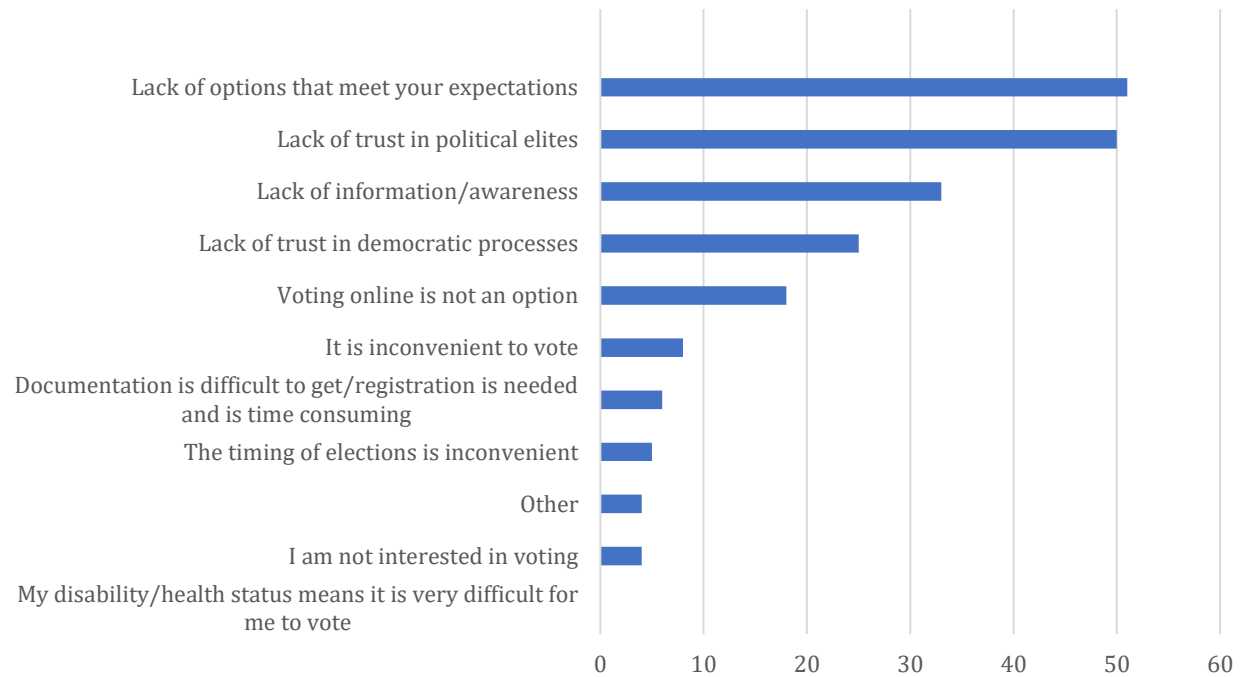
2.2. Challenges Hindering Participation

The existing literature addresses various challenges hindering active participation in democratic processes (including voting). These range from lack of information and awareness, to lack of trust in politics and democratic processes, shortage of viable options meeting certain expectations, barriers related to the voting process (e.g., timing, documentation, physical barriers), as well as lack of interest.

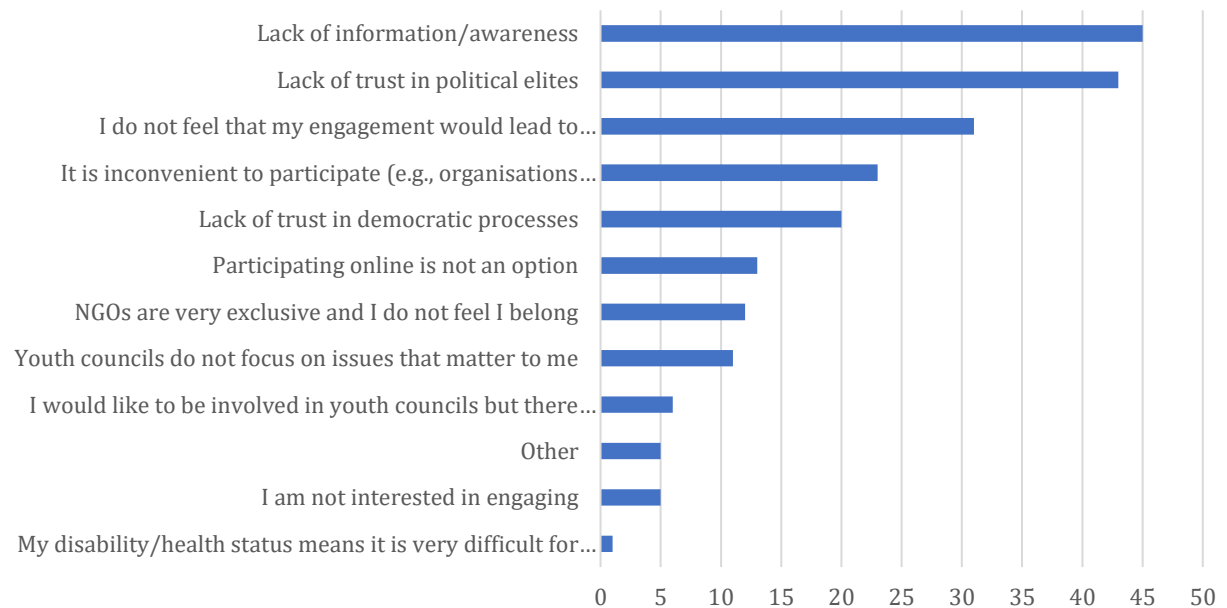
The responses to a 2021 European Parliament Youth Survey (EPYS) Flash Eurobarometer—in which interviews were conducted with a representative sample of young people aged 16–30, in each of the 27 EU Member States—show that, apart from the age of voting, the main reasons for non-participation are lack of interest (15%), followed by lack of trust in concrete outcomes from decision-makers (13%) and an insufficient understanding of the issues at stake (11%).

Responses from our survey confirm these findings. As reflected in the chart below, respondents noted lack of options that meet their expectations; lack of trust in political elites and democratic processes; and lack of information/awareness as some of the key factors hindering participation in voting. As regards engagement in forms other than voting, participants highlighted the lack of prospects that engagement would lead to concrete results; lack of trust in political elites; and lack of information/awareness as the three most important factors hindering participation.

Factors Hindering Participation Through Voting (Q.10)



Factors Hindering Participation Beyond Voting (Q.11)



Civic Education and Political Awareness

Several studies demonstrate that civic education in the classroom translates into greater political awareness and participation.⁸ For under 18s, one might reasonably speculate that the impact would be greater if civic education in schools were coupled with a lower voting age (see discussion below).⁹

It is suggested that participation could be increased by providing education and training materials for citizens of all ages, including school pupils, to prepare them to vote.¹⁰ Good practice in this regard can be observed in Sweden where young people vote at a similar rate as older people and a key reason for this, as identified in the literature, is that civic education is an important part of the school curriculum. Schools prepare young people to vote by inviting politicians from different parties to talk to the students about their policies so that the students can make an informed decision on who to support.¹¹

In **Sweden** civic education is an important part of the school curriculum. The initiative called *Skolval* engages students under the voting age of 18 in a mock election (which emulates and is timed to roughly coincide with 'real' elections) so that they are used to filling out the ballot form and casting a vote.

The EPYS Flash Eurobarometer revealed that 42% of young people felt they did not know very much about local and regional government and 9% knew nothing at all. There seems to be a correlation between the number of young people not voting (54%) and the number who do not understand about government (51%). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that if young people were more informed, they would be more likely to vote.

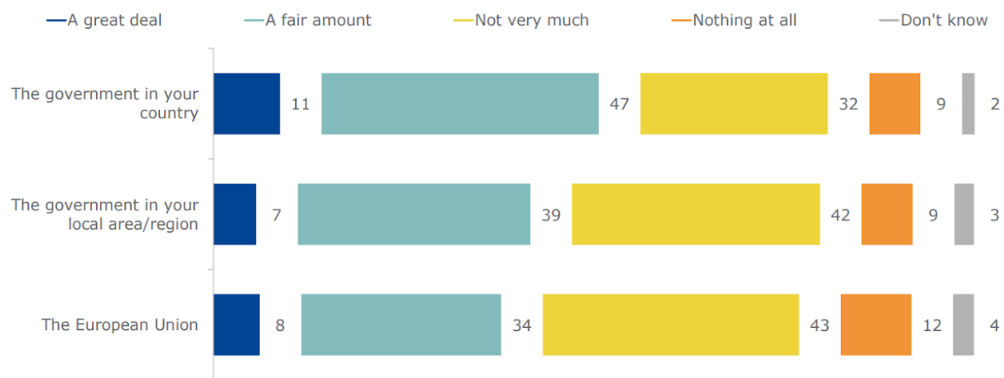
⁸ See, for example, MW Andolina et al, 'Habits from Home, Lessons from School: Influences on Youth Civic Engagement' (2003) 36 Political Science and Politics 275.

⁹ A Folkes, 'The case for votes at 16' (2004) 41 Representation 52, 53.

¹⁰ B Hoskins and D Kerr, 'Final Summary and Policy Recommendations: Participatory Citizenship in the European Union' (European Commission 2012); MW Andolina et al, 'Habits from Home, Lessons from School: Influences on Youth Civic Engagement' (2003) 36 Political Science and Politics 275, 279. The importance of reaching out to young people in the EU and explaining the significance and importance of EU values has also been a central recommendation of the EU-funded RECONNECT project, which aims to reconcile citizens with EU institutions <<https://reconnect-europe.eu/youthresourcecentre/>>.

¹¹ 'Democracy in Sweden: Equal, open and scrutinised by media. Here are 10 features of Swedish democracy' (Sweden.se, 15 September 2021) <<https://sweden.se/life/democracy/democracy-in-sweden>>.

Q3 How much, if anything, do you feel you understand about...? (% - EU27)



Base: all respondents (n=18 156)

It is particularly noteworthy that in a 2019 Flash Eurobarometer—in which interviews were conducted with 10,786 respondents aged 15 to 30 from different social and demographic groups in the then 28 EU Member States—33% of respondents considered that one of the most important things schools should offer is to ‘prepare young people to be active citizens in democratic societies’.¹² It was further observed that this number was slightly higher (at 36%) for young people living in large towns.

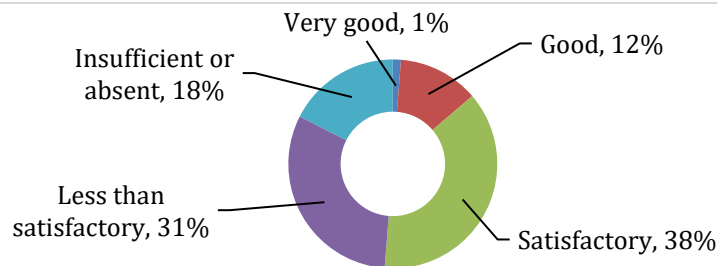
Furthermore, in the same Eurobarometer, more than 4 in 10 (42%) said that ‘critical thinking, media and democracy’ was not taught sufficiently in schools. In fact, this was the top answer of the options given (closely followed by ‘climate change, environment and eco-friendly behaviours’). Interestingly, again, young people living in large towns were most likely to give this answer (47%).

Responses from our survey show lack of information/awareness as a key challenge hindering participation. When asked about voting, 33 respondents identified this as a key barrier, whilst when asked about participation beyond voting that number went up to 45 respondents.

A related concern identified by our survey is lack of communication from the local or regional government on how to engage with them. Indeed, of the survey participants, almost half described communication as less than satisfactory (25) or insufficient or absent (14). 30 described the same as satisfactory, whilst only 10 described it as good with 1 describing it as very good.

¹² European Commission Flash Eurobarometer 478: ‘How do we build a stronger, more united Europe? The views of young people’ (2019).

Communication with Local/Regional Authorities (Q.12)

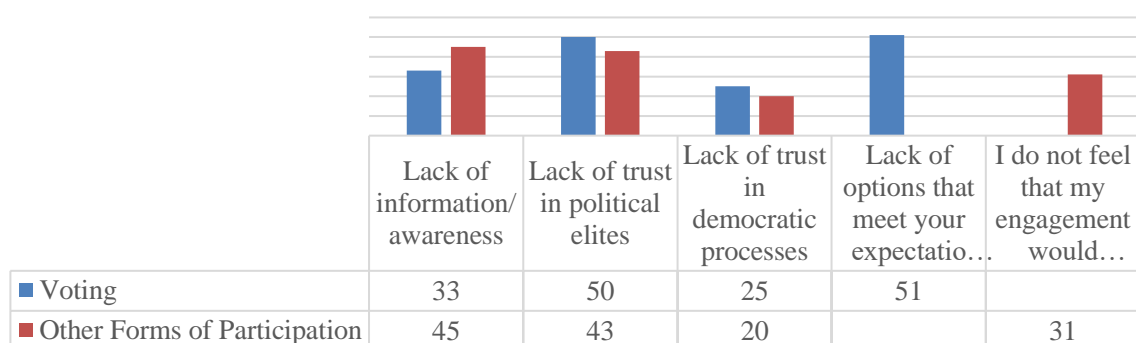


Lack of Trust in Politics and Democratic Processes

Another recurring theme identified in the literature, which overlaps with the shift to issues-focused politics discussed below, is that young people are not so much apathetic about political issues as they are disillusioned with mainstream politics and politicians.¹³

Our survey results show that lack of trust is a significant concern. When asked to give key challenges hindering their willingness to vote in local or regional elections, 50 of the 80 respondents cited their lack of trust in political elites as a key barrier and 25 respondents cited lack of trust in democratic processes. These responses were significantly higher than many other considerations with only 'lack of options' superseding (with the slimmest of margins) lack of trust. Interestingly, the number of respondents identifying lack of trust in democratic processes as a barrier was notably lower than those identifying lack of trust in political elites. Other barriers identified include practical considerations (such as difficulties in accessing documentation and inconvenience of voting).

Trust Related Barriers to Participation (Q10, Q11)



¹³ J Briggs, *Young People and Political Participation: Teen Players* (Palgrave MacMillan 2017) 161.

2.3. Issues and Values (Specific Policy Concerns)

An explanation for the occasional uptick in youth voting, as seen, for example, in the 2019 European Parliament elections and in the 2008 US presidential elections, is that young people are not simply ‘non-voters’ but rather ‘volatile voters’ who can be galvanised by particular issues and campaigns.¹⁴ Accordingly, it is likely telling that in the context of a global movement against climate change, the post-electoral Eurobarometer shows that the number one issue that made young people vote in the European Parliament elections was combating climate change (45% of those aged under 25 said it was an issue that made them vote compared with 34% of those aged 55 or over). Young people were also more likely to mention the promotion of human rights and democracy as an issue that made them vote (44% of those aged under 25 compared with 34% of those aged 55 or over). Our survey results confirm these results. The majority of respondents (46) identified ‘a specific policy issue’ as a factor that most influences their decision on whether to vote at the local or regional level. Such policy issues seem to carry even more weight in the decision on who to vote for. When asked how influential such policy issues are on the decision on who to vote for (Q.9), 48 identified them as being ‘very influential’ (5 on a scale of 1 to 5) whilst 21 identified them as influential (4 on the scale).

How important are policy issues in the decision on who to vote for? (Q.9)



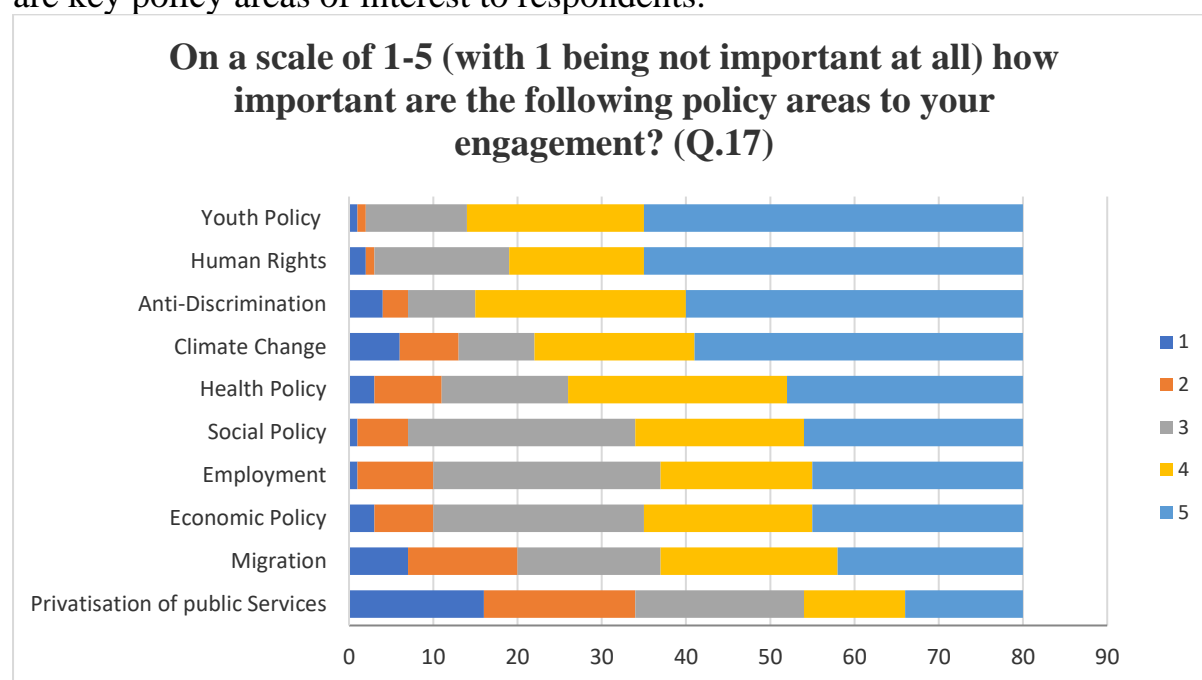
As evidenced in the literature on this topic, ‘young people are often interested and engaged in key issues but are put off by politicians and political parties’.¹⁵ This is reflected in a recent Ipsos report on the lives and choices of Generation Z

¹⁴ AJ Martin, *Young People and Politics: Political Engagement in the Anglo-American Democracies* (Routledge 2012) 21.

¹⁵ J Sloam, ‘How Can Young People Be Encouraged to Vote?’ *Times Higher Education* (1 June 2017) <<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/blogs/how-can-young-people-be-encouraged-vote>>.

which highlights that younger generations are not necessarily less politically active compared to previous generations, but are motivated by slightly different values and concerns.¹⁶ In particular, they may vote when motivated to do so by specific policy concerns but, unlike many older voters, are much less inclined to vote consistently based on party loyalty. This shift to issues-focused participation is also captured in the EPYS Flash Eurobarometer.¹⁷

Our survey asked participants how important specific policy areas are to their engagement. The responses (on a scale of 1 to 5) are outlined in the chart below. It is clear that youth policy, human rights, anti-discrimination and climate change are key policy areas of interest to respondents.



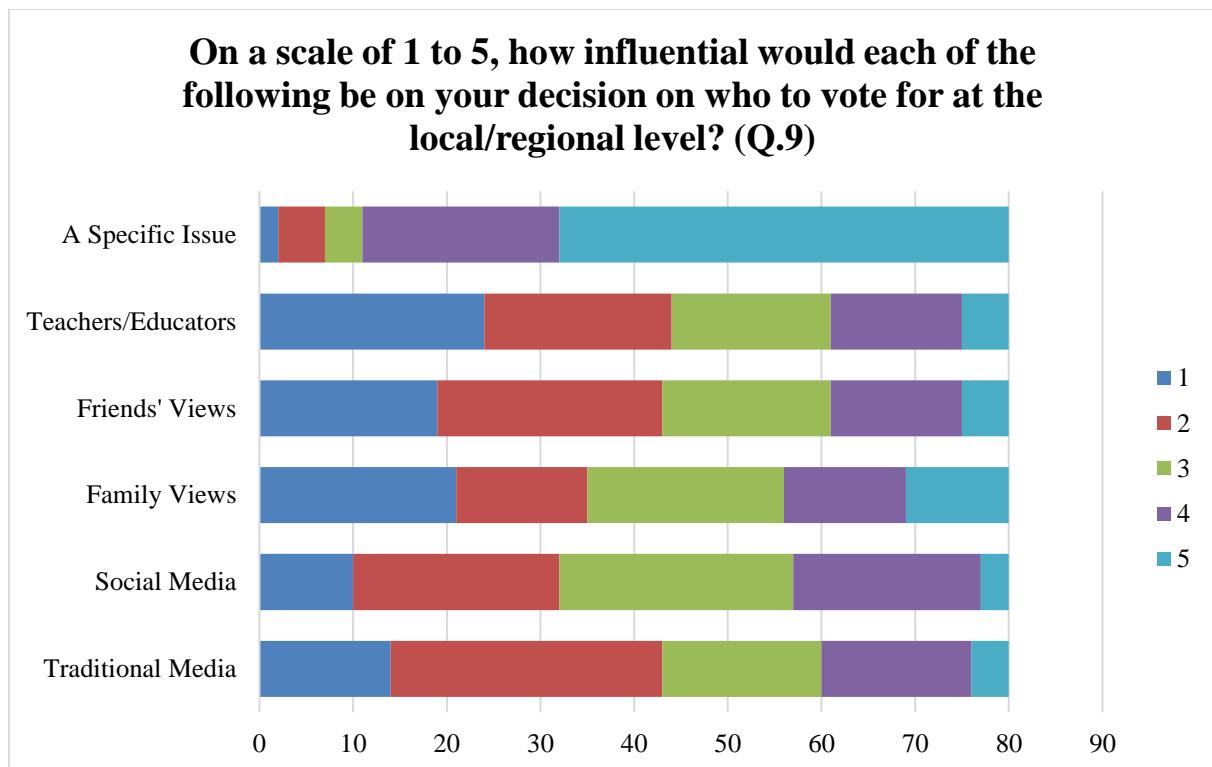
2.4. Sources of Information and their Influence

The recent European Parliament Youth Survey (EPYS) Flash Eurobarometer revealed that social media and news websites are the primary sources of information on political and social issues (41%), followed by television (34%) and friends, family or colleagues (26%).

Our survey responses are more varied. When asked to rate how influential the following sources were on the decision on who to vote for at the local/regional level, respondents clearly identified specific issues as being critically important. At the same time, responses varied on the influence of the views of family and friends and the role of traditional and social media (see sections below).

¹⁶ B Duffy et al, 'Ipsos Thinks: Beyond Binary: The lives and choices of Generation Z' (Ipsos MORI 2018) <<https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/ipsos-thinks-beyond-binary-lives-and-choices-generation-z>>.

¹⁷ European Parliament Youth Survey Flash Eurobarometer (2021).



Social Media and News Websites

It has been suggested that social networks like Facebook and microblogging sites like Twitter may be a vital tool politicians can use to re-engage young people via the specific issues that interest them.¹⁸ More generally, it has been noted that ‘the internet has become a critical conduit of freedom of expression ... Many scholars have found a positive relationship between internet use and political engagement ... [which is] especially strong among young people’.¹⁹ Interestingly, only 10 survey participants identified online activism as their main mode of engagement (‘I am active online but not through formal organisations’). Our survey also asked participants to identify, on a scale of 1 to 5, how influential traditional and social media are on their decision on who to vote for. The results provided above clearly reflect a relatively weak influence of both forms of media, with traditional media polling especially poorly.

¹⁸ J Briggs, *Young People and Political Participation: Teen Players* (Palgrave MacMillan 2017) 87ff.

¹⁹ LE Hestres, ‘App neutrality: Apple’s app store and freedom of expression online’ (2013) 7 *International Journal of Communication* 1265, 1266 (cited in Briggs *ibid*).

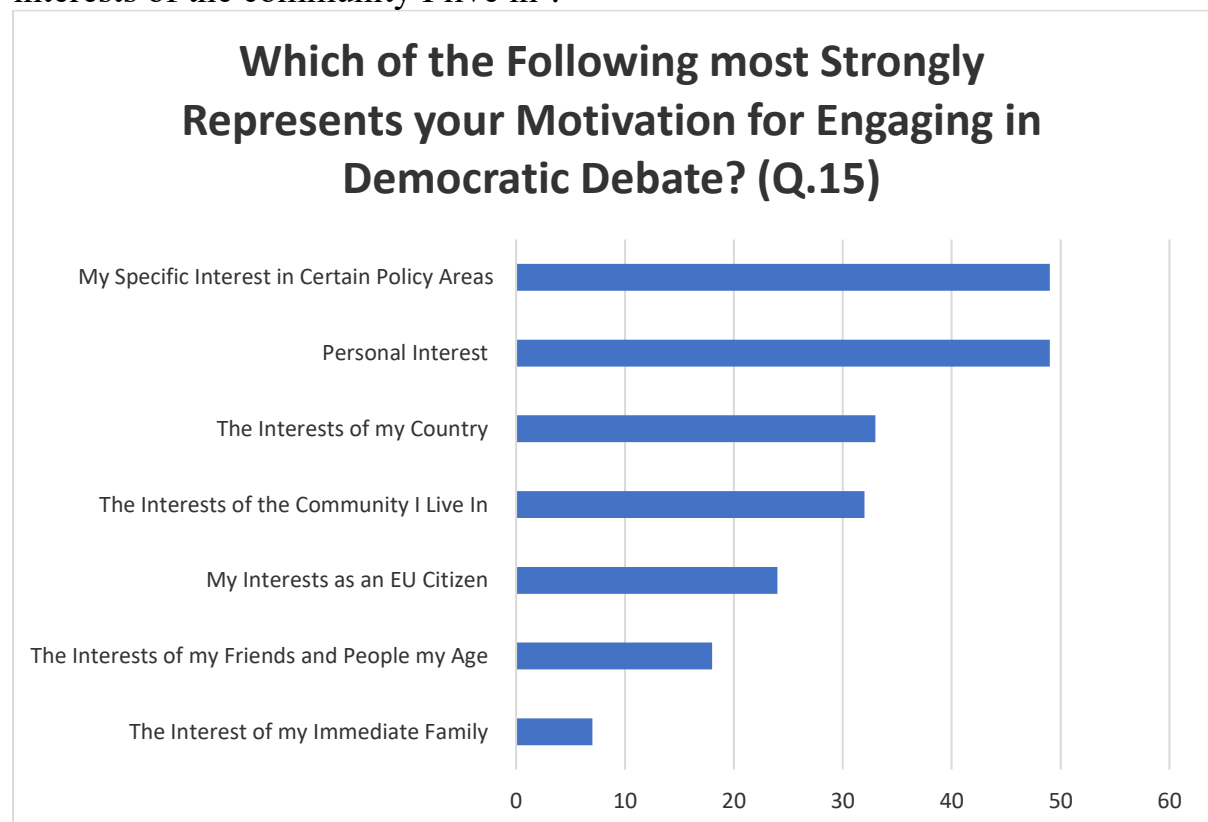
Family Views

Responses from our survey show that family views have some influence on young people's voting choices at the local and regional levels. As shown in the table above, 24 participants noted an influence on the scale of 4–5 (out of the 1–5 range). Interestingly, family views are considered more influential than the views of friends or teachers and educators. The largest numbers however identified the level of influence as relatively low (scale of 1–3).

Research has highlighted that even when other demographic and social factors are taken into account, young people who have politically engaged role models at home are more likely to be politically aware and inclined to participate in political activities.²⁰

Motivations

We asked participants to identify (by selecting 3 choices) which interests most strongly represented their motivation for engaging in democratic debate. 'Personal interest' and a 'specific interest in a policy area' were the most popular responses in this category, followed by 'the interests of my country' and 'the interests of the community I live in'.

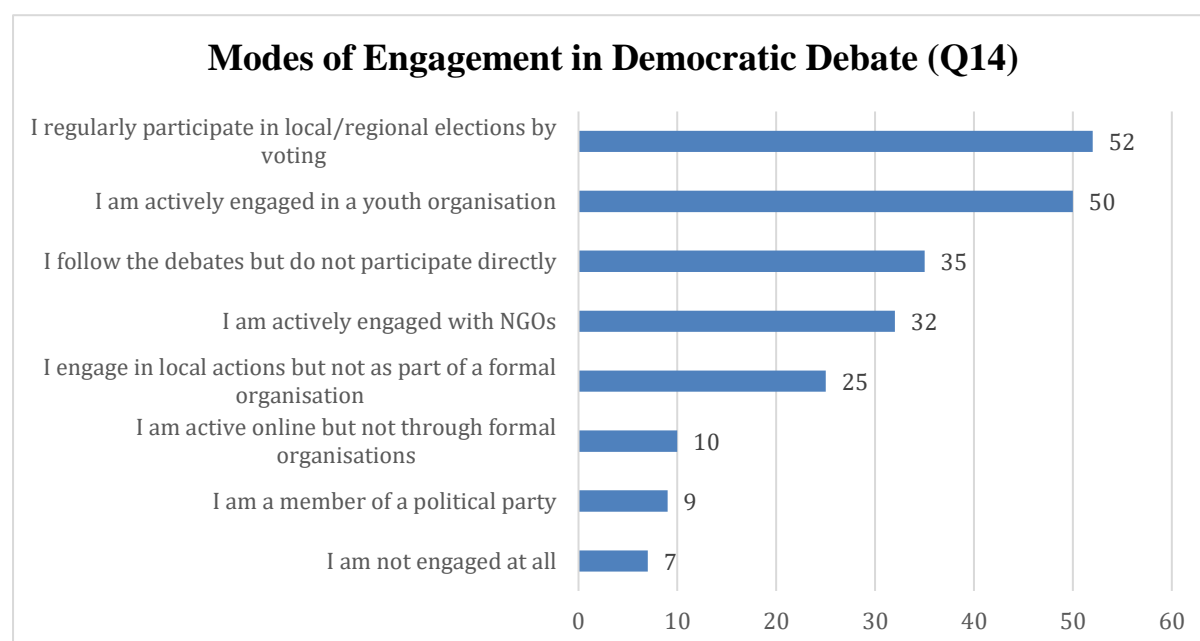


²⁰ MW Andolina et al, 'Habits from Home, Lessons from School: Influences on Youth Civic Engagement' (2003) 36 Political Science and Politics 275, 276–7.

3. Modes of Engagement

The relevant literature highlights how the traditional focus on political participation as voting or joining a political party is too narrow to capture the broad scope of youth engagement. Young people are increasingly turning to non-institutionalised forms of political participation, including online activism, demonstrations, political consumerism and signing petitions.²¹ The EPYS Flash Eurobarometer also demonstrates that, while voting is still a key means of political engagement, young people are also expressing their views through petitions, social media, boycotting certain products, protesting, volunteering for charities and NGOs, taking part in consultations, joining youth organisations and writing to politicians. Only 10% of those surveyed said they did none of these activities, hardly evidence of political apathy, and there may be further means of participation that are not on this list.

Our survey results show a significant degree of engagement either through voting or through engagement in youth organisations, as well as engagement through NGOs and local grassroots actions. Others follow the debates but do not participate directly.



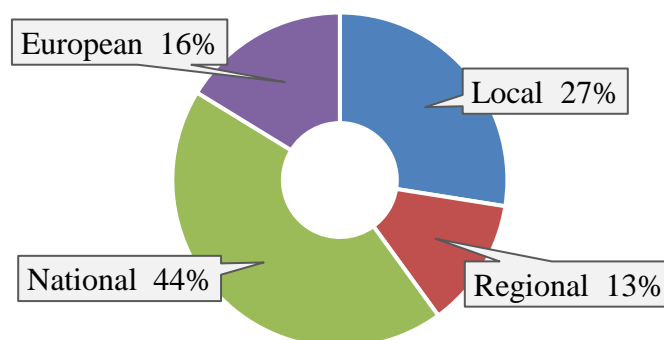
²¹ S Marien, M Hooghe and E Quintelier, 'Inequalities in Non-Institutionalised forms of Political Participation: A Multi-Level Analysis of 25 Countries' (2010) 58 Political Studies 187; HP Bang, "'Yes we can': identity politics and project politics for a late-modern world' (2009) 2 Urban Research & Practice 117, 128; J Briggs, *Young People and Political Participation: Teen Players* (Palgrave MacMillan 2017) 161.

As regards the effectiveness of different modes of engagement, young people surveyed by the EPYS Flash Eurobarometer considered that voting, taking part in protests and demonstrations, and petitions were the top three actions for making their voices heard by decision-makers. Voting was also considered the most effective means of making voices heard in a 2022 Flash Eurobarometer commissioned by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture to mark the European Year of Youth.²²

Our survey results show that young people broadly engage with politics through voting in local/regional elections and being actively engaged in youth organisations and NGOs. At a time of distrust in political elites (see survey results elsewhere), the need to acknowledge non-voting means of engagement is even more clear.

A related issue concerns the level of engagement where participation in democratic processes is considered the most effective.²³ When we asked participants to identify the level of governance at which their motivations were best met, the largest number identified the national level (n=35) whilst the second largest group identified the local level (n=22). Given the relatively low number identifying the European level (n=13) and the increase in voting in the last round of European elections, one could see an opening for encouraging even more active participation in national and local elections moving forward.

Level of governance that best meets motivations for democratic engagement (Q.15.a)



²² European Commission Flash Eurobarometer 502: 'Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth' (2022) <<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/api/deliverable/download/file?deliverableId=81514>>.

²³ One explanation found in the literature for this is that the distinction between formal and informal political activity is less strong at the local level. J Tonge, 'Revitalising Politics: Engaging Young People' (2009) 45 Representation 237, 244.

4. Ways to Increase Participation

We asked participants to suggest innovative practices that they thought might encourage and support youth participation. A number of trends appeared in the responses.

Many respondents focused on measures related to facilitating voting—either by eliminating the need to register to vote; making it easier to vote in new areas when one moves (e.g., for university); providing opportunities to vote in more convenient locations; and/or providing more information about places where young people can vote. Online voting was the practice most identified by respondents as helpful in this context whilst lowering the voting age was also identified as a promising innovation by some of the participants. Some respondents suggested having leisure activities, such as concerts or markets, near to polling stations or giving rewards for voting as means to encourage greater turnout amongst young people.

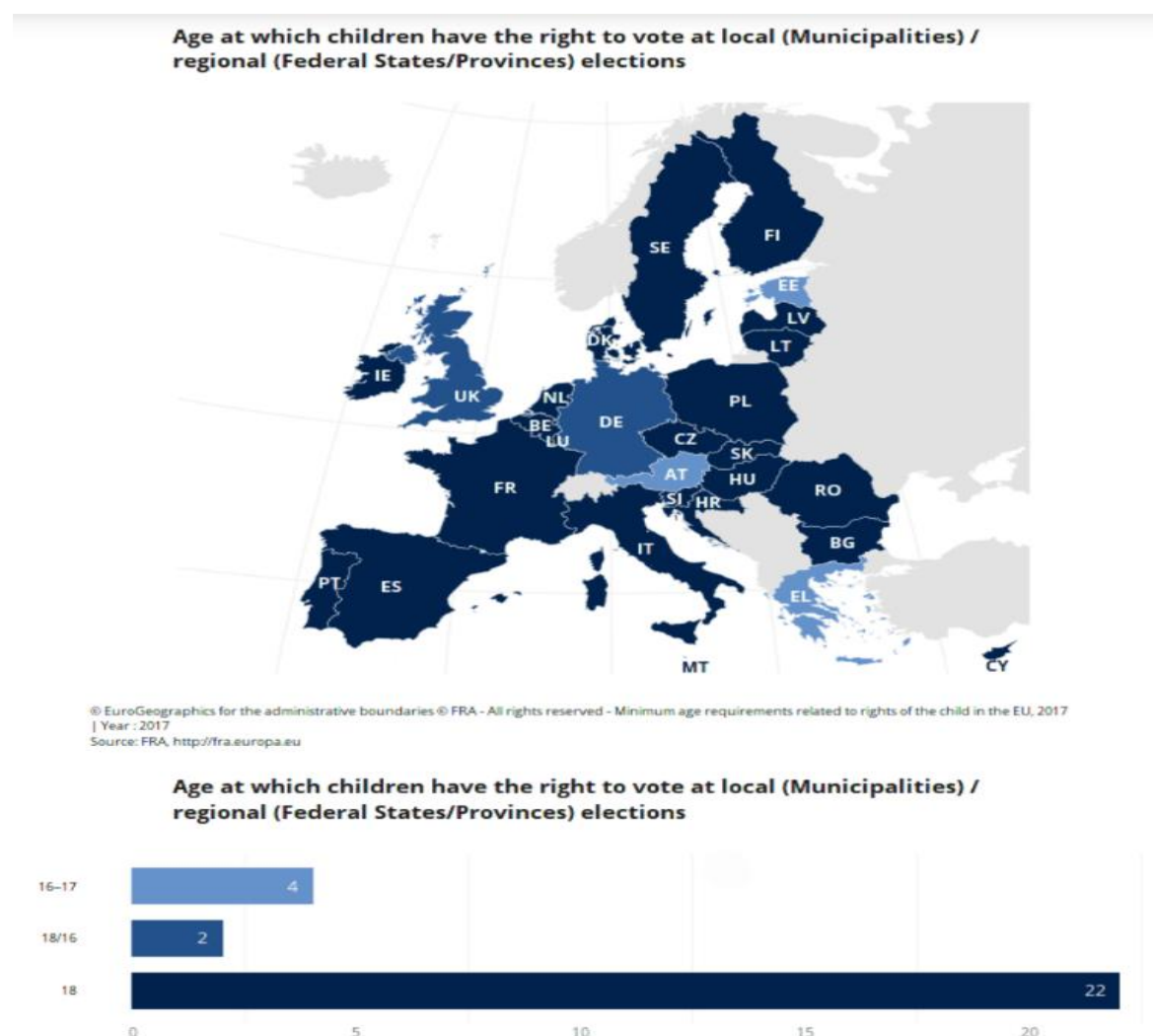
Respondents also identified the need to focus on awareness raising, including providing young people with information on the processes for voting; on the policies/manifestos of the candidates; and on the issues at stake in the election. Debates between young people and candidates in local/regional elections were also repeatedly identified as an innovative tool. Social media campaigns were identified by many as key tools to raise awareness amongst young people. The use of mock elections that provide a simulation of the real electoral process was particularly highlighted as a promising means of educating young people on how to take part. More generally, engaging with democratic participation issues in schools and through formal education structures was highlighted. Raising awareness of key issues (e.g. the environment) was also identified.

Engagement through youth councils and similar organisations, as well as with NGOs more broadly, was identified as a promising practice, with some recommending measures to support young people in either joining organisations or setting up their own. A further recommendation was the use of participatory budgeting for young people.

4.1. Voting Participation

A vast majority of the literature focuses on ways to increase engagement through higher youth turnout rates at elections. Suggestions in this regard include lowering the voting age, introducing compulsory voting, easing voter registration requirements or introducing e-voting.

As regards voting age, while a majority of countries in Europe set the voting age at 18 at the national level,²⁴ there has been greater willingness to lower the voting age at local and regional levels (e.g., in Germany, Norway, Estonia).



Supporters of lowering the voting age to 16 see it as an opportunity to include a new generation of politically active and engaged citizens, and to create a more open and fair political system.²⁵ Such optimism is supported by substantial research which shows that in elections where the voting age is lowered, turnout among 16–17 year old first-time voters is substantially higher than turnout for

²⁴ European countries that have a lower voting age nationwide include Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Malta at 16, and Greece at 17. J Eichhorn and J Bergh, 'Lowering the Voting Age to 16 in Practice: Processes and Outcomes Compared' (2021) 74 Parliamentary Affairs 507, 512.

²⁵ S Champion MP, 'Votes at 16 will not solve the problem of youth disengagement overnight, but it will help us to address the issue' (*Democratic Audit UK*, 14 May 2014) <<https://www.democraticaudit.com/2014/05/14/votes-at-16-will-not-solve-the-problem-of-youth-disengagement-overnight-but-it-will-help-us-to-address-the-issue/>>; J Eichhorn and J Bergh, 'Lowering the Voting Age to 16 in Practice: Processes and Outcomes Compared' (2021) 74 Parliamentary Affairs 507, 517; E Zeglovits and J Aichholzer, 'Are People More Inclined to Vote at 16 than at 18? Evidence for the First-Time Voting Boost Among 16- to 25-Year-Olds in Austria' (2014) 24 Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties 351, 358.

older first-time voters.²⁶ One explanation for this is that 18–21 is a period of great transition and upheaval for many young people (e.g., entering the workforce or starting university). Researchers thus suggest that lowering the voting age to a more stable time in young people’s lives might better allow young people to be socialised into a culture of voting (and broader political awareness), potentially resulting in longer-term engagement.²⁷ Research also shows that if people vote in the first election for which they are eligible, they are more likely to continue voting throughout their lives.²⁸

Some scholars also suggest considering the introduction of compulsory voting.²⁹ In countries where voting is compulsory, and usually non-voting punished with a small fine, more young people vote. For example, in Belgium the voter turnout for those under the age of 20 is 87%. In a study comparing the turnout in 15 European countries of those aged 30 and below versus those aged 60 plus, in every case electoral participation is higher in the over 60s, except for Belgium where voting is compulsory.³⁰

Literature highlights how compelling young people to cast a vote may have an educative effect, which may ‘lead to a more politically engaged electorate and may lead to greater participation in other areas of political life—not just in terms of voting’.³¹ However, there are also strong arguments against compulsory voting as this may result in superficial engagement with politics, with a significant number of people complying to avoid a penalty.³²

Critically, only 11 of our survey respondents quoted legal obligation as one of the factors that most influences the decision on whether or not to vote in local/regional elections. Conversely, 51 identified a sense of civic obligation as such a factor.

²⁶ J Aichholzer and S Kritzinger, ‘Voting at 16 in practice: A review of the Austrian case’ in J Eichhorn and J Bergh (eds), *Lowering the Voting Age to 16 – Learning from Real Experiences Worldwide* (Palgrave Macmillan 2020); M Hough, ‘Votes at 16: what the UK can learn from Austria, Norway and the Crown dependencies’ (*Democratic Audit UK*, 28 September 2013) <<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/democraticaudit/2013/09/28/votes-at-16-what-the-uk-can-learn-from-austria-norway-and-the-crown-dependencies/>>; M Franklin, *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies Since 1945* (Cambridge University Press 2004).

²⁷ M Franklin, *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies Since 1945* (Cambridge University Press 2004); D Butler and D Stokes, *Political Change in Britain: Forces Shaping Electoral Choice* (St Martin’s Press 1969).

²⁸ M Hough, ‘Votes at 16: what the UK can learn from Austria, Norway and the Crown dependencies’ (*Democratic Audit UK*, 28 September 2013) <<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/democraticaudit/2013/09/28/votes-at-16-what-the-uk-can-learn-from-austria-norway-and-the-crown-dependencies/>>.

²⁹ MP Wattenberg, *Is Voting for Young People?* (4th edn, Routledge 2016) 202.

³⁰ S Birch, G Gottfried and G Lodge, ‘Divided Democracy: Political Inequality in the UK and Why it Matters’ (Institute for Public Policy Research, November 2013) 9.

³¹ J Briggs, *Young People and Political Participation: Teen Players* (Palgrave MacMillan 2017) 248.

³² See for example Goldsmith Commission, *Citizenship. Our Common Bond*. (HMSO 2008) 107.

Views on voting in local or regional elections (Q.8)



Requiring young people to register to vote can be a significant barrier to their participation in elections, particularly for first-time voters.³³ Apart from making registration fully automatic, other ways to address this situation include ensuring that young people have ‘accessible information at hand on how to register and vote, for instance through information and registration campaigns in schools, universities and other places where young people socialise. Social media can also be leveraged, for example by prominently displaying reliable information and links to governmental websites to all users of voting age.’³⁴ Another possibility is pre-registration. Studies on the effect of allowing young people under the age of 18 to pre-register to vote so that they are already registered as soon as they turn 18 show that this increases turnout.³⁵

In countries like the **United Kingdom**, citizens must register to be included on the list of eligible voters before they can vote.

In others, like **Germany**, while it is not necessary to register to vote directly, the list of those eligible to vote is based on local residency registers. Individuals will automatically be registered to vote, but only if they have registered with the local authority when they move into a new area.

Finally, another suggested measure is online voting. While it is still in its infancy in the majority of countries, the technology exists for people to vote quickly and easily through an internet connected device and it is, therefore, highly likely the use of this technology for democratic participation will expand.³⁶

³³ *Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice Fit for All Generations?* (OECD 2020).

³⁴ *Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice Fit for All Generations?* (OECD 2020).

³⁵ J Holbein and D Hillygus, ‘Making Young Voters: The Impact of Preregistration on Youth Turnout’ (2016) 60 *American Journal of Political Science* 364.

³⁶ J Briggs, *Young People and Political Participation: Teen Players* (Palgrave MacMillan 2017) 58.

18 respondents to our survey identified the fact that voting online is not an option as a key challenge hindering their willingness to vote in local/regional elections. One might reasonably expect that this convenience would appeal to young people familiar with the internet. However, there is insufficient data on e-voting so far to draw firm conclusions and indications from recent studies suggest that providing easier means of voting does not, on its own, necessarily make up for lack of engagement.³⁷

Estonia has allowed people to cast their vote online in local elections since 2005 and in national and European elections since 2007. Surprisingly, analysis of election results from the 234 Estonian municipalities shows that internet voting has not attracted young people in great numbers. Rather, the existing habitual voters have started using the internet as an alternative to going to the polling station.

4.2. Youth Councils

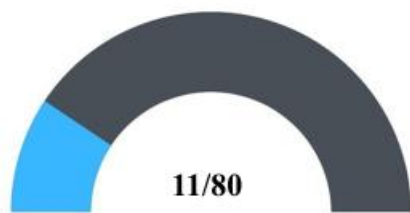
Youth Councils are broadly defined as fora established by local or regional authorities where committees of young people can discuss issues and youth policies in their local communities and engage in dialogue with decision-makers. Youth councils are widespread across Europe with almost all EU Member States having youth or children's councils at the local level.³⁸

In France alone, there are approximately 4,000 local or regional youth councils. **In Finland** and **Norway**, there is a legal obligation on authorities to create a youth council in every municipality.

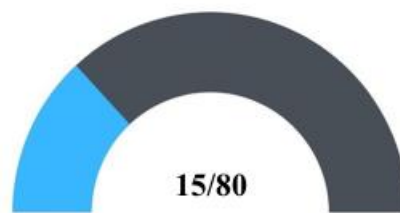
Our survey results show that a significant number of respondents (n=31) were not aware of whether a youth council is in place in their local or regional government. Only a small number of respondents reported being involved in such councils (10 at the regional and 5 at the local level). 11 respondents to the survey also noted the fact that 'youth councils do not focus on issues that matter to them' as a key barrier to engagement, whilst 31 noted that they felt their engagement would not lead to concrete results (although the latter was about engagement broadly and not exclusively related to youth councils) (Q.11).

³⁷ D Bochsler, 'Can Internet voting increase political participation?' (Centre for the Study of Imperfections in Democracy, Central European University 2010); U Serdült et al, 'Who Are the Internet Voters?' in E Tambouris et al (eds), *Electronic Government and Electronic Participation* (IOS Press 2015).

³⁸ EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 'Participating in youth or children's councils' (24 April 2018) <<https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2017/mapping-minimum-age-requirements-concerning-rights-child-eu/participating-youth-or-childrens-councils>>; L Siurala and H Turkia, 'Celebrating Pluralism: Beyond Established Forms of Youth Participation' in P Loncle et al (eds), *Youth Participation in Europe: Beyond Discourses, Practices and Realities* (Policy Press 2012) 77; A Gretscher et al, 'Youth Participation Good Practices in Different Forms of Regional and Local Democracy' (Finnish Youth Research Network 2014) 24.



Youth Councils do not focus on issues relevant to me



I am involved with Youth Councils at the local or regional level

The majority of the literature on youth participation is positive about the potential of youth councils to provide young people with skills of democratic awareness, deliberation and communication and to provide a forum for meaningful dialogue with decision-makers.³⁹

As well as canvassing for opinion in the wider community, it is also vital that the membership of the youth council itself is inclusive.⁴⁰ Indeed, a major criticism of youth councils is that often they are not sufficiently representative of young people. More precisely, the membership of youth councils

tends to be insufficiently representative of the communities they serve with disadvantaged and marginalised groups remaining chronically underrepresented. Indeed, ‘regardless of whether the councillors are invited, nominated (by teachers or school councils) or even elected, the “achievers” tend to be overrepresented.’⁴¹ This concern is further amplified by a study of youth councils in the Netherlands

In the municipality of **Ballerup (Denmark)**, the Youth Council visits all the schools and higher education institutions in the area to discuss youth-related issues with students and to take their comments. The Youth Council then passes these concerns on to the City Board in an annual meeting.

³⁹ E Sant and I Davies, ‘Promoting Participation at a Time of Social and Political Turmoil: What is the Impact of Children’s and Young People’s City Councils?’ (2018) 48 Cambridge Journal of Education 371, 374; A Gretscher et al, ‘Youth Participation Good Practices in Different Forms of Regional and Local Democracy’ (Finnish Youth Research Network 2014) 25.

⁴⁰ ‘Global Youth Council Guide: Promoting Youth Voices in Local Decision-Making’ (National Democratic Institute 2021) 38

<<https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Promoting%20Youth%20Voices%20in%20Local%20Decision-Making%20C%20Global%20Youth%20Council%20Guide.pdf>>; ‘Running an effective Comhairle na nÓg Annual General Meeting’ (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2016)

<<https://www.comhairlenanog.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Running-an-effective-CNN-AGM.pdf>>; S Borkowska-Waszak et al, ‘Good Practices of Youth Participation’ (Mid-term Deliverable Report of the project ‘Youth for a Just Transition’ commissioned by DG REGIO, June 2020) 14

<https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/eu_regional_and_urban_development/topics/documents/youth_for_a_just_transition_mid-term_deliverable_report_final.pdf>.

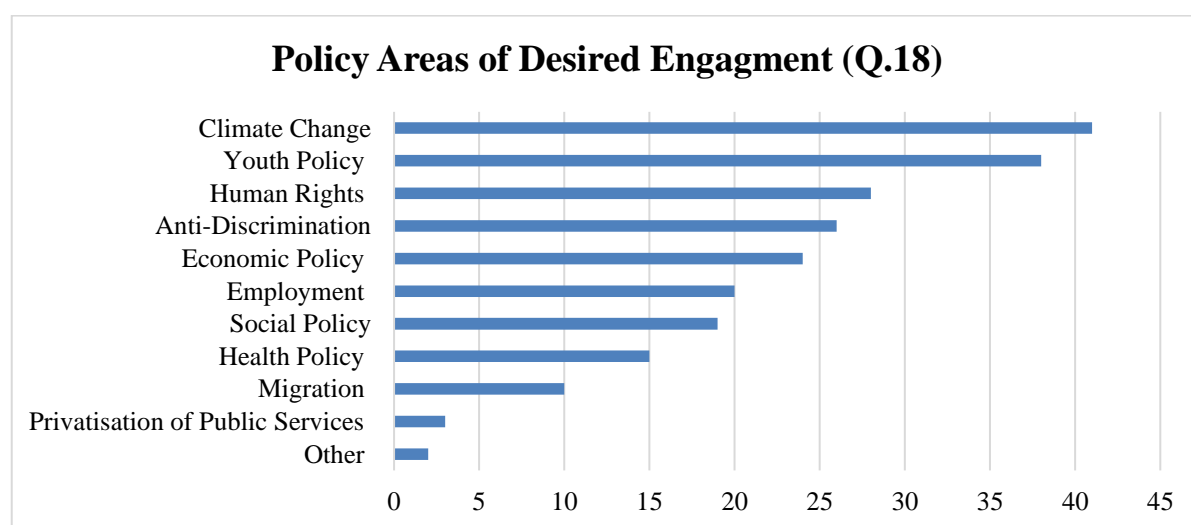
⁴¹ L Siurala and H Turkia, ‘Celebrating Pluralism: Beyond Established Forms of Youth Participation’ in P Loncle et al (eds), *Youth Participation in Europe: Beyond Discourses, Practices and Realities* (Policy Press 2012) 78–9; A Augsberger, ME Collins and W Gecker, ‘Engaging Youth in Municipal Government: Moving Toward a Youth-Centric Practice’ (2018) 26 Journal of Community Practice 41, 46.

which found that there was little interaction/consultation by council members with young people outside the council.⁴² There are however good practice examples.

In the **Paris (France)** Youth Council, membership is by statute 50% male and 50% female. Youth councils in **Flanders (Belgium)** reserve half of their membership for young people with no other organizational affiliations. This potentially gives greater representation to young people who are not already highly engaged in local civic life.

In **Ireland**, there is a youth council in each of the 31 local authority areas and each one has an annual general meeting open to all young people in the local area. To try to achieve as broad a representation as possible, letters of invitation are sent to local schools and youth groups, including organisations representing seldom-heard young people. At the annual meetings, the young people elect the youth council committee and select the topics the committee will work on for the coming year. The youth councils also have a dedicated strategy and toolkit for ensuring that underrepresented groups, such as children in care, make up at least 20% of participants.

A second criticism is that the powers of youth councils are limited to consultation. Consequently, youth councils may have a limited capacity for achieving tangible impacts; and the topics discussed are often ones deemed by others to be of interest to young people, rather than all issues of national interest which in some way or another will have an impact on young people. In our survey, we asked participants which areas they would most want to be engaged with if there were opportunities for direct participation. Whilst youth policy was selected by a significant share of respondents (n=38), other issues were also identified by significant numbers of respondents, including climate change (n=41), human rights (n=28) anti-discrimination (n=26) and economic policy (n=24). The responses are outlined in the chart below.



⁴² D Feringa and E Tonkens, 'How the participation style in local youth councils contributes to the civic engagement of young people' (2017) 26 *Journal of Social Intervention: Theory and Practice* 43.

A third criticism is that youth councils emulate the formal political institutions that young people are not engaging with, i.e., the youth council is a copy of the local council.

4.3. Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting is a deliberative democratic process where citizens are given decision-making authority on a certain amount of the municipal budget. Participatory budgeting is an inclusive, ‘low-threshold’ opportunity for participation and participants do not need to have the skills associated with navigating the formal structure of youth councils.⁴³ For young people, participatory budgeting can have a useful educative effect as they ‘learn democracy by doing’ as they deliberate on proposals to benefit their local community. The process also gives young people a voice in the community and a degree of concrete ownership over decisions that affect them.⁴⁴ There are a number of existing practices in this regard in European regions and municipalities.

In the **Lundby** area of **Gothenburg (Sweden)**, participatory budgeting has been used as an effective way to involve local people in democratic processes and to give them a voice in making improvements to the local area.

In Lundby—an economically deprived area with large immigrant communities, historically distrustful of government—local authorities work together with a diverse range of actors (schools, housing providers, community groups, leisure centres and libraries) to build trust and increase the legitimacy of decision-making processes. Innovative means have been used to be as inclusive as possible with a particular focus on involving young people (e.g., through use of sign language, and use of film workshops and visual representations to help residents develop and vote on proposals).

In the first year, over 80 proposals were submitted by residents; over 1000 votes were received; and 7 proposals are being implemented.⁴⁵ The project, called *Din Idé* (Your Idea) won an IOPD Best Practice Award for Citizen Participation in 2021.⁴⁶

In **Cluj-Napoca (Romania)**, the City Hall launched Romania’s first fully online participatory budgeting process. Citizens aged 18 and over were able to register, submit project proposals to improve the local area and vote on proposals through a dedicated platform, which was also optimised for use on mobile phones.

In the first year, 338 proposals were submitted and 8,559 people cast 29,138 votes for their 6 favourite projects, in the first round. In the second round—where citizens could vote for only one project—11,499 votes were cast, reflecting a 34% increase in the number of people participating, and 15 projects were eventually selected.

⁴³ O Bárta and A Lavizzari, ‘Insights –Meaningful youth political participation in Europe’ (European Commission and Council of Europe, December 2021) 22–3.

⁴⁴ A Cook, ‘Youth-led Participatory Budgeting in North Ayrshire’ (*Democratic Society*, 27 May 2021) <<https://www.demsoc.org/blog/youth-led-participatory-budgeting>>.

⁴⁵ ‘Your idea: Citizen’s budget in collaboration in Gothenburg’ (*YouthPB*, 2022) <<https://youthpb.eu/project/your-idea-citizens-budget-in-collaboration-in-gothenburg/>>.

⁴⁶ ‘Din Idé – Medborgarbudget i samverkan / Citizens’ budget in collaboration’ (IOPD, May 2021) <<https://oidp.net/distinction/en/record05.2021.php>>.

The online process was considered a success and has continued to be renewed in subsequent years.⁴⁷

In **Lublin (Poland)**, a participatory budgeting process called the Youth Civic Budget was developed by the city's Youth Council and the local authority's Team for Children and Youth, following a petition to the city mayor to introduce the scheme.

The process was open to informal groups of 3 or more young people, with ages ranging from primary school pupils to university students. The process aimed to stimulate youth participation in Lublin and to educate young people on how to plan, implement and manage the budget of activities in the local area. A key focus was to ensure that the young people developed their ideas independently and that project proposals were not forced by adults. Furthermore, young people participated on the jury evaluating projects.

A distinctive feature of the process was its implementation by a youth-focused NGO 'Teatrikon'. The decision to use an NGO to implement the project is a rare example of financial administration being taken out of the local authority's hands, to reduce bureaucratic hurdles and provide human resources trained to the needs of the young groups.⁴⁸

In **Colle di Val d'Elsa, Tuscany (Italy)**, in a project led by the municipality, 59 young people were selected (who were representative of the demographics of the local area) to be engaged in deliberations on how to allocate €20,000 among various youth projects. The process lasted four months and included meetings between young people and local officials, among young participants themselves and via social media.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ E Boc, 'The Development of Participatory Budgeting Processes in Cluj-Napoca' (2019) 58E Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences 38.

⁴⁸ 'Youth Civic Budget in Lublin (Poland)' (*YouthPB*, 2019) <<https://youthpb.eu/project/youth-civic-budget-in-lublin-poland/>>.

⁴⁹ A Gretschel et al, 'Youth Participation Good Practices in Different Forms of Regional and Local Democracy' (Finnish Youth Research Network 2014) 35.

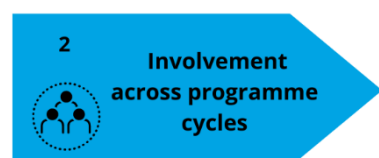
5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This research has clearly identified several trends in the way young people perceive participation and what motivates them to participate. A key takeaway is that young people engage based on the policy issues they are interested in. A second one is that they consider a much wider spectrum of avenues for democratic participation, than only voting and support for traditional political parties. A third takeaway is that civic education for citizens of all ages, including school pupils, would bolster political awareness and democratic participation.



Ensure that deliberations on youth democratic participation consider the broad range of avenues young people engage through and the variety of tools they use to engage.

Any strategy or programme that considers or seeks to expand youth participation must consider the variety of avenues of engagement and should move away from the existing focus on voting as the primary means of measuring participation. Indeed, this research has clearly shown that on various issues and in various spaces young people consider their interests better represented through, for example, engagement with NGOs and other organisations.



Engage young people (including from a range of backgrounds) in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of youth programmes.

Local and regional authorities should set up programmes, drawing from best practice examples, to promote youth democratic participation, ensuring that such programmes are designed with youth perspectives as the central consideration. Young people should not merely be consulted about the programmes but should be involved across the entire programme cycle from conception to design through implementation and monitoring and evaluation.



Consider measures that support the engagement of seldom-heard young people.

To fill in the engagement gap, local and regional authorities should put in place measures that engage groups such as migrant youth, youth from minority backgrounds, NEETs,⁵⁰ and others. Youth participation will be most effective if it represents as many young people and their backgrounds as possible. Specialised

⁵⁰ Not in Education, Employment or Training.

efforts might be needed to ensure the engagement of youth from persistently marginalised backgrounds who do not currently consider themselves represented or able to participate.



Ensure that young people are engaged not only on youth policy but on the wide range of policy areas of direct and indirect relevance to them.

Our survey shows that beyond youth policies specifically, young people would like to be engaged, including through opportunities for direct participation, in policies affecting human rights, anti-discrimination, climate change and economic policy. Local and regional authorities should carry out such similar assessments in their respective territories and follow them up through concrete measures of engagement and participation.



Consider further enhancing civic education and training on democratic participation throughout the education system.

Local and regional authorities should consider further enhancing civic education and training on democratic participation throughout the education system, including at primary and secondary school, as well as through informal education channels. Civic education is a powerful tool towards instilling both a sense of civic obligation and awareness of what and how engagement can take place at the local, regional, national and European levels.



Facilitate and support greater coherence and coordination on policy issues and on engagement measures between the local, regional, national and European levels.

Authorities at different levels should implement measures to align policies and promote coordinated action regarding engagement of young people in democratic processes. Such coordination efforts should rely on collaboration with actors at all levels of government (including at the European level), as well as with non-government stakeholders, to improve policy implementation, and better integrate policy and resource processes.



Ensure greater transparency and communication with young people.

Responses to our survey show that lack of information/awareness is a key challenge hindering participation. Also, a related concern identified by our survey is lack of communication from the local or regional government on how to engage with them. Local and regional authorities should place additional efforts on

communicating in a clear, transparent and understandable (adapted to the different audiences) way with young people in order to increase trust, participation and ultimately legitimacy of political and decision-making processes.

Annex 1 – Survey Questionnaire

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

THE STATE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY – A YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

Section 1: Demographic and Background Information

1. What is your age group?*

 - 15–17
 - 18–21
 - 22–25
 - 26–29
 - Other

2. Gender*

 - Male
 - Female
 - Other
 - Would rather not say

3. Country where you participate most actively and engage in political life*
(drop-down list of EU Member States)
4. Please tick all that apply:*

 - I am a member of a minority racial/ethnic group
 - I am a national of the country I am responding about
 - I am a national of another EU Member State
 - I am a non-EU national
 - I consider myself as having a disability
 - Would rather not say

5. Area of residence*

 - Urban
 - Rural

6. Highest Level of education attained/enrolled in to date:*

 - Primary
 - Secondary
 - Technical/professional certificate
 - Graduate
 - Post-Graduate

- Would rather not say
7. Compared to the average in your region, would you consider your household's level of income to be:*
- Lower than average
 - Average
 - Higher than average
 - Would rather not say

Section 2: Factors Influencing Decisions on Democratic Participation

8. What are 3 factors that most influence your decision on whether to vote at the local (e.g., city/town) / regional (e.g., province) level?*
- Sense of civic obligation
 - Legal obligation
 - Desire to change something
 - Sense of justice
 - Practical considerations
 - Peer or family influence
 - A specific policy concern (e.g., climate change, migration, inequality, the economy)
 - I am not interested in voting
 - I am not eligible to vote in local/regional elections
 - Other (please specify)
9. On a scale of 1 to 5, how influential would each of the following be on your decision on who to vote for at the local/regional level?*
- Traditional Media
 - Social Media
 - Family Views
 - Friends' Views
 - Teachers / Educators
 - A specific issue (e.g., climate change, migration, inequality, the economy)
 - Other (please specify)
10. What are the key challenges hindering your willingness to vote in local/regional elections? Choose up to five.*
- Lack of information/awareness
 - Lack of trust in political elites
 - Lack of trust in democratic processes
 - Lack of options that meet your expectations (e.g., I do not feel represented by any of the candidates)
 - It is inconvenient to vote (e.g., voting centres are far away/no postal voting)
 - Documentation is difficult to get/registration is needed and is time consuming

- Voting online is not an option
 - The timing of elections is inconvenient (e.g., clashes with work commitments/elections are scheduled too closely to each other)
 - My disability/health status means it is very difficult for me to vote
 - I am not interested in voting
 - Other (please specify)
11. What do you see as the main challenges hindering your active and meaningful participation in democratic processes (besides voting) at the local and regional levels? Choose up to five.*
- Lack of information/awareness
 - Lack of trust in political elites
 - Lack of trust in democratic processes
 - It is inconvenient to participate (e.g., organisations meet at times that clash with other commitments)
 - Participating online is not an option
 - My disability/health status means it is very difficult for me to engage
 - NGOs are very exclusive and I do not feel I belong
 - I would like to be involved in youth councils but there are no such options
 - Youth councils do not focus on issues that matter to me
 - I do not feel that my engagement would lead to concrete results
 - I am not interested in engaging
 - Other (please specify)
12. How would you rate the communication from the local or regional government on ways you can engage with them?*
- Very good
 - Good
 - Satisfactory
 - Less than satisfactory
 - Insufficient or absent
13. Can you mention up to three innovative practices supporting youth democratic participation? (e.g., projects to promote voter registration amongst new voters; opportunities for virtual participation in debates; awareness raising campaigns). Give as much detail as possible including hyperlinks, if available.
- I.
- II.

Section 3: Engagement in Democratic Debate

14. Which of the following represents your mode of engagement in democratic debate? Tick as many as apply.*
- ☐ I am a member of a political party
 - ☐ I regularly participate in local/regional elections by voting
 - ☐ I am actively engaged in a youth organisation
 - ☐ I am actively engaged with NGOs
 - ☐ I engage in local actions (protests, solidarity) but not as part of a formal organisation
 - ☐ I am active online but not through formal organisations
 - ☐ I follow the debates but do not participate directly
 - ☐ I am not engaged at all
15. Which of the following most strongly represents your motivation for engaging in democratic debate? You can pick up to 3 choices below.*
- ☐ Personal interest
 - ☐ The interest of my immediate family
 - ☐ The interests of my friends and people my age
 - ☐ The interests of the community I live in
 - ☐ The interests of my country
 - ☐ My interests as an EU citizen
 - ☐ My specific interest in certain policy areas (e.g. migration, climate change, inequality, the economy)
 - ☐ Other (please specify)
- 15a (LINKED). At which level of engagement do you consider this motivation to be best met?
- ☐ Local
 - ☐ Regional
 - ☐ National
 - ☐ European
16. At the local and regional levels, do you think your views are best represented through (choose only 1):*
- ☐ Representative democracy (meaning you elect people who then make decisions)
 - ☐ Direct democracy (where you engage directly e.g., through a referendum)
 - ☐ Active engagement by NGOs and civil society
17. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being not important at all) how important are the following policy areas to your engagement?*
- ☐ Anti-Discrimination
 - ☐ Climate Change
 - ☐ Economic Policy
 - ☐ Employment

- Health Policy
 - Human Rights
 - Migration
 - Privatisation of public services
 - Social policy
 - Youth Policy
18. If there were mechanisms for direct participation, about which of the following would you be most interested in being consulted? Identify up to three policy areas.*
- Anti-Discrimination
 - Climate Change
 - Economic Policy
 - Employment
 - Health Policy
 - Human Rights
 - Migration
 - Privatisation of public services
 - Social policy
 - Youth Policy
 - Other
19. Have you ever been involved in a project at a European Level?*
- Yes, directly
 - Yes, indirectly
 - No, but I would like to be
 - No and I am not interested
20. Does the local or regional government in your area have in place youth councils or similar institutions?*
- Yes – Local
 - Yes – Regional
 - No – Local
 - No – Regional
 - I do not know
- 20.a Are you involved in them? (related question – appears unless one has responded ‘I do not know’ in the previous one)
- Yes at regional level
 - Yes at local level
 - No at regional level
 - No at local level

Annex 2 – Bibliography

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Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 101 | 1040 Bruxelles/Brussel | BELGIQUE/BELGIË | Tel. +32 22822211
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