

Time to Act!

E-BOOKLET ON HOW TO FOSTER YOUTH PARTICIPATION
ASOCIACIJA “AKTYVUS JAUNIMAS” – ACTIVE YOUTH ASSOCIATION



Erasmus+

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Foreword

This e-booklet is a product of a meeting between young people and youth policy makers *“Time to Act!”*, which took place in May, 2015 in Kaunas, Lithuania and was financed by the European Commission’s Erasmus+ programme. The project was started because European societies today face huge issues of youth absenteeism both in public life and politics. As a result of it, democratic values and principles are weakened, which in itself is an alarming trend. One of the ways to tackle these problems is via viable initiatives and/or youth policy reform.

The project was a part of European Youth Week (EYW) and had its goals aligned to those of EYW’15: to enhance youth participation in politics and beyond across Europe (especially, in the participating countries – see in the summary below). Hence, a number of initiatives to help youth get involved were developed throughout the meeting and we have put them all together to this e-booklet. We aim to promote them by introducing this e-booklet to young people, youth policy makers, youth workers and other relevant parties. It consists of key information about youth participation in- and knowledge of political and civic processes and methods on how to increase these two aspects. Yet, the meeting, its concept, activities and results will also be briefly presented, so as to show why & how the proposed initiatives/policy reforms were created in the first place.

Please note, that the contents of this E-booklet represents the views of its authors only and the European Commission is not responsible for any of the information and/or media provided.



Summary:

Project title: Time to Act!

Financed: by European Commission’s Erasmus+ programme

Website: <http://youth-week.eu>

Dates: 4-10 of May, 2015

Participating organizations: [Asociacija “Aktyvus jaunimas”](#) – Active Youth Association (hosts), Associazione di promozione turistica e sociale In Tour (Italy), OportunidadEuropa (Spain), Artilt-D biedriba (Latvia), 4YOUth Foundation for Supporting Youth Initiatives (Poland)

E-booklet: filled by the 35 participants of the meeting. It covers biggest concerns for youth in Europe; European Youth Week and what events should take place during it; proposed initiatives and reforms mainly aimed to: 1) increase youth representation; 2) make political parties more acceptable to youth; 3) boost youth participation in elections.

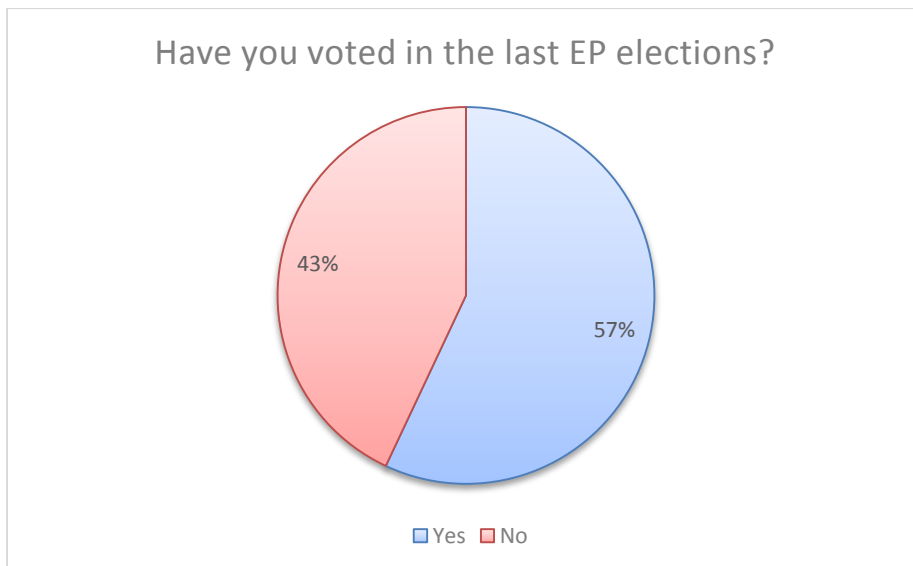
Framework

Before going on to the part of the e-booklet filled by the participants, it is useful to look at how it was compiled. The methodology itself is given on the right, yet the preceding activities are also described.

To know more about the participating sample of youth, on the 1st day of the meeting the [initial knowledge assessment](#) was carried out. This was done in order to see how well the participants knew the subject and various resulting issues. Additionally, we wanted to see how active in politics/public life are the participants themselves. The result are given and analysed below:

The sample had the following composition: median age was **22**; male/female ratio – **41% against 59%**. The participants were also asked to self-grade their current knowledge on the topic and gave a mere **5.8** on average for it (on a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 means absolute). About **89%** of the participants took part in the most recent local elections (municipal or central government); while only **57%** took part in the European Parliament (EP) elections of 2014.

As we can see the participating sample is relative active when it comes to going to elections, taking part in public life, etc. However, since the project was about politics this was to be expected. It was also anticipated that there will be more participants, who have voted in the regular/national elections rather than the EP elections of 2014. Such trends are seen throughout Europe and throughout all the age groups of voters.



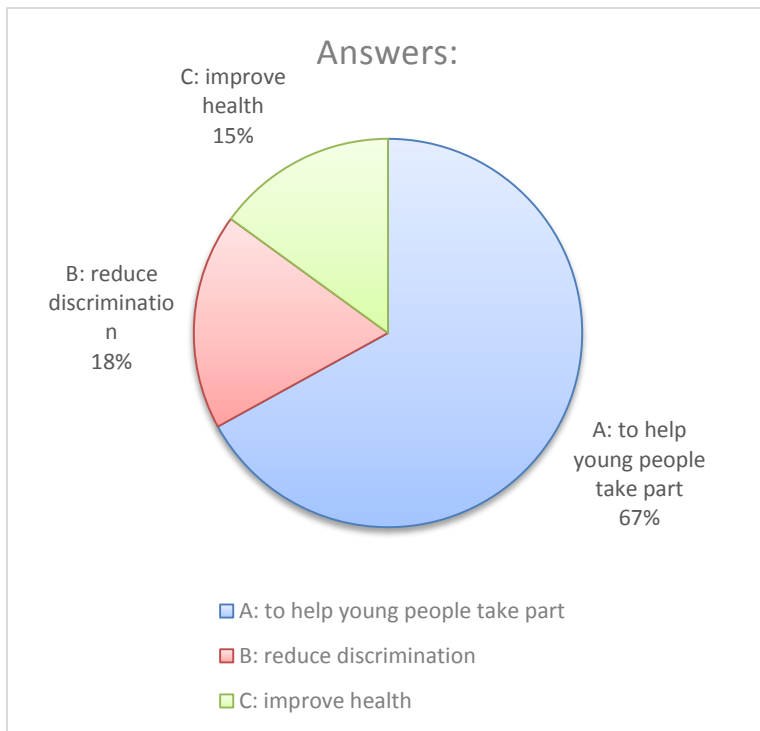
Same relatively high participation rate (**45%**) was observed, when the participants were asked about whether they have ever took part in some political action/initiative/process.

However, when it came to European Youth Week the results were rather upsetting. Only **7%** of participants knew the true purpose of it. This was quite reversed, when they were asked whether they know what's the topic of this year's EYW. This was a multiple choice question, though. 3 possible answers were given (may be found at the legend of the pie chart below).

E-booklet was filled by the 35 participants of Erasmus+ youth meeting "**Time to Act!**", which took place in Kaunas, Lithuania in May, 2015 (European Youth week). The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 30 at the time of the meeting. They were coming from the following countries: Lithuania, Italy, Spain, Poland and Latvia.

The booklet was filled in the last day of the action during a specially designed activity. This allowed the participants to use all their previous experience, as well as things learned throughout the project. The setting of the activity was as following:

- Participants were randomly divided into 6 groups with close gender and nationality balance;
- They were given up to 1.5 hours for the task. It has asked each team to fill-in a pre-made form (can be found further in the e-booklet);
- The organisers did not interfere with the work of the participants and only collected the completed forms. Hence, thoughts and ideas reflected in this e-booklet are genuinely created by the participants of the youth meeting;
- The forms did not use any names and also were shuffled after the collection. This was done to keep the anonymity of the authors of certain ideas.



As you can see **67%** were right with the answer - **to increase youth participation in both the society and labour market.**

As we can see from this quite diverse (in terms of age, nationality, gender, education, etc.) sample of people, little is known about political participation, as well as EYW (self-grade: **5.8 on average**). Therefore we have focused on the following goals throughout the meeting: 1) increase the participants' knowledge on the topic; and 2) create initiatives that would help increase youth participation in EP elections, society and/or the labour market.

To achieve these goals, we have created a number of non-formal education activities. *These may be found given in the section below.*

Project's schedule & activities

1. Meeting's schedule: <http://youth-week.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/1xTime-to-Act-Schedule.pdf>
2. Participants' current knowledge assessment on EYW, its goals, political participation, elections, etc. - <http://youth-week.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Current-Knowledge-assessment-T2A.pdf>
3. Information session on the topic of the project, which also includes the results and the analysis of the current knowledge assessment - <http://youth-week.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/2Info-Session-t2a.pptx>
4. The rules and list of topics for discussions in non-formal environment (World Café method) - <http://youth-week.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/t2a-worldcafe.pdf>
5. Interactive workshop, which analyses the issues of increasing youth political participation - <http://youth-week.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/4t2a-political-participation.pptx>
6. With the help of this mini-workshop/grouping activity, the participants were: a) taught about political spectrum; b) grouped with like-minded people in order to smoothen the teamwork and efficiency when coming up with the initiatives - http://youth-week.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/3Pol_parties-t2a.pptx
7. Activity to create an 'Own Political Party'. This is designed not only to teach about any party's foundlings, but also to give some shell for the task groups, as well as to foster their creativity and team-building - <http://youth-week.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/t2a-party.pdf>
8. Template for preparing the initiatives, discussing them with the policy makers/experts and then finalising for the pitch - <http://youth-week.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/t2a-committee.pdf>
9. Information for initiative's pitch preparation - <http://youth-week.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/t2a-pitchchallenge-campaign.pdf>
10. Sheet used by the policy makers/experts to evaluate the initiatives pitched by the participants - <http://youth-week.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/t2a-evaluation-sheet.pdf>
11. Challenging situations given for the teams pitching their initiatives to answer: <http://youth-week.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/t2a-situations-pitch.pdf>
12. Suggested problems for the initiatives to be created - <http://youth-week.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/7Themes-for-committees.pptx>
13. Italian team's presentation titled 'European Identity and Its Construction' - <http://youth-week.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/The-European-identity-and-its-construction-Time-to-act-Active-Youth-Kaunas.pdf>

On the last day of the action, we not only asked the participating youngsters to fill-in the e-booklet, but also to self-evaluate their then knowledge of the topic. This final assessment has shown that the activities undertaken in the project has helped to increase the participants' knowledge of political participation by significant *1.2 grade point on average*. Such increase implies that the youth meeting, its activities and organisation were effective in reaching its set goals and, henceforth, gives credibility to the e-booklet.

The E-booklet

The full form, which was handed to the teams of the participants, can be found here: <http://youth-week.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/t2a-ebooklet.pdf>

Youth concerns

Throughout the meeting we wanted to know what are the biggest concerns and issues of today's young people. Firstly in order to get a more comprehensive idea we asked the participants to build a survey, asking them to a) pretend that they are voters; and b) rate (from 1 to 5, where 1 means no concern) a number of the areas according to their importance to them when voting for a candidate/party. The results may be found below:

Voters' Survey's Results

How much is the following relevant to you when voting for a candidate/party?

Issue	Average score
Military & foreign policy	2.6
Fighting corruption / transparency	3.7
Higher education - tuition fees	3.4
Health care	3.5
Jobs creation / unemployment reduction	3.9
Family issues	2.5
Demographics & immigration	3.1
Voting system & representation	2.7
Culture - funding for arts, cultural events	3.0
Sports - funding for the sports' infrastructure	2.8
Infrastructure - roads / public transport	3.2
Business & entrepreneurship support	3.3
Agriculture, fishing, etc.	2.1
Education system as a whole / research	3.2
Terrorism / public safety	3.1
Salaries (e.g. minimum / public workers')	3.4
Pensions / age of retirement	2.9
Social benefits (e.g. for young mothers)	3.2
More personal/social freedoms	3.3
Environment	3.5

The bolded fields were the most relevant to the participating youth. These include (starting with the most important):

1) Jobs creation / unemployment reduction; 2) fighting corruption / transparency; 3) health care & environment; 4) salaries & higher education - tuition fees.

We have got back to the issue at the end of the meeting as well. *This was done in order to for the last refine the acquired information. It is in our belief that continuous (yet separated and limited) inquiries lead to the most accurate results.*

The participants were asked to recollect the biggest youth concerns/issues, which are in need of political parties' attention and eventual solutions:

Concern/issue	Why/how it happens?	Which countries are the worst?	Possible solution
Youth under-representation	Youth isn't interested in politics, politics seem far from regular people, politics seem boring; Old party members don't open the ways for the young to engage in decision making	All	Debates, meetings with young people, politicians visiting schools/universities, they should show that they are 'regular' too; a law that would grant a quota in decision making institutions for young people
Unemployment	Too little jobs, young people under- or overqualified for the available ones, lack of motivation	Spain, Greece, Italy, Romania, Portugal	Unemployment camp (workshops, career fair, etc.), creating your own business – entrepreneurship; more mobility between member countries; paid internships
Migration	Better working conditions/more jobs abroad	Italy	Lower taxes for start-up business
Non-participation in elections	Young people don't trust politicians – they promise too much, protest against the system; young simply don't care, laziness	Spain, Italy, Greece	Voting by internet; increased general public engagement in decision making; political education in schools/universities; free public transport on the elections day; less promises from the politicians
Possibility to buy/rent home	Young people are not capable of renting/buying a proper place to live	Italy, Spain, Greece	Better loan conditions for young people
Corruption	A lot of politicians/decision-makers work only for their own interest	More or less all	Initiatives fostering transparency

As we can problems like corruption and unemployment were mentioned again. However, there were new ones such as possibility to buy/rent homes; migration; and youth under-representation in passiveness in politics. According to our participants the mentioned concerns were the most acute in the Southern European nations, such as Spain, Italy and Greece.

European Youth Week

Looking back at the results of the initial knowledge assessment, it is safe to say that people are rather uninformed about EYW. This was the case with the participants of the project at least. Yet, the activities of the training course were designed to change that. Thus, in the e-booklet we have included the question about the point and definition of EYW. The participants were asked to write what it is based on what they have learned through the training course and, of course, their previous knowledge. We have got the following answers from the six work groups (please note that these do not match the most-common found definitions 100%):

- I. TO HELP TO UNDERSTAND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO TAKE PART IN THE CIVIL SOCIETY; TO GET TO KNOW MORE ABOUT POLITICAL PROCESSES AROUND US.
- II. A WEEK WHERE EUROPEAN YOUTH GETS TOGETHER AND THINKS ABOUT NEW CONCEPTS FOR EUROPE.
- III. PLATFORM WHERE GOVERNMENT AND NGOs WORK AND SET GOALS TOGETHER.
- IV. WEEK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO MEET AND DISCOVER POLITICS.
- V. EYW TAKES PLACE TO ENCOURAGE AND HELP EUROPEAN YOUTH TO TAKE PART IN THE CIVIL SOCIETY AND EMPLOYMENT MARKET.
- VI. TO MAKE YOUTH FEEL MORE EUROPEAN; TO FOSTER THE EUROPEAN IDENTITY.

As we can see answers provided are similar, with the following components in common: 1) to involve youth in politics, society and labour market; 2) to foster European identity. This, in fact, more or less match the official definition. Therefore, we could make a conclusion that the participants have indeed learned what the **EYW** stands and aims for.

The participating youngster were also asked about any examples of **EYW** events or what would they desire (ideas generated throughout the project or thought of at the moment of filling-in) for such events/activities.

Additionally, they had to explain how it would help the cause of **EYW**:



Participant of the meeting

Description of event/activity	How do/would they help the cause of EYW
Festivals (e.g. colour festival), free concerts	<i>It's would be a great informal environment for decision makers to meet a huge number of young people</i>
Seminars about European Union	The young would better understand the role of the EU
European mobility week	Both youth and young politicians would go on short exchanges to other members states
Volunteering in EU institutions	Youngsters would experience the life of certain European institutions (e.g. European Parliament), and that would 1) increase their political knowledge; and 2) foster European identity, among other benefits.
Coffee with politicians (i.e. non-formal environment for discussions, meetings, etc.)	Would make politics feel less distant in the eyes of young people

Lastly, the e-booklet has asked what measures would increase the publicity of **EYW**. Most of the answers mentioned the following: 1) More advertising on social media (e.g. Facebook) and internet; 2) Flashmobs.

Youth representation & engagement

Our meeting aimed at proposing what could boost overall youth participation in politics and society in Europe. The participants were continuously inquired on this matter throughout the project (list of activities may be found here: Project's schedule & activities). Therefore, there was a wish to include their thoughts on the issue in the e-booklet. It has asked to remember or think of any initiatives or reforms that would succeed in increasing the **number of young people amongst decision makers**. The question also covered the how part:

Description of initiative/reform	How do/would they help in this cause
<i>Set quotas for young politicians in decision making institutions/parliaments</i>	<i>Young would be better represented</i>

More projects & meetings where youth can experience decision making	It would help reduce youth ignorance towards politics
Create clubs/make events, where youth can get informed about important things regarding policy making & politics	It's easier to get involved in politics/decision making, when you are better acquainted
Internships for young politicians in various European institutions	It would give them more experience and foster their political careers
Give a say for youth associations in certain political processes	If youth associations would be given a bigger role in the making of certain decisions, it would boost 1) participation in youth organisations; and, subsequently, 2) youth interest in politics/policy-making

Furthermore, we have asked in what ways **political parties could change** their mind sets and way of work to become more open and acceptable to youth. The following answers were acquired:

- THEY SHOULD ORGANISE MORE MEETINGS AND DEBATES WITH YOUTH. ALSO THEIR PARTY PROGRAMMES SHOULD BE MORE OPEN AND APT TO CHANGE;
- THE POLITICAL PARTIES SHOULD ORGANISE SPECIAL YOUTH COUNCILS, WHERE YOUTH WOULD SIMULATE THE SELECTION OF CANDIDATES AND/OR MAKING THE PARTY'S MANIFESTO;
- SPECIAL WEBSITES FOR YOUTH SHOULD BE CREATED. SUCH WEBSITES SHOULD CONTAIN ALL THE PARTY'S IDEAS AND DECISIONS, SO THAT THE YOUNG WOULD SEE WHAT ARE THEY REALLY AFTER;
- INTERNSHIPS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (DURING REGULAR TIMES, AS WELL AS ELECTION CAMPAIGNS);
- YOUNGER PARTY LEADERS, WHO USE MODERN METHODS (E.G. TWITTER) TO ENGAGE WITH YOUTH.

As we can see there are plenty of measures on the table as seen by the participants of our youth meeting. These concern not just the political system but also the parties.

Another objective of '**Time to Act!**' was to come up with ideas for more youth engagement in political/social life. The e-booklet, specifically, inquired what measures should be taken (by political parties / youth organisations / government / other) in order to make young citizens go to elections? *The youth was asked to put emphasis on EP elections.*

Description of measure/initiative/reform	How do/would they help in this cause
<i>More information about the EU and the European Parliament (e.g. special classes, debates or simulations of elections/parliament at schools or challenges/games on social media)</i>	<i>Youth would be more aware about the roles of the EU and EP</i>
More youth mobility	Youth exchanges gives skills, builds networks and promotes European identity amongst the young
European 'clubs' across Europe	Centres, where youth could get to know and learn about the political parties, their ideas, etc. Also it would be necessary to make the whole experience fun.
Government supporting national youth councils and dialogue with them	Taking part in these councils would motivate youth to get involved in processes such as voting. It would also give side benefits for the young, e.g. time on media/popularity (proven to be very important for today's young)

According to the participants, huge focus should be put on European identity. This should boost the turnout in the EP elections in the long-run at least.

Of course, in order to attract more young voters the **electoral system** itself should be a subject to change. The ideas on the issue may be found below:

Description of a reform	How do/would they help in this cause
Internet voting	<i>It would help to attract the ones (especially, youngsters), who don't have time to go to the ballots or are simply lazy</i>
Incentivising the voting process – giving small benefits for those, who voted (a ticket would be given at the ballots)	Certain benefits (e.g. free public transport for a few days) would attract more voters (especially, young) to the ballots
More power for online petitions	Youth is especially into e-petitioning, hence, giving it more power, e.g. to get some law for more rounds of-/ more extensive discussions in the legislature

While internet voting is a well-known suggestion and present in some countries (e.g. Estonia), the other two proposed ideas are less popular. However, these should nevertheless be seemed as viable (in terms of costs and impact) and interesting.

Lastly, the e-booklet explored the possibilities for youth to meet decision makers. We have asked the participants about arenas (other than Erasmus+ youth meetings with policy makers), where youngster could meet politics/experts. A majority of the answers included social networks, which is not surprising. However, there were more subtle suggestions also:

- ✓ Social networks
- ✓ Skype conferences/group-calls
- ✓ 'Face to face' debates/coffee with a politician(s)
- ✓ Youth parliaments



Conclusions

The project “Time to Act!” had a goals aligned to those of the European Youth Week of 2015: to promote youth engagement in politics, society and the labour market. This was mostly intended by two means. First was the creation of initiatives aimed to support the meetings’ goals. Second - the publication of an e-booklet, which would include: 1) number of most relevant youth concerns; 2) definition and ideas for EYW; 3) the initiatives proposed by the participants, as well as good practices aiming to increase youth involvement, representation and engagement in politics and wider society. The last objective was to promote these ideas to general public in the participating countries (Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Spain & Italy) and beyond.

It was in our belief that the best results will be provided if the e-booklet was filled by the participating youngsters primarily. Hence, it was done during one of the last activities of the action. This way not only the participants’ experience, but also things learned and developed throughout the meeting were reflected in the booklet. Six groups had a task to anonymously fill-in a premade-form, which gave a framework, but also allowed a significant degree of freedom to the participants.

Firstly, a number of social problems, that were of the most relevance to youth had to be listed, along with their causes and countries, where they are the most persistent. Among those mentioned, the most notorious ones were: youth unemployment & jobs creation, transparency / fighting corruption, health care & environment, salaries, higher education – tuition fees, etc. According to the participants, Southern European countries are facing the most problems. Such situation implies that there is a lot to do in order to improve the societies there; and this is higher youth participation (among other things, such as entrepreneurship) comes in. The youngsters in the meeting indeed found possible ways how it could solve each and every of the problems.

Boosting youth participation and representation in the society is crucial in today’s Europe. Great part of this e-booklet is dedicated to ideas that could help this cause. The participants of the meeting had not only shared various good practices already in place in some countries, but also created their own. These initiatives included already well-known ones, such as internet voting (which would increase the young voter turnout), as well as fresh/less popular ones. For instance, 1) giving a say for youth associations in certain political processes; or 2) incentivising the voting process – giving small benefits for those, who voted (a ticket would be given at the ballots). It is worth noting, that European identity was seen as a crucial factor in order to increase the importance of the EP. According to the participants of the meeting this may be fostered with the use of education systems, e.g. special classes about the EU and the EP, debates or simulations of elections/parliament at schools or challenges/games on social media.

Of course, Erasmus+ projects, such as ‘Time to Act!’, do massively promote European citizenship, unity and mutual compassion. Therefore, this e-booklet included a number of newly created non-formal education methods, which were used in this project. As the results of the meeting have shown, the participants’ knowledge on youth participation, EYW have significantly increased on average. We, therefore, anticipate that the resources in this e-booklet will be shared and used in the future youth meetings, similar projects and workshops. The objective in the long-term is to see much higher rates of youth participation and representation in the society, politics and labour market.

“It was great, I’ve learned a lot. Actually, I think I will never be the same again!”

PARTICIPANT OF “TIME TO ACT!”