

# Peer-to-Peer Review Report on the Best Practices and Debate Forums of Youth Engagement in the EU

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## I. Summary

The Peer-to-Peer Review was dedicated to the revision of the two main activities Work Package 2: Mapping the European Scene for Youth Activation:

1. Good practices of youth civic engagement and empowerment programs in the EU
2. Debate Forum Podcasts and Infographics.

The peer review was performed in two phases. The first phase consisted in a bilateral review where the partners were divided in pairs, reviewed each-other's results (good practices and debate forums) and subsequently filled a Google Form questionnaire where they drew conclusions on their peer's work following a set of opened and closed questions.

The pairs were the following:

<b>Drambllys (Spain)</b>	<b>FTS (Italy)</b>
<b>CGE (Germany)</b>	<b>Connect International (Belgium)</b>
<b>CEBS (Poland)</b>	<b>CitizesAct/Emphasys (Cyprus)</b>

The second phase consisted in two online sessions which were attended by all the partner organizations who, under the facilitation of the Drambllys team, discussed a set of topics and drew conclusions on the research and debates they had done for the production of the aforementioned results (good practices of youth civic engagement and debate forums). The peer review online discussions took the form of a semi-structured focus group discussion where the facilitator asked previously prepared questions and the attendees shared their views based on the work package activities carried out thus far and as well on their solid professional experience in youth work.

The findings and conclusions serve as a basis for the development of the Competence Framework relate to the personal, social and civic engagement that young people will need to acquire as part of the EU4Youth2Act empowerment and civic orientation programme.

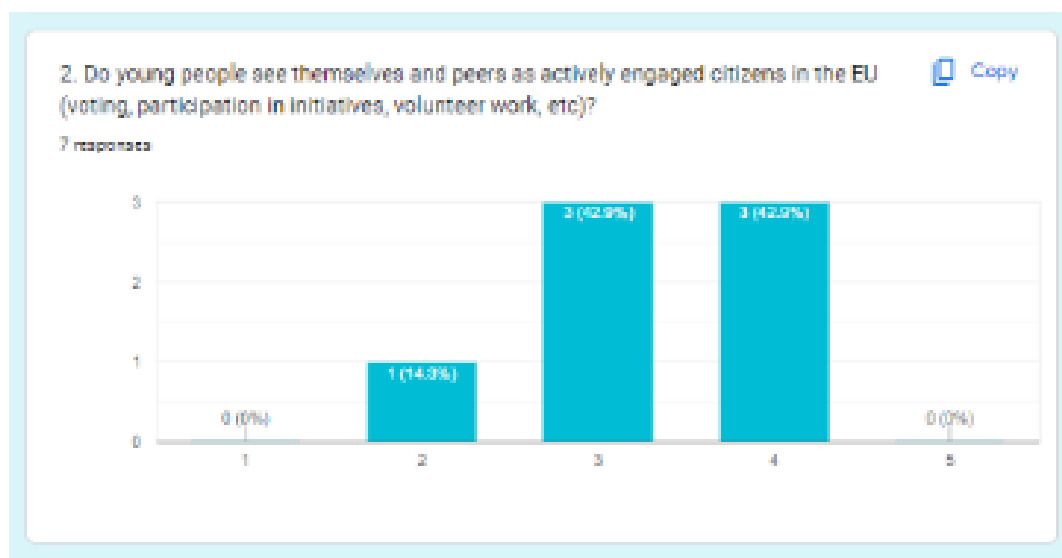
This report summarises the main points of the findings of the Google Form Questionnaire as well as the 2 Peer Review Online Sessions.

## II. Young people, awareness and engagement with the European Union.

The partners see young people as rather familiar or quite familiar with the benefits the EU offers to their citizens (out of 7, 1 partner defines them as little familiar, 3 as rather familiar and 3 as quite familiar).



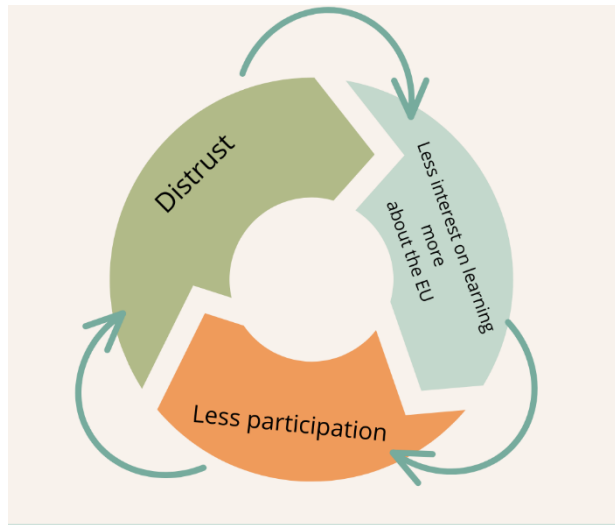
Similarly, the respondent organizations think that young people see themselves and their peers as rather or quite engaged citizens in the EU (out of 7, 1 partner defines them as little engaged, 3 as rather engaged and 3 as quite engaged).



A further open question asked the respondents to elaborate a bit more regarding the relation young people have with the EU and the role the EU plays in their lives. The answers depict young people as quite sceptical and disconnected from the EU and mainstream politics. They do understand some benefits they have from being in the EU such as the possibility to travel without visas, to work and study in other member states and cultural richness and exchange and other aspects of everyday life. They are also appreciative of the promotion of democracy, the EU's work in the prevention of conflicts and the opportunities it offers through its Erasmus programmes and their engagement generally consists in supporting movements such as concerning specific topics which in our Online Review Session were identified such as environment, inclusion, peace, employee rights or even participation in local communities through innovative tools such as arts, technology, etc. Mental wellbeing is a topic that has gained prominence especially after the COVID era, as young people were especially affected from lockdown.

However almost partners agree that the understanding they have of the European Union does not go deeper. Generally, the research pointed out that in terms of political participation because they do not feel represented politically. There is a general sense of distrust the traditional ways of participation as they don't feel that their opinions will be heard or acknowledged, so they find alternative ways of participation which are more youth friendly and more tangible. In addition, the distrust they have towards the traditional ways of participation and the European policy and institution, results in their abandonment including the lack of interest to learn more about the EU or the tools that push them towards participation in democratic life (in most cases, unfortunately including voting).

This way we the vicious circle of distrust and participation is created, where the distrust discourages the interest to know more about the EU (its democracy and institutions), which results in less participation. The lack of participation impedes finding out more in first person by doing things and being present in events. The less we know, the less we trust, finding ourselves in a vicious circle:



Source: Own elaboration

During the Online Peer Review sessions revealed, the partner organizations stated that it is more difficult for young people born after 2010 to fully grasp the advantages of the EU, as they were already born in it and cannot make a before and after comparison.

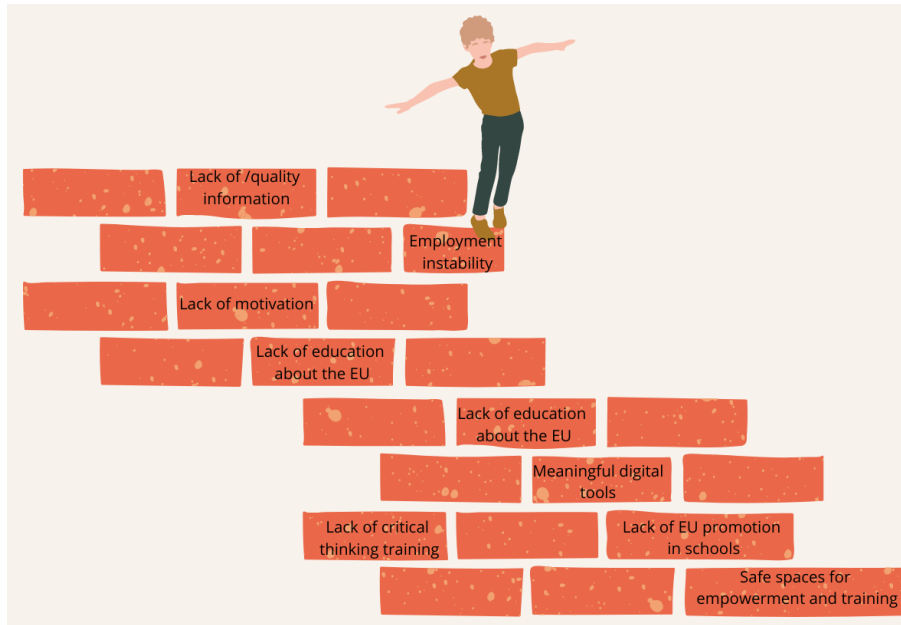
### III. Challenges and opportunities

Based on the Debate Forums and the partners identified that young people in that in order to increase youth engagement in the EU there are certain skills that (among other things, through projects such as EU4Youth2Act should be enhanced). The skills that were identified were the following:



Source: Own elaboration

There are, however, hurdles in the full development of these skills that hinder their participation due to challenges they face. Some of the identified challenges were:



Source: Own elaboration

Employment, access to the labour market and financial stability were the top challenges that were mentioned. Sometimes, overqualification (among other things) frustrates their employment expectations, adding pressure and stress leading to a feeling of being financially independent which manifests further to poor mental health

These challenges exacerbate further in the case of young people with fewer opportunities or who come from a disadvantaged background (lower income, lower education, migrant descendant, cultural minorities) because factors like discrimination, lower qualification etc, add up.

In addition, youth with fewer opportunities are reluctant to participate in different activities due to their own insecurities. During the peer review online sessions the project officers of gave the examples of youth participation in Erasmus + projects. They are generally reached by projects that scout and welcome them, but they are reluctant to participate because they feel they do not have enough capacities, they fear of being blackspotted etc. Sometimes young people (example given from Italy), just strive to make to the end of the month (and their families too) so they do not give much thought to participation in European projects and initiatives, leaving their potential unfulfilled.

Yet another opposite remark pointed out that sometimes youth with fewer opportunities feel “used” by initiatives as they include them for the sole purpose of being qualified as inclusive and do not produce real change. All these factors sometimes take a toll in their mental health. It was suggested that the Competence Framework should include self-confidence as a means to boost youth participation.

The debate forums that in their case measures and incentives should be taken to encourage their participation in democratic life. Some approaches mentioned included:



Source: Own elaboration

The project’s result, Social Innovation Hub was mentioned as a solution to the elimination of the barriers that keep young people from participating actively in the European democratic life and enhancing their competences by:

- The creation of workshop and resources in media and platforms which are popular among young people.
- By understating their specific needs empowering them to take the lead instead of being passive receivers.
- Outlining the EU strategy for the future and explain how they fit into the picture (promotion of activities related to employment, study, participation etc).
- Providing access to tools that focus on critical thinking, problem solving, inclusivity, diversity.

Finally some another set of competences were mentioned in order to enhance the participation of young people in active citizenship and EU initiatives. The competences were the following:



- Awareness
- Problem-solving skills
- Media literacy (distinguishing the truth from fake news)
- Peer sharing and self-choosing the tools for awareness raising (instead of just offering them solutions and guidelines. The hybrid approach – involving them in the project – will have a better impact).
- Fostering Eu identity which is a challenging topic. This must be born in mind because it is easier to identify these skills for young people
- Personal growth to target practical perspective in terms of economic gain, welfare benefits, use of resources available to citizens etc.

The forum debates also pointed out that an important skill to enhance is being proactive in self-development which would give them tools and methods to learn and increase their knowledge and ability to choose the material, method and information they need.



Source: own elaboration

## IV. Conclusions

This report resumes the findings of the Evaluation Questionnaire and the 2 Online Peer Review Sessions which were organized for the EU4Youth2Act project partners to debate on the following results of Work Package 2:

- Good practices of youth civic engagement and empowerment programs in the EU
- Debate Forum Podcasts and Infographics.

The online sessions focused on the initiatives that attract more young people's attention, the way that they engage and how it reflects in society. The sessions also sought to explore the challenges and opportunities young people are face with and what can be done to encourage them to participate more and the competences that can be increased to foster they civic engagement.

The online sessions and the evaluation questionnaires revealed that young people are aware of the advantages and benefits that the EU, however on a shallow level. They knowledge revolves around travelling without visas and facilities to work and study in the member states.

They do participate but at a more initiative level, in topics such as environment, inclusion, peace, employee rights or even participation in local communities.

There is a general feeling of distrust of the European institutions and politics which keeps them from participating more in European democracy. In order to overcome this hurdle, skills like adaptability, learning, critical thinking, analytical skills, empowerment to participate, active listening, empathy and understanding and active participation were mentioned.

Other skills included enhanced awareness, self-confidence, problem-solving skills, media literacy, bottom-up methods that enable them to participate in solutions to challenges they face, personal growth and EU identity.

All these skills were proposed by keeping in mind the issues that young people face in nowadays society, with the most prominent being economic constraints and employment instability which translate in further issues like lack of access to housing, frustration of their future perspective or even problems with mental health. All these issues worsen more when it comes to young people with fewer opportunities that lack self-confidence and avoid participation due to insecurities or fears related to their "social status".

Projects like EU4Youth2Act were considered as very fruitful in helping young people overcome hurdles that impede their participation. Some of the suggested ways to approach the development of their competences were the use of the platforms that they find appealing, empowering them to take the lead, explain how they fit in the EU strategy and provide access to tools that focus on critical thinking, problem solving, inclusivity, diversity.