

# Analysis of Youth Participation and Active Citizenship in Greece, Italy, Romania, and Spain

## 1. Introduction

### Purpose of the Study:

This chapter presents the findings of a needs analysis conducted within the framework of the "YOUth lead the future!" project (2023-3-EL02-KA210-YOU-000176965). The aim of the study was to identify the specific challenges and gaps in youth participation and active citizenship across four European countries: Greece, Italy, Romania, and Spain.

### Survey Methodology:

A total of 131 responses were collected from youth workers and educators across the four countries. The survey consisted of 12 closed-ended questions and one open-ended question. The participants were primarily youth workers and educators working with marginalized or underrepresented youth. The data collected through this survey will inform the development of a learning guide to enhance youth participation and active citizenship.

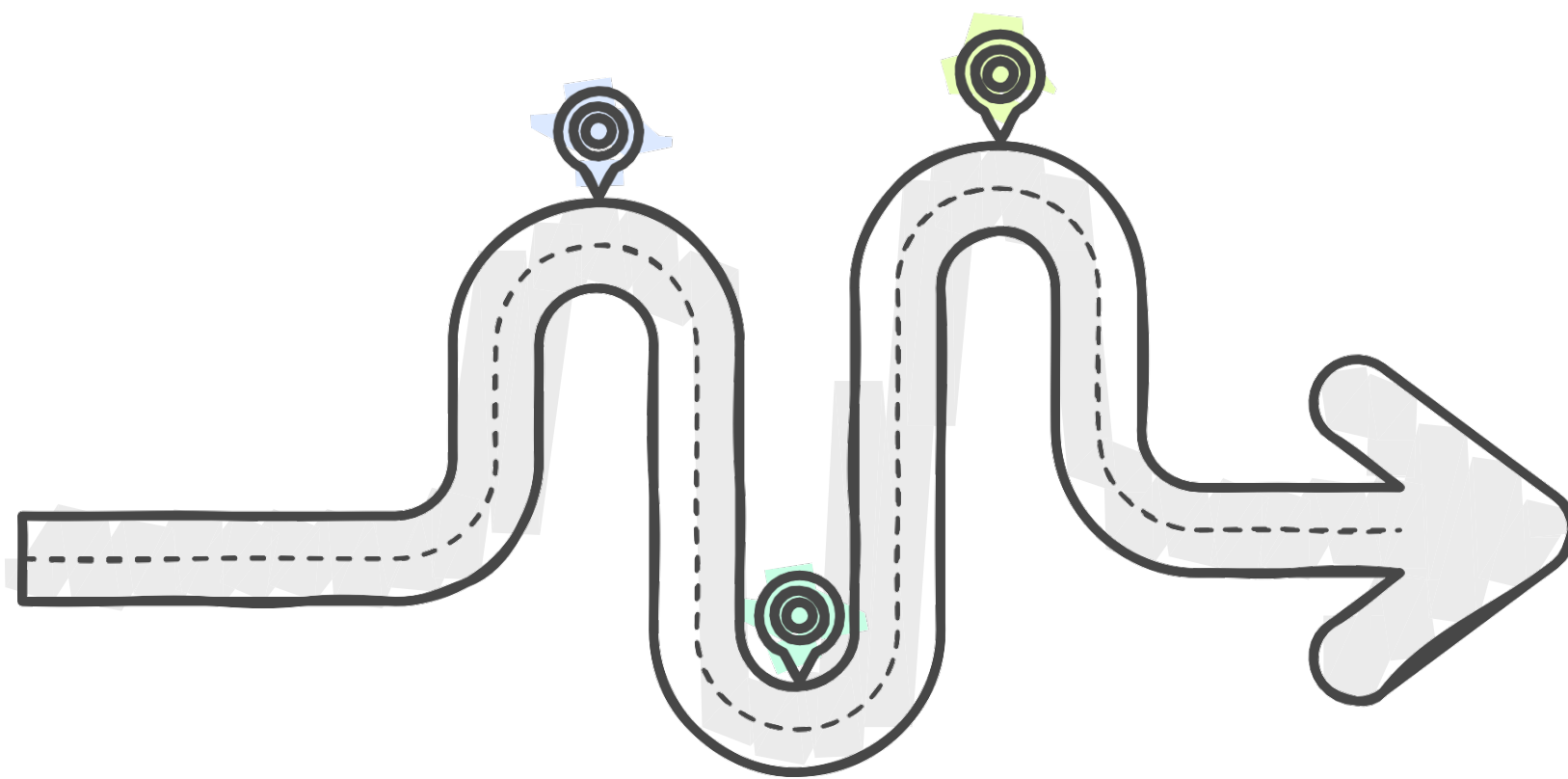
## Enhancing Youth Participation

### Conduct Needs Analysis

Initiate the project by identifying the specific challenges in youth participation.

### Develop Learning Guide

Use the survey data to create a resource aimed at improving youth engagement.



### Collect Survey Data

Gather insights from youth workers and educators through a structured survey.

## 2. Key Findings

### a) Barriers to Youth Participation

- **Lack of Awareness:** A key finding of the survey is that lack of awareness significantly limits youth participation in these four countries. Respondents from Greece, Romania, and Spain reported that many young people are unaware of the opportunities for civic engagement available to them. This awareness gap can be attributed to insufficient outreach, lack of information about programs, and failure to communicate the benefits of participation. This lack of awareness is especially prominent in Greece, where respondents noted that youth often do not know what they don't know, making engagement less likely.

This issue of awareness aligns with the Eurobarometer 2021 report on youth participation, which found that youth engagement often falls short due to lack of information, with 34% of youth in the EU reporting that they do not have enough information about youth-related activities or initiatives ([Eurobarometer, 2021](#)).

- **Economic Barriers:** Economic constraints were also cited as a major barrier to youth participation, particularly in Greece and Romania. Many young people face financial limitations that prevent them from engaging in activities requiring transportation or participation fees. The lack of financial resources is further compounded by the economic realities of young people from marginalized backgrounds who may struggle to balance family obligations and participation in extracurricular activities. This is a notable concern in Greece, where youth from low-income backgrounds are significantly limited in their participation in youth programs.

The EU Youth Report 2020 highlighted that economic barriers are one of the most significant challenges faced by young Europeans. It emphasizes the need for accessible opportunities that take into account the socioeconomic status of youth, particularly those from marginalized communities ([EU Youth Report, 2020](#)). Moreover, the Eurobarometer 2024 survey highlights that while many young Europeans are optimistic about the EU's impact, economic challenges persist. Addressing these economic barriers is crucial for enhancing youth engagement. ([europeansting.com](#)).

- **Social and Cultural Barriers:** The survey highlighted significant social and cultural barriers affecting youth participation. Social anxiety, fear of stepping outside comfort zones, and the influence of traditional family and gender norms were reported as factors contributing to disengagement in Spain and Romania. For example, respondents in Spain noted that youth often feel "comfortable with what they have," and are reluctant to step outside their established routines. Additionally, respondents from Greece mentioned prejudices and limited thinking, which impede youth from engaging in new experiences or political activities.

The European Youth Foundation's Annual Report 2020 discusses the importance of addressing cultural barriers and promoting inclusive societies. It emphasizes how traditional norms can restrict youth involvement, especially among young women and marginalized groups (European Youth Foundation, 2020).

- **Lack of Institutional Cooperation:** A critical barrier identified during the implementation of the survey was the lack of cooperation from other organizations in the youth field. In all four participating countries—Greece, Italy, Romania, and Spain—the survey was disseminated not only through direct project channels but also widely forwarded to local, regional, and national organizations working with youth. Despite this broad outreach, the level of response and collaboration from these organizations was unexpectedly low.

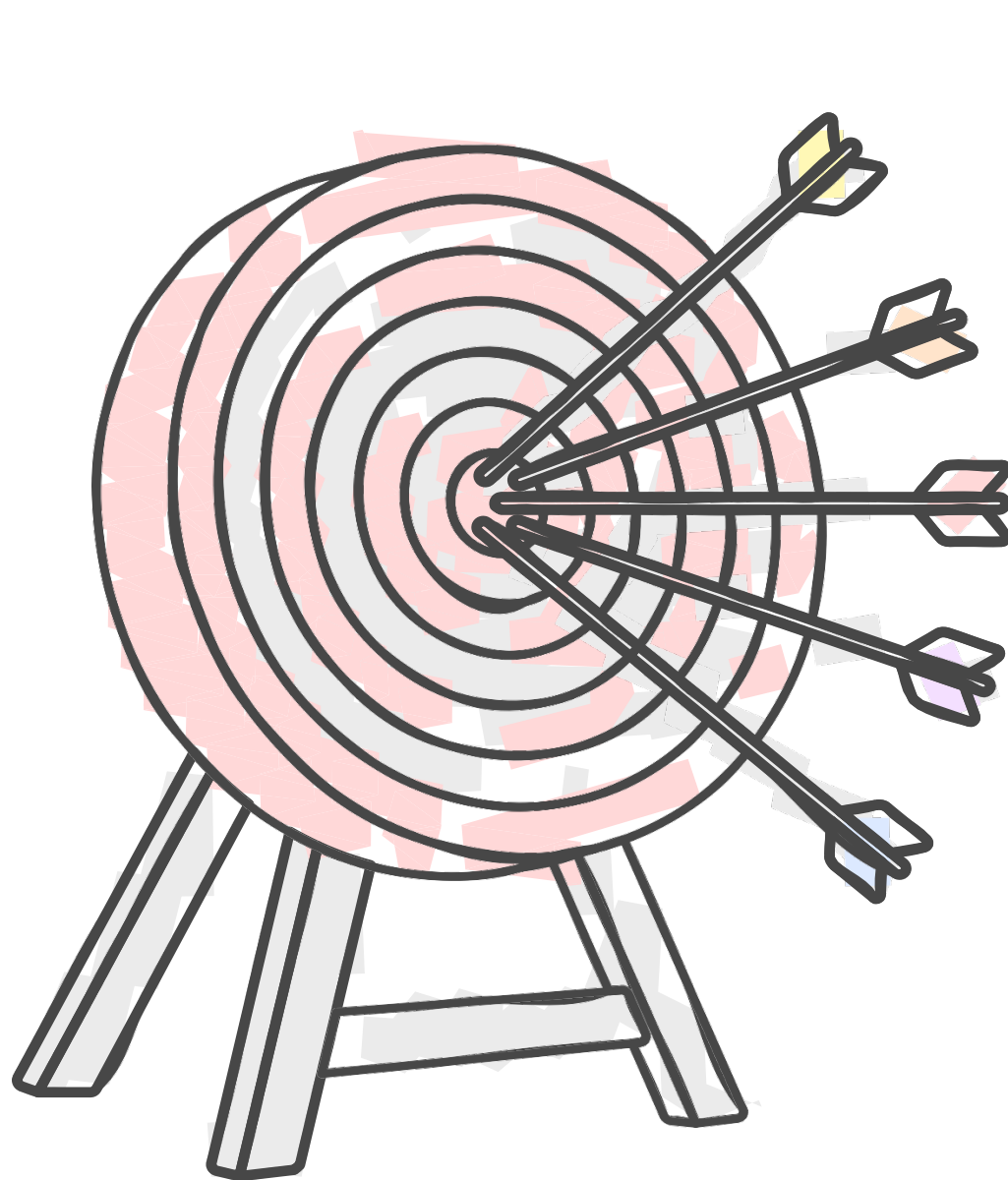
This lack of engagement is not just a logistical issue; it reflects a deeper structural problem in the ecosystem of youth participation. The absence of collaboration and support from key stakeholders limits the reach and effectiveness of any initiative aimed at empowering young people. It also signals a lack of shared responsibility and coordination across institutions that should, in theory, be allies in fostering active citizenship. Without active inter-organizational support, youth workers and educators are often left isolated in their efforts to mobilize young people—particularly those from marginalized backgrounds.






This aligns with broader EU findings; for instance, the Eurobarometer 2024 survey on youth and democracy found that while 64% of young Europeans intend to vote in the upcoming European elections, only 38% view voting as the most effective means to influence decision-makers, and 19% express disinterest in politics. Such statistics suggest a broader disengagement that may be influenced by institutional shortcomings. ([SALTO](#)).

The EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 emphasizes fostering youth participation in democratic life and supporting social and civic engagement. However, the challenges observed in this study indicate that more concerted efforts are needed to bridge the gap between policy objectives and on-the-ground realities ([Youth European Portal](#)).

- **Other Barriers:** Other unique barriers were identified in the open-ended responses. In Greece, youth disengagement was partly attributed to political indifference, and the lack of motivation was noted as a problem in Romania. Respondents from Spain pointed out that mobile addiction, limited thinking, and traditional views were additional deterrents to active participation. These responses reflect broader concerns noted in the Eurofound 2020 report on youth inclusion, which mentions the growing influence of digital technology on youth behavior and the risk of social disengagement ([Eurofound, 2020](#)).

## Barriers to Youth Participation



-  **Lack of Awareness**  
Core issue limiting participation
-  **Economic Barriers**  
Financial constraints affecting engagement
-  **Social and Cultural Barriers**  
Societal influences and norms
-  **Lack of Institutional Cooperation**  
Insufficient collaboration among Organizations
-  **Other Barriers**  
Unique challenges in specific countries



## b) Factors Affecting Access to Youth Programs

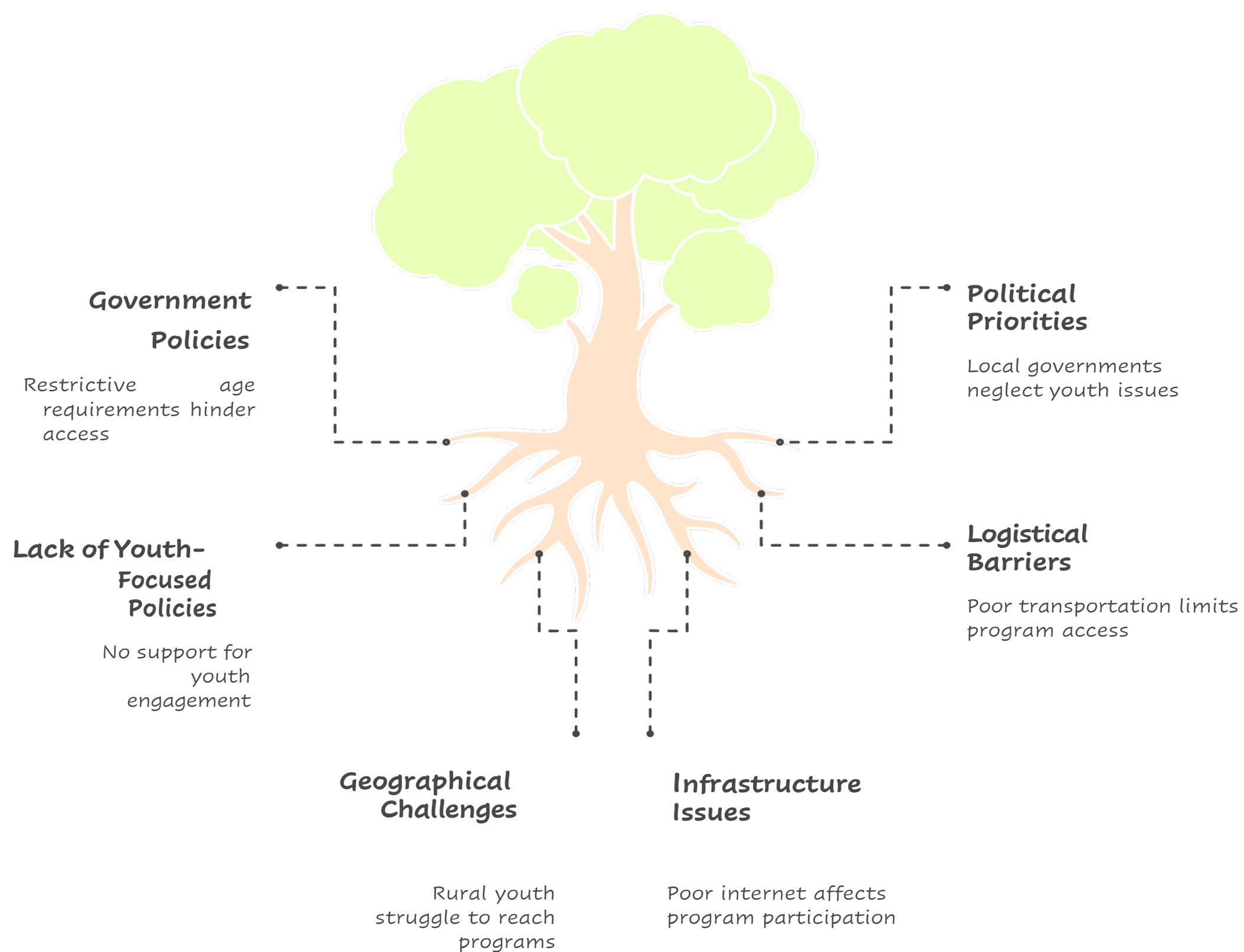
- **Government Programmes:** A significant barrier to youth engagement was the limited access to government-sponsored programs. Many respondents noted restrictive policies, such as age requirements and lack of incentives, which prevent youth from accessing opportunities for participation. In Italy, the political orientation of local governments was also highlighted as a challenge, with some areas prioritizing other issues over youth involvement. In Greece, there was a total lack of youth-focused policies, which exacerbates the challenge of engaging youth in active citizenship.

This is consistent with findings from the Eurobarometer 2021 report, which notes that youth in the EU often struggle to access government programs, with 28% of young people citing limited access to programs as a key barrier to participation ([Eurobarometer, 2021](#)).

- **Logistical and Geographical Barriers:** Access to youth programs was also hindered by logistical and geographical barriers. Many youngsters in rural areas reported difficulty accessing programs due to the lack of public transportation or affordable mobility options. In Spain, the distance to international airports was mentioned as an issue for programs requiring travel. Similarly, in Romania, youth faced difficulties accessing programs due to poor internet infrastructure and transportation.

The EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 emphasizes the importance of ensuring that youth programs are accessible, regardless of geographical location. It advocates for removing logistical barriers to ensure that young people from rural areas can participate in civic and educational activities ([EU Youth Strategy, 2019-2027](#)).

## Limited Access to Youth Programs



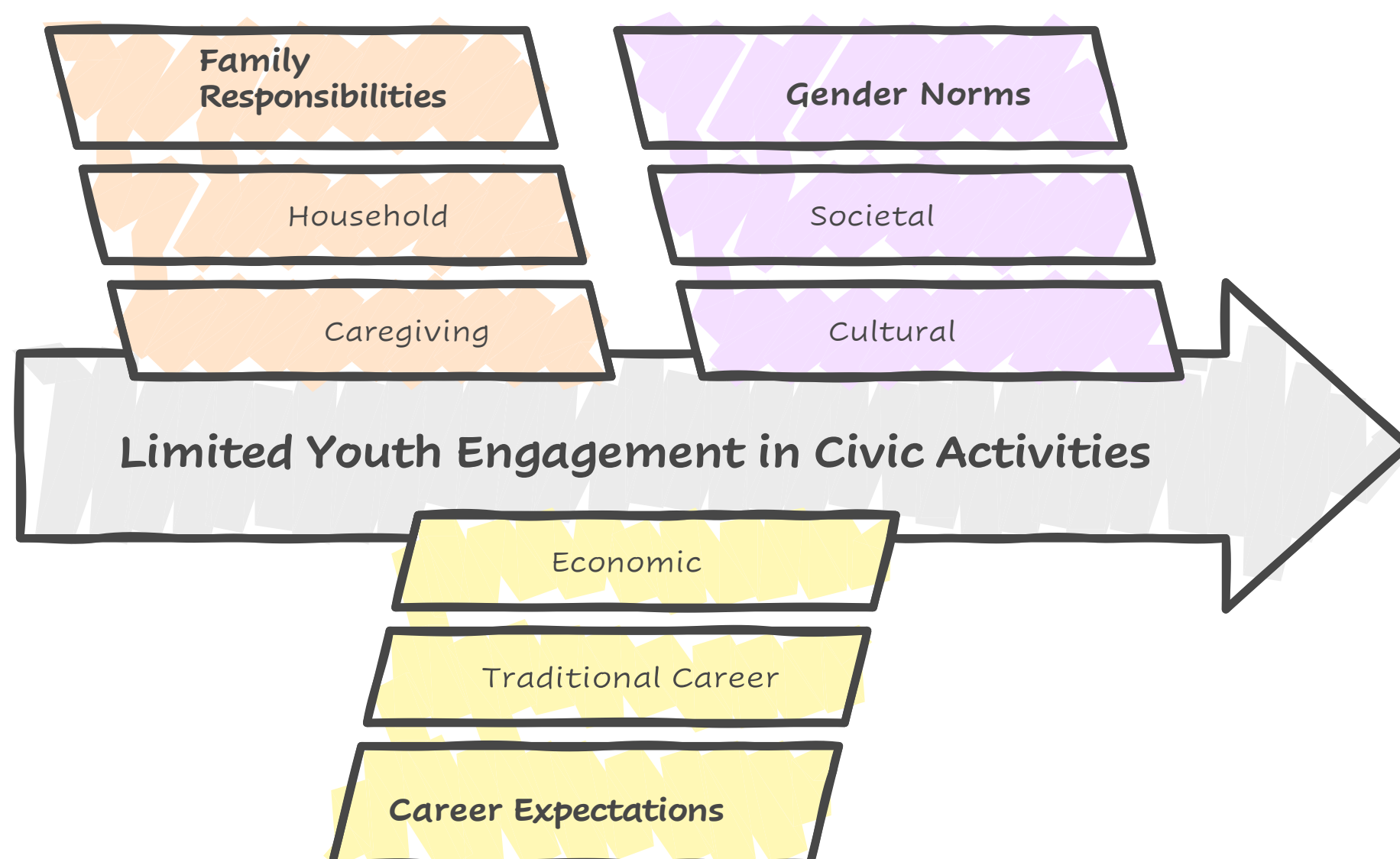
### c) Socioeconomic Influences on Participation

The survey revealed that personal and familial socioeconomic factors play a critical role in youth decisions to engage in civic activities. Many youth are tasked with balancing family responsibilities, making it difficult to commit to extracurricular activities or programs.

Moreover, traditional career expectations were seen as influencing young people's willingness to participate in civic engagement. In Spain and Romania, gender norms and societal expectations were highlighted as barriers, particularly for young women, who often face additional challenges to participation.

The Eurofound 2020 report highlights that family and career pressures significantly impact youth engagement in both formal and informal activities. The report calls for greater support structures to ease these pressures and encourage participation ([Eurofound, 2020](#)).

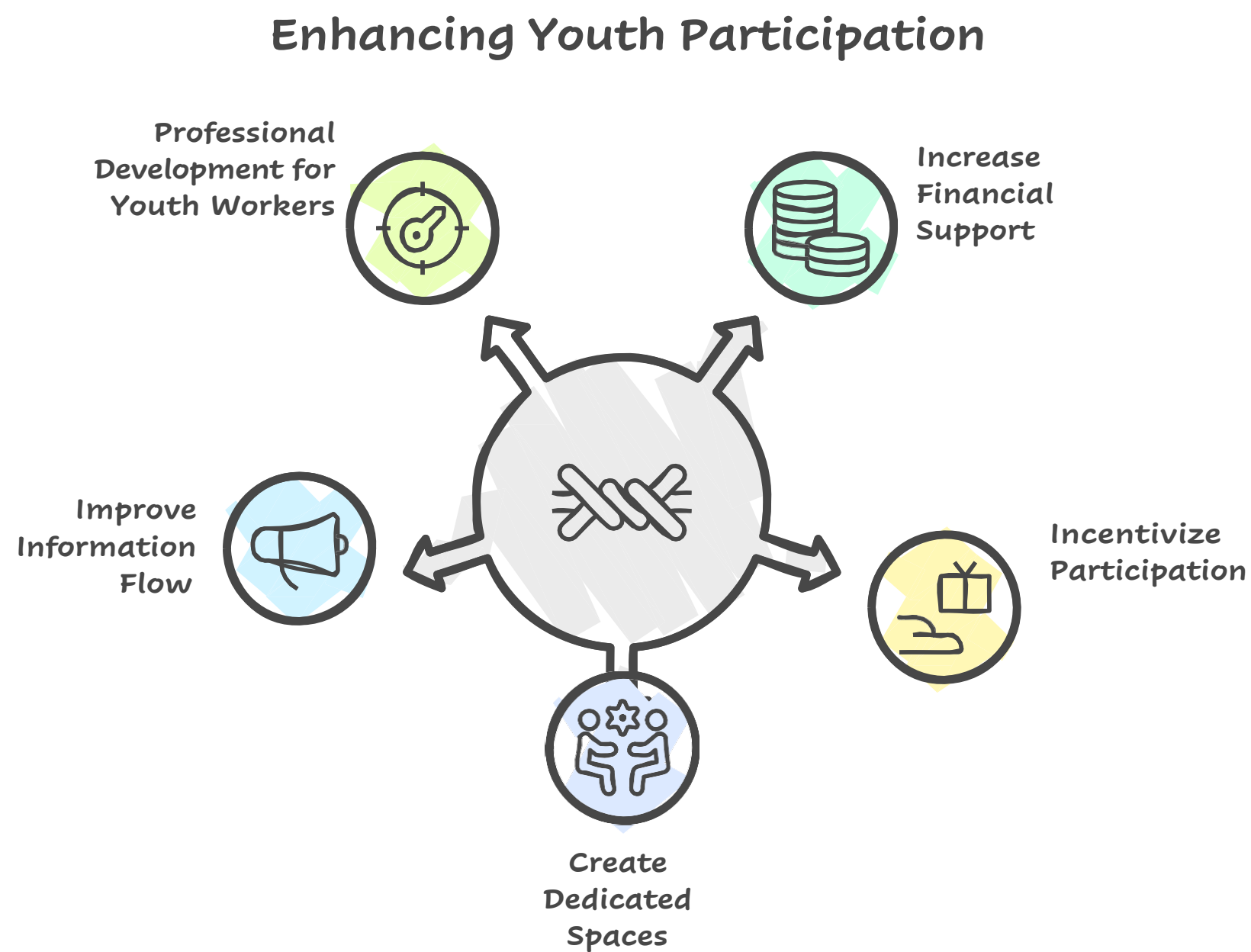
### Socioeconomic Barriers to Youth Civic Participation



### 3. Recommendations for Enhancing Youth Participation

The survey respondents provided several suggestions on how to overcome these barriers and enhance youth participation:

- **Increase Financial Support:** A strong theme across the responses was the need for financial resources to make youth programs more accessible. Funding should be allocated not only for program activities but also to support transportation, accommodation, and other related costs.
- **Incentivize Participation:** Many respondents emphasized that participation must be rewarding and enjoyable to encourage more youth engagement. Programs should offer tangible benefits, such as career development opportunities, social rewards, and personal growth, to make engagement appealing.
- **Create Dedicated Spaces for Youth:** A consistent recommendation was the creation of dedicated spaces where youth can engage in activities outside of formal education or family obligations. This would provide safe and accessible areas for creativity, learning, and community-building.
- **Improve Information Flow:** There was a clear need for more effective communication to ensure youth are aware of available opportunities. Clearer information about programs, how to get involved, and the benefits of participation should be disseminated through various channels, especially in rural and marginalized communities.
- **Professional Development for Youth Workers:** Many respondents indicated that providing training and mentorship for youth workers is essential to ensure they can effectively engage and support marginalized youth. Investing in the development of youth workers will equip them with the skills needed to bridge the gap between youth and opportunities for active citizenship.



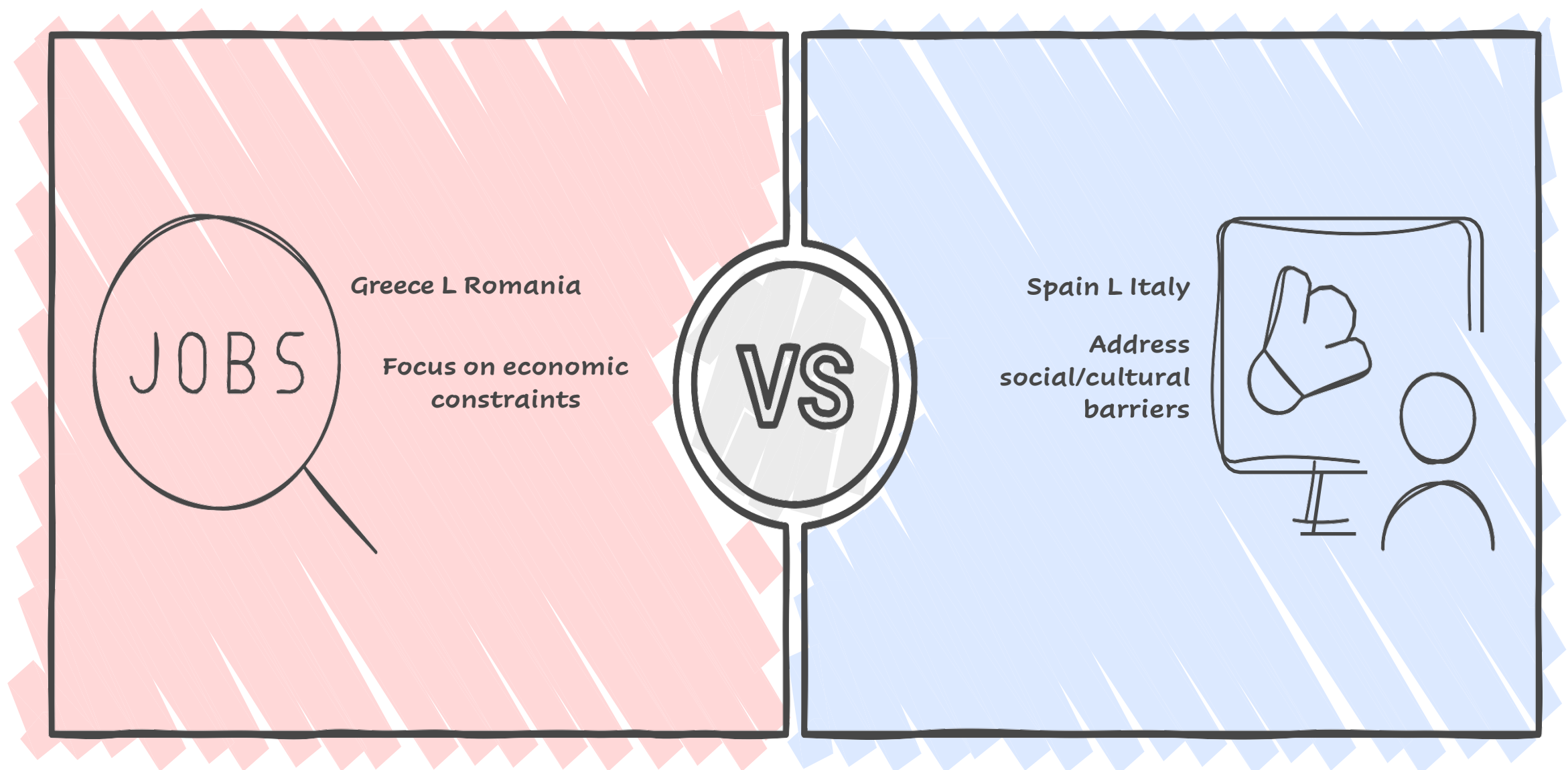


#### 4. Discussion

The findings highlight that while barriers to youth participation in active citizenship exist across Greece, Italy, Romania, and Spain, they are not universal. In particular, cultural, social, and economic differences between the countries influence the types of challenges faced by youth. For instance, while economic constraints were most pronounced in Greece and Romania, social and cultural barriers were more notable in Spain and Italy.

These results suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach will not be effective in addressing the barriers to youth participation. Instead, a tailored approach that considers the specific challenges in each country will be necessary to improve engagement. Furthermore, the role of youth workers and educators is critical in overcoming these barriers. They must be equipped with the skills and resources to support youth in navigating the challenges they face.

#### How to effectively address youth participation barriers?

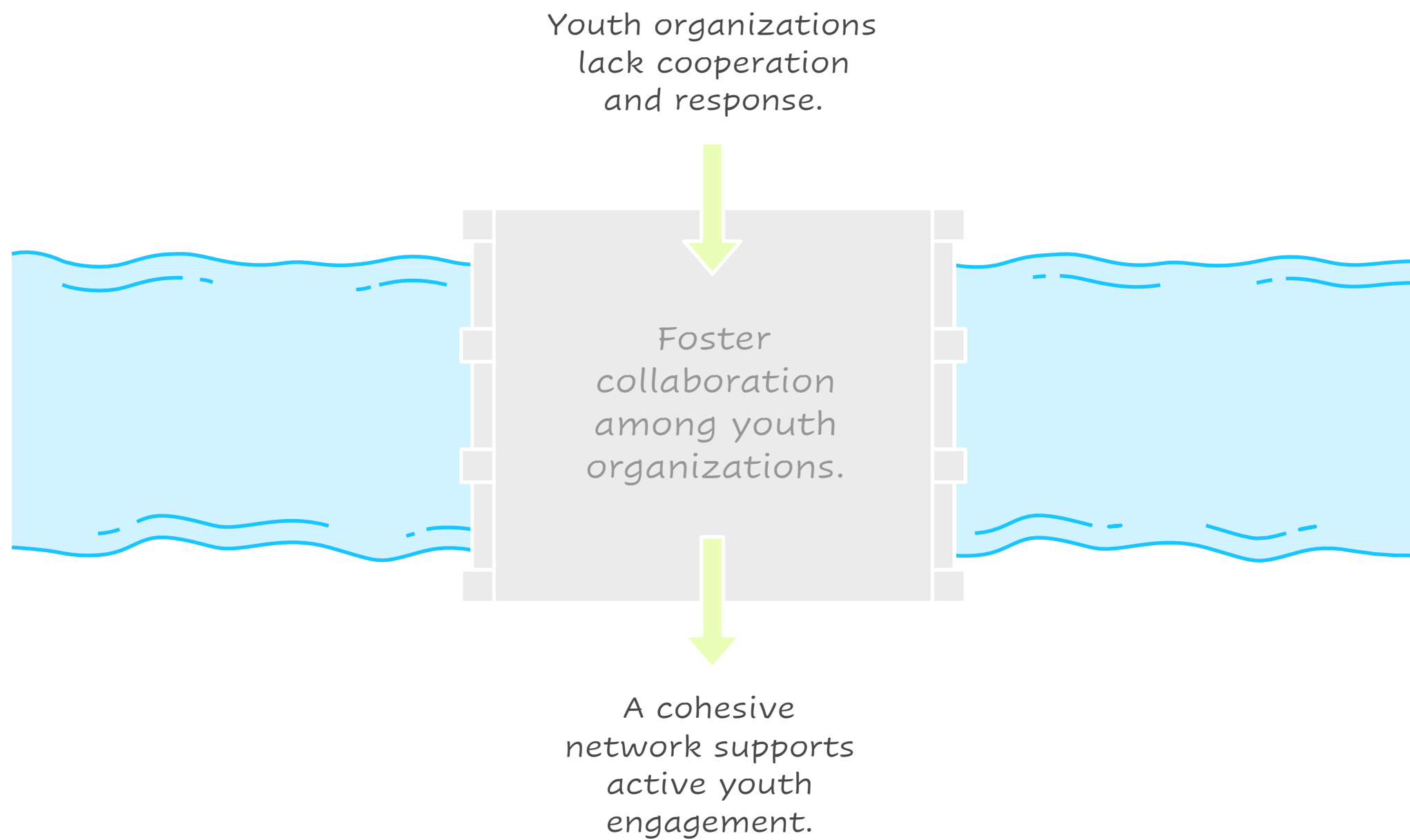


In addition to the thematic findings from the survey responses, a crucial insight emerged from the data collection process itself: the lack of cooperation from youth-focused organizations at all levels. Each country team made a concerted effort to disseminate the survey widely through organizations working in the youth field—spanning local, regional, and national levels. However, the response rate from these organizations was disproportionately low, despite the survey's clear alignment with shared goals of youth empowerment and civic engagement.

This points to a broader systemic issue: the absence of a cohesive, collaborative approach to youth participation across sectors. When youth workers and educators are unable to mobilize partnerships with other institutions, the impact of their efforts becomes limited and fragmented. More importantly, young people are left without a clear or consistent network of support that can guide them into active civic roles. If organizations within the youth field are disengaged or siloed, it creates barriers not only to research efforts like this one—but to sustainable, long-term youth participation itself.

Addressing youth participation must therefore go beyond targeting young people alone. It requires building a stronger, more responsive ecosystem of organizations committed to shared action, knowledge exchange, and collaboration. This is essential for translating research into practice, and for creating real, scalable change.

## Enhancing Youth Participation Through Collaboration



### 5. Conclusion

The analysis of youth participation and active citizenship in Greece, Italy, Romania, and Spain reveals significant barriers that hinder youth engagement. These barriers include lack of awareness, economic constraints, social and cultural obstacles, and logistical challenges. However, by addressing these challenges through targeted interventions such as increasing financial support, creating dedicated spaces for youth, and improving communication, youth participation can be significantly enhanced.

In comparison to EU-wide reports on youth engagement, such as the Eurobarometer surveys on youth participation, this survey aligns with the consistent trend that youth workers and educators often operate without sufficient backing from other organizations. The EU Youth Strategy calls for stronger partnerships and networks to foster more inclusive participation, yet the data from this survey reveals the same gaps that have been observed across Europe.

As noted in Eurofound's 2020 report on youth social inclusion, low institutional cooperation directly affects the ability of youth workers to mobilize engagement, particularly in marginalized or rural areas. This report echoes the struggles reported by respondents in our survey, highlighting the systemic nature of the issue.

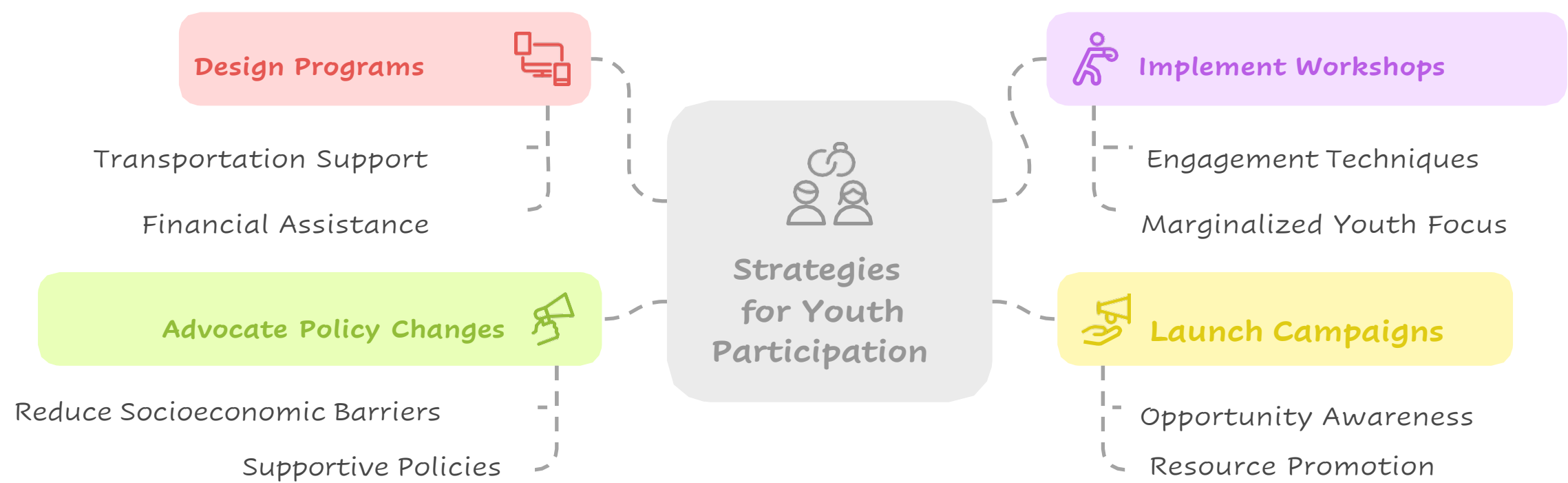


## 6. Next Steps

Based on the findings, the following steps are recommended for enhancing Youth Participation:

- Design accessible, low-cost youth programs that prioritize transportation and financial support.
- Implement workshops and training for youth workers to help them engage marginalized youth effectively.
- Launch a communication campaign to increase awareness of available opportunities and resources.
- Advocate for policy changes to support youth participation and reduce socioeconomic barriers.

## Strategies for Enhancing Youth Participation



## 7. Annexes

- Survey Questionnaire: A full version of the survey can be found in the annexes.
- Full Survey Data: Aggregated survey responses are included for reference, highlighting key trends and insights.