



# EUROPE, WHERE ARE YOU GOING? Policy paper

WwEU

All photos by the project and WwEU

The Game Changers policy paper is based on dialogues with the project's students and teachers along the project and a questionnaire created at the end of the project to catch concrete testimonies.

Key messages, unedited and authentic, from teachers and students are inserted.





## CONTENT

<b>INTRODUCING THE PROJECT</b>	4
<b>PART 1- STATE OF THE ART KEY FACTORS CAUSING EUROPE TO INCREASINGLY LOSE ITS YOUNG GENERATIONS</b>	6
<b>PART 2- HOW SCHOOLS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE PREVENTION OF DISENGAGEMENT AND DISINTEREST?</b>	11
<b>THE THREE PROJECT ENGAGEMENT CRITERIA FOR SCHOOLS</b>	16
<b>PART 3- THE DECLINE OF POLITICAL LEADERS AND POLITICAL SYSTEMS VERSUS THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCEPTICISM AND DISINTEREST.</b>	19
<b>THE WILLINGNESS AND ABILITY OF EUROPE TO RESPONSE.</b>	
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY SUPPORT Messages sent to educational policy-makers?</b>	24

This paper is set on 2 years of practical experimentation with the participation of five secondary schools, teachers and students, two knowledge partners and one quality assurance partner from different European countries.

The document is based on the project activities reflection on why Europe is losing its young generations and to what extent the establishment is willing and able to allow the young generations to challenge things like 'politics', 'democracy' and 'European values'.

The policy paper is not a research paper and it doesn't pretend to provide research results, as this is not the aim of an Erasmus+ project.

Therefore, the language of the document is not academic, making its content accessible and attractive to very large audiences.

In other words, the text contributes to an understanding of what further steps might be taken in the core field addressed.

Thus, the text might inspire new European initiatives based on and going further than the project.

Rich examples of the project experience can be found in the [project website](#).

*The GAME CHANGERS project 2019-21 is funded by the European Commission Erasmus+ program*



## **INTRODUCING THE PROJECT**

Young students as political GAME CHANGERS developing an easy-to-use model for secondary schools to help engage young students in politics based on their own interests and their 21st century culture.

The European Commission and state of the art research jointly agree that the increasing disinterest in politics among young Europeans is a giant challenge and a threat to a sustainable and democratic Europe.

To tackle this challenge, the traditional understanding of politics, democracy and EU values must be fundamentally questioned and deconstructed (as strongly recommended by state-of-the-art critical research).

The young students themselves must be allowed to take the scene and co-create what politics, democracy and EU values mean in their world and how the school can provide the necessary space for such youth-driven innovation.

The partnership of GAME CHANGERS went through the two years project creating valuable experience and knowledge and this Policy Paper is missioned to transform this knowledge into some lessons learned and policy recommendation.

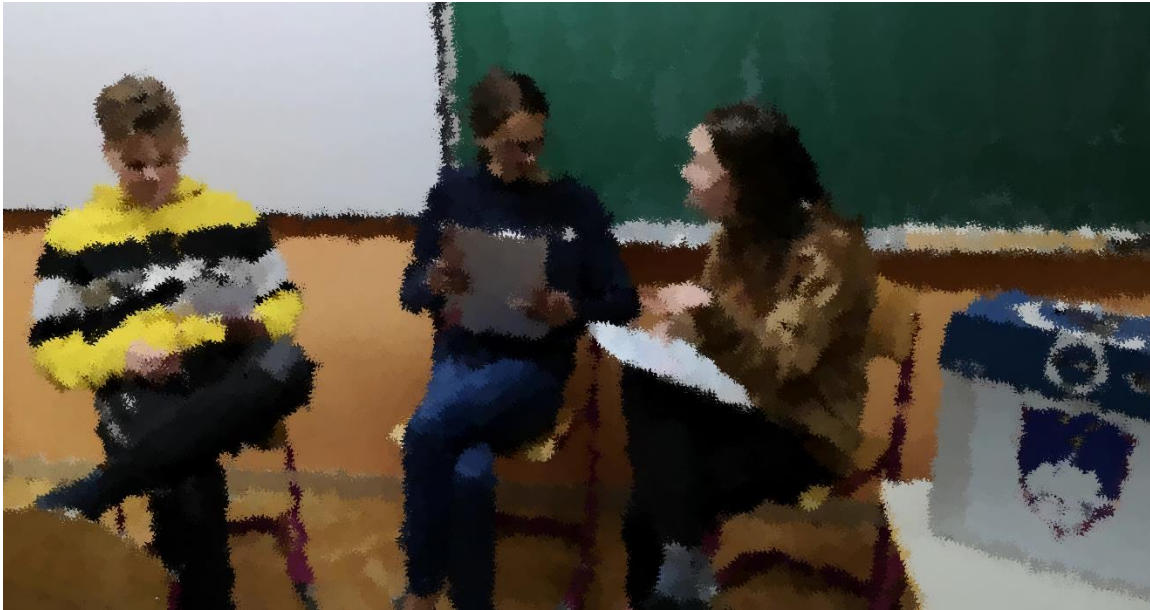
GAME CHANGERS was not a non-formal Youth project but a school project, engaging young students systematically in politics.

The project's mission was to address through innovative work methods, the urgent challenge of young Europeans' increasing disengagement in politics. To do that, the project focused on a key question: how can open schooling in secondary schools contribute to engaging young people in politics, democracy and European values?

Co-driven by the students themselves, the project aimed to create an innovative and easy-to-use model for secondary schools to help engage young students in politics based on their own interests and their 21st century culture.

The guidance has been developed through real-life and real-time open schooling, and therefore based on practical experience, not on imposed assumptions.

Highlight that the overall mission of the project was not to re-engage young people disinterested in politics, but to create innovative approaches in early schooling that prevent such disinterest and foster authentic and sustainable engagement.



## **PART 1- STATE OF THE ART**

### **KEY FACTORS CAUSING EUROPE TO INCREASINGLY LOSE ITS YOUNG GENERATIONS**

*Government participation policies reproduce adult-led, hierarchical and elitist modes of participation. They fail to recognise the shift from membership-based to network-based society...*

*Philippa Collin, Young Citizens and Political Participation in a Digital Society, 2015*



#### **STUDENTS VOICES**

Most of the students aren't interested in politics and they do not talk about politics at home.

Some of them think politics is useless and many of them associate politicians with corruption.

The only way they see participating in politics is through social media.

None of them stated to have participated in a civic project apart from some clean up event.



Yes, some of them are interested in politics because they politics as a gateway to understanding how our country's system works inside and

outside, and knowing what situation we are in politically is a useful tool to have in life.

Young people go for activism rallies, such as climate change and human rights, but when it comes to their individual aspirations, they're lost. Most young people nowadays are troubled with the concept of responsibility and adulthood, and many cannot take it and remain unemployed or get drawn into the radical side of politics and become harmful to their own environment.

There are lots of people in our community that enjoy discussing politics. Among them, some agree, some disagree between themselves. Politics should be a platform for discussion, and not hatred aimed at opposing opinions. We often discuss some issues with colleagues, but those issues are usually minor compared to something grand like the elections or global trends.

At home, it's a different story, because it's easier to feel comfortable discussing even the taboos of political topics.

If there is good reason to participate in politics and civic activities then any student should be able to participate in furthering change in our country's policies, or at least attempting to. Naturally, there are risks with any form of activism, but if they are well-assessed, anybody should have the freedom to spread their word.



Mostly they are not interested in politics, they think that the topics addressed by politicians are often boring

The word politics has a derogatory connotation in our country.

The main problem of young people in Europe is fake news, misinformation and deception on social networks. What worries them the most is the political abuse of social networks. They are concerned about the media owned by politicians and reporting falsely. They believe that politicians should not be the owners of the media.

They also think disinformation is a major problem. They are concerned about threats and blackmail on social media and about the attacks on journalists, who are therefore unable to report credibly.

The main problem of young people in Europe is unemployment, but what worries them the most is global warming.

They think the biggest problem for young people in Europe is precarious forms of employment, because people in precarious work have no rights to holiday pay, paid sick leave or redundancy payments. Currently, they are most concerned about coronavirus disease.

The biggest problem for young people in Europe is poor housing conditions or very expensive rents. This makes it difficult for young people to move away from their parents. The concern is that housing prices after the covid-19 pandemic will be even more expensive.

The main problem for young people in Europe is the constant exposure to hate speech. What worries them most is how negative information affects our mental health.

Most students do not talk about politics at home. The exception is the time before the election or when important political decisions are published in the daily news.

Students don't talk with friends about politics.



The GAME CHANGERS project was from the beginning oriented towards the European Commission's and leading research's statements: the increasing disinterest in politics among young Europeans is a giant challenge and a threat to a sustainable, democratic Europe.

In light of this statement, two very basic questions arise from the first moment: what happens? what are the reasons for this disinterest?

This is the context of the GAME CHANGERS project.

Through many practical experimentations along with the project, a number of very concrete and strong messages emerged.

Importantly, these messages are reinforced with the voices obtained in the questionnaire especially created for this policy paper.

The students' voices show us a very interesting point: their interest or not in politics is linked to their countries and how their countries do politics.

**KEY FACTORS THAT MIGHT EXPLAIN WHY EUROPE IS LOSING ITS YOUNG GENERATIONS:**

#### **CHANGING PATTERNS**

Today's youth have been grown in a world that is significantly different from their parents' world. This makes the young people different.

They live, learn and see themselves differently.

In fact, young people are authentic products of 21<sup>st</sup> century communication technology and that changes everything. And of course, this influences how



they define their identity, citizenship and how they want to participate in democratic and civic life.

#### SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

*The flexibility needed to adjust to this kind of instability, and the resulting loose ties young people may have to essential aspects of their life (work, economic security, home), changes the way young people perceive their citizenship and political participation.*

*As such, the intensity and modes of participation can shift across time, embracing membership of new communities along with changes in their priorities and interests. In other words, political participation is transforming to become more ad hoc, personalised and 'self-expressive'*

*Beyond apathetic or activist youth: Ordinary young people and contemporary forms of participation*

*Harris, Wyn and Younes, 2010.*

Unlike previous generations, today's young people experience fractured paths to their financial and social independence.

The European economic crisis and the challenging problems of unemployment and job distrust together with that they are not allowed to join and participate in the public debates appear to have a clear impact on them.

Research data mention that 15% of young Europeans are neither at work nor studying (NEETs) and it seems that this data is increasing.

This dark number shows that this is not a problem for young people as individuals, but an issue for European society.

#### LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

A large number of young people admit that they do not know enough about Europe and its politics and they find politics boring.

They ignore how politics in Europe work, they do not know about their rights as EU citizens and how all this can affect their lives.

#### POLITICAL TRUST

As we can see from the students' voices, and again, depending on the countries, the lack of leadership and the low credibility of the politicians and social leaders is a general voice.

Mostly, young people show a big disinterest in the political agenda. They feel that their needs and demands are not taken into account (political ineffectiveness).

And the issues that matter to them are rarely included in the political agendas.

#### POLITICAL CORRUPTION AND IMPUNITY FOR THE CORRUPT

At the same level, and, once again, depending on the students' home countries, there is a general belief that politics cannot transform society.

They have the feeling that the important decisions that affect the everyday lives of citizens are not made in parliaments. They believe that decisions come from power, individual, or parties' interests, but are not democratically elected.

However, and despite these untrusted messages, one can also see that not all political disaffection is necessarily a political disengagement. A clear example of this is in some of the student's voices when expressing climate change and human rights interests and concerns.

This is interesting, perhaps the disengagement can bring new ways? For instance, research data tell us that the levels of unusual political participation are increasing, particularly with regard to protest actions. Young people trust in new ways, forms of actions such as demonstrations, strikes, having a voice in online platforms. And all this states that young people non participating in what it is known as traditional forms of political engagement does not mean that they do not believe in anything or pass of everything.

In fact, European studies make clear that there is a strong interest among young people in politics when is about organising, mobilising, and contesting.

Is then a new concept of citizenship and politics based on civic values such as solidarity and respect growing?

In short,

From the late 20th century, there has been a tendency among young people towards increased informal participation and lower formal participation.

Young people express dissatisfaction with old ways of doing politics and disengagement from formal and traditional political processes. They are, however, involved and participating in other ways because they want to have a voice about topics that they are very concerned.

The students' voices make clear that they are concerned about their future and this makes them sceptical about politics.

The internet and social media, which they have grown up with and believe in, are key aspects and obviously, have transformed their participation and communication.

All this leads Europe to the need of rethinking the meaning of political participation and being engaged. As well as to what kind of Europe are we offering to the young people.

And perhaps, instead of keeping insisting about whether young people are disengaged, or they're are different, or passing, one could start thinking that most young people are all three at the same time because they see things dark and they need a transformation of politics to feel part of Europe.



*“Politics” in this project does not indicate any form of specific political preferences, but simply means “taking active part in local and global challenges as citizens”. It therefore links strongly to the EU Commission’s long-standing call for active citizenship – and this needs to start in secondary school.*

*The project*

## **PART 2- HOW SCHOOLS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE PREVENTION OF DISENGAGEMENT AND DISINTEREST?**



### **TEACHERS**

We think the schools are a good place for students to get involved with politics. Actually, that’s what we try to do in the Erasmus+ class and this topic is also dealt with in the subject ‘Culture and Values’.

We definitely think that the students must be taught to participate in politics and civic activities. For instance, in our school, they participate in different volunteer tasks such as: food collecting for people in needs and blood bank participation among others.

Civic activities should be taught at primary school as well as at home.

Open schooling is a good method to engage them as they learn and get new viewpoints from different people’s contributions. This way, they might become more involved in this kind of civic activities.

Teachers can build capacity by sharing the projects that we are dealing with, including the difficulties, doubts and successful ideas too. Basically, what we do when we meet either face to face or virtually.

Erasmus+ projects is a good way to make young people become aware of the fact that although they are under 18 and they can't vote yet, they have the right to speak up and share their needs, complaints and ideas to make their local area or even this world a better one.

We think it's a good method as students can learn from each other by sharing their worries with students from other countries. It's a suitable way to engage and motivate them in political aspects.



Though schools should be open for any kind of political discussion, it's certainly disadvantageous to draw very young people into politics, because they can very easily become radicalized and take a wrong turn in their political discoveries. If you want to do politics, it's best to do it outside of the confines of school-aged children and adolescents.

Activism is good if you know what you're doing. Children and teens under 18 might not know what they're doing, and may be used because of it. Radicals and even cult organizers might win over children and teens who have stepped too deep into the political sphere and use them for wicked means, which is a serious threat to the wellbeing of our society.

Open Schooling is fundamental by design, which means that it can be used for many purposes, including politics. This does not mean, however, that political study should be implemented through it. Open Schooling should be about science, and politics isn't a STEM-sort of science, it's more of a humanities affair. Whether Open Schooling is a good method for political engagement of young people or not depends on how it is used. If it is used to discuss politics carefully and sparingly so as not to radicalize children, it is good. Otherwise, it might present some problems.

Politics should be discussed carefully and sparingly so as not to radicalize children. In order to support such projects, the teachers must be well-spoken and well-read and know every little detail of the topic that is about to be discussed. Also, any form of discussion should be an open discussion, not a debate, seeing as politics should be perceived as a net of ideas, not a platform for opposing opinions. In order to build capacity, certain curricula should be set for the teachers to meet before each part of the proceedings. Only a select few of teachers should advance to actually leading a discussion in the classroom.

Through travel and communication, Erasmus+ does a wonderful job of bringing people of different backgrounds and opinion closely together, and this is good for all parties involved. On a deeper level of politics, people from

different countries might have topics they are sensitive to that shouldn't be brought to light among their visitors. These things should be addressed carefully and at opportune times. If Erasmus+ was to be used to experiment with engaging young people in politics, it should be supervised to the utmost extent. Otherwise, it would be a risky form of promulgating political engagement.



Yes, schools are the optimal space for the formation of young people as political subjects. In the school environment, young people can develop political literacy, develop critical thinking, certain attitudes and democratic values, and become actively involved in social life.

Absolutely. Young people should be taught to participate in politics and civic activities. We need to enable young people to build themselves into young political figures who will be able to critically assess information, express views and stand up for democratic values. The last decades have witnessed a growth in the share of young European Union citizens who express alienation, and distrust toward social and political institutions at the national as well as the European level.”

Yes, open schooling is a good method, because young people:

- recognize democracy in their immediate environment;
- recognize the tasks performed by political figures and the duties and responsibilities of those in power;
- identify in cases the responsible or irresponsible conduct of the authorities and the consequences of such conduct;
- learn how important it is for civil society to be active;
- develop a positive attitude towards civic action by getting acquainted with various actions;
- learn why it is important for the government to act in public;
- learn about the role of the media in detecting abuses of political power;
- adopt the principle of pluralism (confrontation of different opinions);
- understand the important role of the media in modern societies ...

I believe that projects such as this one, are very important for next generations, and we teachers strive to facilitate and support this kind of projects.

What helps with this kind of projects are clear and written instructions of all the output material that is expected of us, so that we can do our part quickly and efficiently, and also that the tasks are not too demanding time wise. I believe that sometimes “less is more” could be applied to these projects. In that case there is more time to do research and there is not so much pressure on the final output.

Yes, I believe that Erasmus+ projects are appropriate and useful. Students like participating in this project.



## STUDENTS

Schools could be a good place to learn about politics participation. Some students show interest in learning how to participate in civic activities in their local area. Others think it's none of their business.



It's necessary to discuss politics because it's an avenue of thought that must be known to all people, young and old. Of course, opinions may always differ, and there may be radical outliers here and there, but these discussions bring to light a lot of what's going on in the world, and we feel that it's quite important.

If there is good reason to do so, any student should be able to participate in furthering change in our country's policies, or at least attempting to. Naturally, there are risks with any form of activism, but if they are well-assessed, anybody should have the freedom to spread their word.

Open schooling is a good way to learn just about anything, therefore it should also be implemented in political discussions and any form of such activism in our schools. But politics is more of a water cooler topic rather than a science, so it might not be as effective as usual.

Erasmus+ is a great tool for communication and discussion. That is why it would be good to discuss politics through it as well. Young people meeting up all over the world to discuss various ideas that are relevant right now - it's hard to think of a better strategy to build strength of mind in unity.

Yes, there are lots of things that need to witness change in our community and environment, and through various sub-projects we do in school, we achieve just that. We've come to know many forms of spreading information and raising awareness thanks to OS and respective projects. This has helped us in implementing new ways of speaking to people and reaching out to those who need support. We've spread various science ideas, done experiments and showcased our knowledge in just about every way you can think of. If an obstacle ever presents itself, we usually know what to do, and if not, our teachers are always there to guide us.



All students agreed that the school is a suitable place for the formation of young people as political subjects and to prepare young people for active citizenship.

Yes, we should be taught to participate in politics. Many young people are unfortunately only committed to their material goods. We should do more for the good of the community and the environment. We must be aware that we will soon have the right to vote and we will decide our fate and the fate of this planet. Many young people are not aware of this. If we are passive, we will only be puppets in the hands of populist leaders. We need to learn how to be politically active.

Yes, open schooling gave us an insight into the work of politicians, with it we learned to cooperate, respect different opinions and find solutions.

Yes, we participate in trying to change our community. We attend school parliament sessions where we take initiatives for changes in our school environment. In the local community, we take part in cleaning up campaigns, campaigns to collect old paper, we help the elderly, and, if possible, participate in humanitarian campaigns. Every year we actively participate in the Amnesty International's "Write for Rights" campaign, which aims to change the lives of people or communities who have suffered or are at risk of human rights violations.

We like to participate in Erasmus+ projects.



*True youth engagement requires a fundamental shift. Young people must have an authentic voice in the design, development and day-to-day functions of activities. It is impossible to overstate the importance of this shift from adult-directed to youth-owned.*

*The best way for adults to engage young people is to ask for their views, opinions and direction—and to listen carefully to their answers. Young people recognize the difference between token participation and authentic engagement. Roles that may seem subtle to adults are often very clear to youth.*

*"Engaging youth in community decision-making"*

*Center for the Study of Social Policy, Washington, DC*

*2007*

One of the challenges we must face as a society in relation to the current system (political, economic, social and cultural) is to review the role of the

school as an optimal space for the formation of young people also as political subjects.

Some years ago, it would have been less understandable and perhaps even irrelevant for secondary schools to take initiatives to what we can call “politics engagement of young people”.

“Politics” in the school field does not indicate any form of specific political preferences, but simply means “taking active part in local and global challenges as citizens”.

It therefore links strongly to the European Commission’s long-standing call for active citizenship – and this needs to start in secondary school.

Despite a longstanding commitment to citizenship education in secondary schools, this has not resulted in the widespread political engagement of young people. It is understandable that those working in the formal education sector will have some reticence about using the term ‘political’ so we must be clear that this is not an issue of party politics but it is in line with European Commission calls for systematic initiatives to re-engage young people in politics based on their own understanding and their own voices.

Actually, the only context in which young people can be systematically re-engaged in politics is in school. Few young people are engaged in non-formal activities that address various forms of politics.

Engagement in politics and global challenges should take place as early as possible, and certainly in secondary school, as these are the years in which young people form their identity and can also develop a resistance to traditional politics.

To counter increasing and somewhat well-justified disinterest in politics in Europe, the young people must be much more substantially engaged. The research identifies the need to include citizenship education in the school curricula to provide students with practical opportunities to apply as citizens actively and practically in connection with their communities, and this means engaged through school activities, precisely in the form of open schooling.

And in fact, the teachers’ voices confirm that.

## **THE THREE PROJECT ENGAGEMENT CRITERIA FOR SCHOOLS**

### **OPEN SCHOOLING**

Open schooling – so strongly recommended by the European Commission – is a perfect way to engage and re-engage young students in the world of politics.

But the reality is that very few schools in Europe can engage or re-engage the young students in the world of politics through an open schooling approach – strongly linked to working with the community.



The schools and the teachers need practical useful guidelines on how to initiate such activities for the students, activities that can be implemented flexibly in the school curricula, for example in social science.

As one of the teachers tell us: *Actually, that's what we try to do in the Erasmus+ class and this topic is also dealt with in the subject 'Culture and Values'.*

This is what the GAME CHANGERS project aimed, meeting the needs through delivering practically useful and attractive guidance to secondary school teachers and the new generations of teacher students.

The project based its basic approach on Open Schooling, allowing the students to learn through interaction with authentic resources in the community.

Some examples included in the project approach were:

- direct engagement in important political challenges or cases in the community or online communities
- interacting with community resources with personal experience in 'politics and democracy', for example, older people (intergenerational approach)
- direct engagement in critical and disturbing challenges such as radicalisation, terrorism, civil rights, religious conflicts and similar
- creating knowledge 'on demand' (when needed), not 'when scheduled' (classroom)

#### CO-CREATION APPROACH

It is of great importance that the politics and democracy activity in secondary school is co-created and co-designed by the young students themselves. This ownership criterion is absolutely crucial to success.

Ready-made menus of politics and democracy re-engagement do not work. They basically block the young students' engagement interest and more, they make young people feel the same way they feel in society: aside and forgotten.

This criterion is represented and put to work in the GAME CHANGERS project precisely through its cocreation criteria:

- teams of young students engage in decisions on the implementation of the project
- teams of young students co-create the project knowledge about the increasing disengagement in politics and democracy, including creating a political discourse of their own
- teams of young students co-create the re-engagement innovation
- teams of young students co-create the outcomes of the project

#### SUBJECTIVE ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

The 3rd set of re-engagement criteria is often forgotten or in some cases less understood by research and policy initiatives for young people.

This criterion is about the young person's subjective and emotional conditions for engagement and in particular re-engagement.

Innovative open schooling must give the young student a totally different impression of what 'politics' is or could be, and the new experience must link to the teenager's identity development. As we saw, the subjectivity of 21<sup>st</sup> young people is very different from earlier generations.

Last but not least, the project tried at the same time to contribute to the very important promotion of the teacher profession, as the only sustainable way to acknowledge the teacher profession is to create new capacity and competences among teachers to innovate traditional education and to meet the students' needs in a globalised world through open schooling and working with community.



*Scholars and policy makers continue to struggle to comprehend the causes and implications of a general decline in traditional forms of political participation. Young people are frequently blamed for this decline and are targeted with a range of policy mechanisms to 'remedy' the 'problem'."*  
*Philippa Collin, Young Citizens and Political Participation in a Digital Society, 2015*

### **PART 3- THE DECLINE OF POLITICAL LEADERS AND POLITICAL SYSTEMS VERSUS THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCEPTICISM AND DISINTEREST. THE WILLINGNESS AND ABILITY OF EUROPE TO RESPONSE.**



**STUDENTS:**

What do the students think about politics, politicians and activism?

Students are not very into politics nor fond of our politicians either. Generally, they see politics as a distant topic and directly associate politicians with corruption.

They do not belong to any youth movement linked a political party and only see social media as a possible way to have a voice.



To have your voice heard in the political scheme of things, social media is the first thing that comes to mind. But the most important thing should be articulation and simply being informed as well as informative. If a person sharing their ideas truly knows what they are talking about, discussing or disseminating, they will be listened to more actively, as well as supported more, as well. As for forms of participation, things such as PSAs, surveys, and any form of amateur journalism or activism should do the job just fine.

In our hometown, there is a small semi-political party called JKL (League of young conservatives) which gather round intermittently to discuss various issues that are relevant to our immediate environment at certain times of the year. We believe that this league is important because it provides a platform for young people to express their political opinions outside of school, in a more serious, albeit controlled, setting, as it should be done. Some young people from our school are interested or belong to this JKL movement.

Politics gives rise to freedom of thought and expression. In no other avenue is it more appropriate to gather round and discuss important worldly issues. It inspires the search for newfound policies, methods of discussion, sharing of information and communication in general. It inspires activity, something that all young people should be taking full use of.



We think that the most effective forms to have a voice are:

- participation in elections
- posts on social networks
- participation in public protests
- European Citizen's Initiative

We belong to some associations, such as the mountaineering association; theatre club; voluntary fire brigade and athletic society

We don't belong to any youth movement linked to a political party

When thinking of politics and politicians this is what comes to our minds:

A sense of curiosity

A feeling of anxiety and sometimes even anger.

Populist politicians who talk nonsense annoy us.



*The remoteness with which they [young people] mainly view political institutions is in stark contrast with their often-passionate commitments to particular issues and personally defined acts incorporated in their everyday lives." Philippa Collin, Young Citizens and Political Participation in a Digital Society, 2015*

Europe is in times of deep and multiple crises and challenges.

European democracies suffer from several deficits, which leads to a deficit of trust in institutions and representatives of elected democracy among the European citizens. Many authors define it as a crisis of citizenship.

Political conflicts, migration, geopolitical security challenges, pollution and climate change challenges emphasize that political engagement is not anymore local or national, but global.

Globalised Europe is moving towards considerable and extremely challenging social problems.

Globalisation and demographic factors, such as longer lives and in-migration from other continents, put enormous pressure on member states.

The new nationalist winds puffing over Europe do not make it likely that governments will react in various innovative ways to the challenges; on the contrary, everything looks more traditional making than ever.

And in front of this panorama, the European Commission calls for systematic initiatives to re-engage young people in politics based on their own understanding and voices. Why? Because unless young people are re-engaged in politics, the European Union's democratic project will be significantly challenged and may not survive.

What are then the most dramatic challenges in the 21st that might lead Europe into a deep political engagement crisis?

- Mistrust

Several Eurobarometer and other surveys tell us that the levels of mistrust are relatively high in most EU countries.

Trust in the capacity of institutions to improve life declined tremendously.

An extensive sense of precariousness and pessimism has brushed through Europe. Many voters no longer trust politicians and political institutions.

The European Union's and its institutions' image is regarded as less valuable than national democracies. This reality is linked to national governments' tactics of blaming the EU for unpopular policies.

One thing is for sure, fear feeds mistrust, and fear encourages individuals to seek simplistic explanations and solutions.

- Decrease in political participation

Obviously, as people's suspicion of political institutions grows, so does their willingness to not participate in politics.

This disappointment and lack of participation can be explained by two factors.:

- People who have lost contact with politics because of their social conditions. They think that politics is something that has nothing to do with themselves or their lives and they will never have the chance to influence decisions.
- The abstentionists. They are a diverse group of people who accuse politicians of being corrupt, elitist, and egoistic. This group, which is larger than the previous one, is more interested in politics than the previous one, but it is more disappointing.

- Anti-Europeanism and anti-democratic movements are on the rise.  
The populism as a consequence of the circumstances described before

The described challenges on the national and the European level cannot be overcome with fast and easy solutions. They need strong decisions and changes from politicians to strengthen citizenship trust and education at all levels of age and social classes.

The decisions and changes include opportunities generated by increasing consensus among policy-makers, researchers and professionals on what kind of changes are needed, possible and attractive, including re-thinking of the term's innovation, social innovation, social economy and social politics.

*Just to mention a few...*

- ✓ Promote mechanisms of participatory policy-making and co-decision by young people in key decisions and across policy fields.

Existing mechanisms should be examined to be implemented in new and varied ways at various levels. Such systems should not be developed as policy-making processes, but as inputs into actual decision-making, allowing young people to participate in the processes while also providing feedback on their contributions.

For instance, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015, names youth as “critical agents of change” and prioritizes them across its 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The agenda is a plan of action for people, the planet and prosperity. Young people played an important role in defining the agenda.

This participation made the goal important for all stakeholders working on youth political empowerment as well as the youth themselves.

- ✓ Increase young people's participation in mass media sources, as well as promote and dedicate attention to issues that affect them and about which young people are likely to be more knowledgeable about.

- ✓ Ensuring the representation of young people and their interests in democratic structures, especially political parties.  
It is necessary to secure the participation of young people in key political structures, which includes integrating youth into party activity.
- ✓ Introducing youth impact assessment mechanisms in policy making.  
Public authorities should introduce youth impact assessments to predict and evaluate the potential impact of all governmental measures on youth populations.
- ✓ Stable support for organisations that assist youth and support youth civic spaces. Budget cuts to youth-related initiatives do not help to develop a stable environment in which youth organizations may successfully undertake civic life projects.  
Individual and organizational capacity-building initiatives should be encouraged, and forums for collaboration, networking, and sharing best practices should be supported.

In conclusion, young people's political representation is still restricted. Despite their participation and impact in internet activism, protesting, volunteering to improve their communities, and innovating for social good, young people's participation and influence in formal politics is limited. Young people are underrepresented in decision-making positions in politics, and their participation in political parties is diminishing. And this leads us to the question: what will Europe do about it?



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY SUPPORT

*“There are many studies which report that young people see formal participation mechanisms to be tokenistic and disempowering.” Philippa Collin, *Young Citizens and Political Participation in a Digital Society*, 2015*

New and innovative solutions are desperately needed by European citizens and societies. And the leaders in charge of putting these solutions in place need the citizens' trust.

One thing is clear, the lack of citizen voices in policy debates has contributed to the crisis of confidence in European politics.

There is a pressing need to provide inclusive forums for discussion and debate, as well as to identify strategies to bring policymakers closer to European citizens' everyday lives.

This small policy paper concludes by providing some recommendations for policy-making.

The recommendations are based on parts 1, 2, 3 and the project itself by showing and summarizing experiences and thoughts from all the practice partners.

We know that the EU Commission strongly recommends educational collaboration with the private and social sectors, but very few local governments are taking action to support this.

And ideally, policy-making should support schools at all levels to create open schooling in collaboration with relevant community stakeholders, including from the private sector.

But practice is another thing...



Let's list some recommendations in support of the EU Commission recommendations:

#### SCHOOL'S SELF-GOVERNANCE

Policy-making should ensure increasing self-governance in schools, allowing the experimentation needed in the globalised 21<sup>st</sup> century, including the Open schooling approach.

Open room to encourage and establish partnerships between formal and non-formal resources should be integrated in all educational planning and curricula.

Dramatic changes are needed across all teacher educations, including much more practical collaboration with schools and communities.

#### STRONG STRATEGIC FOCUS ON TEACHER EDUCATIONS

Policy-making should focus strongly on innovation in teacher education, in particular on initial teacher education.

Provide resources for training programmes for teachers, school heads and other educators in the field of citizenship education.

The young generations of teachers are not able to manage the new open schooling and the Commission's educational innovation approaches.

The European institutions, particularly the European Commission, should provide the space for a pan-European discussion on defining citizenship education, and should encourage member states, education providers, and other stakeholders, to implement the measures.

#### STRONG NATIONAL COMMITMENT

Policy-making should at national level take seriously the Commission's strategic educational innovation and support the implementation of the innovation instead of undermine it.

National government should leave reticence aside, understanding and supporting the school as the optimal space where young people can be re-engaged in politics.

Political parties should improve the participation and representation of young people in their institutions and develop action plans to do so.

#### LOCAL ENGAGEMENT

Policy-making should ensure much more local engagement from local governments.

Local governments have important roles to play in the field of open schools and cross-sector collaboration – for example supporting the school's role in the young student's political engagement.

Local and regional governments should plan for the construction of participatory policy-making methods and structures that will allow young people to engage in crucial choices made in their communities.

They shouldn't just be consultations; they should provide young people true decision-making power.

Youth councils should be reformed to ensure adequate funding and formal input in municipal policy making.

#### COMMISSION EVALUATION AND CRITIQUE OF NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL POLICY

The Commission should take steps to assess and critique national educational policies, as well as to ensure that the Commission educational innovations are implemented at national level.

The disparity between European and national policies is substantial.

#### MESSAGES SENT TO POLICY MAKERS



#### STUDENTS

We would like the politicians to consider lowering the ratio. It is really necessary to have less students per class in order to attend their needs properly as the way it is arranged nowadays it becomes really hard to give each student the attention, he/she needs.



The main focus of politicians overall should be the interest of children and teens. Almost everything to come depends on how the future generations are raised and can adapt in their own time. If politics is focused on the middle class, the future might not be as fruitful for next generations.

We would like to know more about what happens in our world and why it is important to us. It would honestly be a good idea to implement some form of political studies in our school curriculum, whether through OSS or any other means. It would be beneficial for greater knowledge on hot issues.



We would like to tell to the politicians that young citizens, who are future voters, are not blind and deaf. Make sure they live in a healthy and clean environment and have the right conditions to get an education.

Work honestly and for the benefit of citizens. Citizens are watching you and seeing your abuses.

Think about your posts on social networks. We are all different but equal. Respect us.

You should listen to expert opinions much more.

Allow people to express their opinions.  
Do not discredit journalists. Also, listen to criticism about your work. Maybe  
you can fix some mistakes.  
Focus more on climate change.

