



# “Discovering Europe Together”



## ▼ Introduction

### ▼ Purpose of the Guide – why it was created and who it is for

This guide was created to capture the learning, energy and creativity that came to life during the Erasmus+ youth exchange “Primeiros Passos na União: Descobrimo Juntos a Diversidade Europeia”. After spending eight days together in Portugal, young people from four countries realised that the knowledge and insights they gained were too valuable to keep to themselves. They wanted to create something lasting — a digital resource that could inspire others to explore Europe, understand diversity, and build meaningful intercultural experiences of their own.

The guide is designed for young people, youth workers, teachers, NGO teams, and anyone curious about running or joining an Erasmus+ youth exchange. Whether you are completely new to international projects or

already experienced in non-formal education, this guide offers practical tools, activity ideas, honest reflections, and lessons learned directly from the participants. It is written in accessible language so that anyone, regardless of background or experience, can understand how youth mobility works and how it can change lives.

Above all, this guide aims to show that Europe is something we create together — through dialogue, shared experiences, and the courage to step outside our comfort zones. By sharing our journey, we hope to encourage more young people to take their first steps into the Union, discover its incredible diversity, and become active citizens shaping the future of Europe.

▼ **Project Context** – how the idea was born and its connection to Erasmus+

The idea for this youth exchange was born long before anyone packed their bags for Portugal. A small group of young people from Portugal, Germany, Poland and Spain met through previous local activities and international volunteering, and quickly realised they shared the same curiosity: What does it really mean to be European today? They wanted to explore Europe not through textbooks but through real conversations, shared experiences, and the diversity of their own stories. This simple yet powerful question inspired them to design a project where young people could learn directly from each other and discover Europe together.

With the support of their youth organisations, they shaped this idea into an Erasmus+ KA152-YOU project. Erasmus+ became the perfect platform because it encourages young people to take initiative, build international partnerships and address topics that matter to them — such as identity, inclusion, democracy and sustainability. The programme also provided the tools needed to turn their vision into reality: funding, structure, training opportunities, and a shared European framework for learning through experience.

By choosing Erasmus+, the group connected their personal motivation with a wider European mission. They wanted to show that active citizenship starts with meeting others, listening, and reflecting together. The project became a living example of what Erasmus+ stands for —

giving young people the chance to learn across borders, celebrate diversity, and become active builders of Europe's future.

### ▼ **Our Message to Young People** – what we learned together

If there is one message we want to share with young people across Europe, it is this: you don't need to be an expert, speak perfect English or travel the world to start discovering Europe — you only need the courage to take your first step. During our youth exchange in Portugal, we learned that real growth happens when you leave your comfort zone, meet people who see the world differently, and give yourself permission to be open, curious and honest.

We discovered that Europe is not just a map or a political structure — it is a mosaic of stories, traditions, emotions and dreams. Living together for eight days taught us that differences are not barriers, but invitations to learn. Through games, discussions, challenges and shared meals, we learned to collaborate, to listen deeply and to see ourselves through new eyes. Many of us found confidence we didn't know we had, and friendships we never expected.

Our final message is simple: you belong in Europe, and Europe belongs to you. Your ideas, your culture, your voice matter. Erasmus+ is a space where young people shape the future by being themselves, by daring to connect, and by learning with heart and intention. We hope this guide inspires you to take your own first steps — because the journey truly begins when young people come together to discover, create and grow.

### ▼ **How to Use This Guide** – short explanation of the structure

This guide is designed to be simple, practical and enjoyable to read. You can follow it from beginning to end, or jump directly to the sections that interest you most. Each chapter focuses on one key part of the youth exchange experience — from how the idea was created, to what we learned, to the concrete methods you can use in your own activities. The language is easy to follow, and every section includes real examples from our project in Portugal.

The first chapters tell the story of the project: how it was born, who took part, and what values guided us. The middle chapters explore the learning

approach, inclusion, sustainability, teamwork and digital collaboration — showing how these elements shaped our experience. The final chapters are more practical: they include ready-to-use session ideas, facilitation tips, and advice for anyone who wants to organise their own Erasmus+ youth exchange.

You can read this guide as inspiration, as a training resource, or as a roadmap for planning your own project. No matter how you use it, we hope it gives you confidence, ideas and motivation to discover Europe together with others.

## ▼ Chapter 1. About the Project

### ▼ 1.1 What the Project Was About

The project was a dynamic Erasmus+ youth exchange designed to help young people explore Europe through real experiences rather than theory. For eight days in Almeirim, Portugal, participants from four countries lived, learned and created together — discovering how diversity shapes Europe and how young people can play an active role in its future.

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#### ◆ A Space for Discovering European Diversity

The project provided an environment where participants could:

- experience different cultures first-hand,
- share their stories and perspectives,
- explore what “unity in diversity” means in everyday life.

Through games, discussions and creative tasks, young people learned that Europe is more than a collection of countries — it is a community built on shared values and cooperation.

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#### ◆ A Learning Journey Through Real Experiences

Instead of traditional lectures, the project used non-formal education to make learning engaging and practical. Participants:

- explored citizenship through democratic simulations,
- learned about inclusion through reflective activities,

- connected with nature and sustainability through daily habits,
- built teamwork and communication skills through challenges and games.

These experiences helped turn big ideas — like democracy, identity and inclusion — into something personal and meaningful.

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## ◆ A Project With Purpose and Impact

The youth exchange was designed to:

- empower young people to see themselves as active Europeans,
- build empathy and openness towards others,
- strengthen cooperation between partner organisations,
- inspire participants to take part in more Erasmus+ activities.

Most importantly, the project created a safe space where young people could grow, express themselves and understand their place in Europe.

### ▼ 1.2 Who Participated and Who Organised It

The youth exchange brought together a diverse group of young people and youth leaders who created a welcoming, supportive and inspiring learning community. Everyone arrived with different backgrounds, strengths and expectations — and together they shaped a unique European experience built on trust, curiosity and collaboration.

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## ◆ Who Took Part

The project involved young people aged 16–18 and group leaders from four countries:

- **Portugal** – hosting team and national group
- **Germany** – group of active young people engaged in youth initiatives
- **Poland** – participants with an interest in civic engagement and intercultural learning
- **Spain** – youth involved in local community activities

The group included participants with different:

- social and economic backgrounds,
- levels of travel experience (many travelled abroad for the first time),
- language skills,
- levels of confidence and leadership experience.

This diversity enriched every activity and helped create a balanced, supportive group dynamic.

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### ◆ Who Organised the Project

The exchange was coordinated and implemented by four committed youth organisations:

- **Youth Line Portugal** – coordinating and hosting organisation
- **Youth Line Germany** – partner organisation and team supporter
- **Youth Line Poland** – partner organisation responsible for preparation and follow-up
- **Gines Joven (Spain)** – partner organisation with strong experience in youth work

Together, the teams worked on:

- project design and Erasmus+ application,
  - participant selection and preparation,
  - activity planning and facilitation,
  - logistics, safety and inclusion,
  - follow-up, impact and dissemination.
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### ◆ A True Co-Creation with Young People

What made the exchange special was that young people were not just “participants” — they were **co-creators**. They:

- helped shape sessions,

- led energisers and group activities,
- supported each other through peer mentoring,
- contributed to intercultural evenings,
- co-created this digital guide.

Their active involvement made the project authentic, meaningful and full of ownership.

### ▼ 1.3 Why It Was Needed – the main motivation and goals

The project was created because young people from the four partner countries felt a real need to understand Europe in a deeper, more personal way. They wanted a space where they could talk openly about identity, inclusion, democracy and the challenges young people face today — not through theory, but through real experiences and honest conversations.

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#### ◆ Why the Project Was Needed

Many young people today feel:

- disconnected from European values and institutions,
- unsure how to participate in democratic life,
- overwhelmed by cultural differences or negative news,
- lacking opportunities to meet peers from other countries,
- eager to grow but unsure where to start.

The youth exchange responded to these needs by offering:

- a safe international space to explore big questions,
- practical experiences of cooperation and intercultural dialogue,
- tools to understand diversity and build empathy,
- opportunities for personal growth and confidence-building.

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#### ◆ The Main Motivation Behind the Project

The partners and young participants wanted to:

- empower youth to see themselves as part of Europe,
- explore how diversity enriches societies,
- strengthen connections between young people across borders,
- develop positive attitudes towards participation and active citizenship,
- promote inclusion, understanding and solidarity.

The motivation was simple but powerful:

**to bring young people together and show that Europe becomes stronger when they learn from each other.**

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### ◆ Key Goals of the Youth Exchange

The project aimed to:

- build intercultural understanding and friendships,
- develop key competences such as communication, teamwork and critical thinking,
- raise awareness about democracy, rights and participation,
- promote empathy and inclusion through shared experiences,
- encourage sustainable habits and environmental responsibility,
- inspire young people to join more Erasmus+ opportunities.

These goals shaped every activity during the exchange and helped create a meaningful, empowering journey for all participants.

#### ▼ 1.4 Connection to Erasmus+ Priorities and European Youth Goals

This youth exchange was not created in isolation — it was deeply connected to the wider vision of Erasmus+ and the European Youth Goals. Every part of the project, from the activities to the group values, reflected the priorities that Europe sets for meaningful youth work today. The exchange showed how these priorities can come to life through real experiences, teamwork and intercultural learning.

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### ◆ Supporting Erasmus+ Priorities



The project strongly contributed to the core priorities of the Erasmus+ programme:

### **1. Inclusion & Diversity**

- actively involving young people with fewer opportunities,
- creating a safe, supportive and accessible learning space,
- using mentoring and peer support to ensure equal participation.

### **2. Participation in Democratic Life**

- exploring citizenship through simulations and debates,
- learning how decisions are made at different levels of society,
- encouraging young people to express their opinions and take initiative.

### **3. Environmental Sustainability**

- practising eco-friendly habits during the exchange,
- reducing waste, using local products and reusing materials,
- connecting sustainability to everyday choices and European responsibility.

### **4. Digital Transformation**

- using Notion, Zoom and Google Drive for preparation and collaboration,
- developing digital literacy through creative tasks like video-making.

These priorities shaped the programme and made learning relevant to the challenges European youth face today.

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## **◆ Contribution to the European Youth Goals**

The project responded directly to several goals of the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027:

### **Youth Goal #3 – Inclusive Societies**

- building empathy and understanding through intercultural dialogue,

- exploring privilege, discrimination and equality.

#### **Youth Goal #4 – Information & Constructive Dialogue**

- creating spaces for honest, respectful and informed discussion,
- helping young people share their perspectives on Europe.

#### **Youth Goal #10 – Sustainable & Green Europe**

- encouraging environmentally responsible behaviours,
- raising awareness of climate action in everyday life.

#### **Youth Goal #11 – Youth Organisations & European Programmes**

- strengthening the cooperation between partner organisations,
  - inspiring participants to join future Erasmus+ opportunities.
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### **◆ Why This Connection Matters**

By aligning the exchange with these European priorities, the project helped young people see that their actions, ideas and learning are part of something larger. They began to understand themselves not only as individuals, but as **active Europeans**, capable of contributing to a more inclusive, democratic and sustainable future.

## **▼ Chapter 2. Learning through Experience**

### **▼ 2.1 Non-formal Education – what it means and why it works**

Non-formal education (NFE) shaped every moment of this youth exchange. Instead of learning through lectures or theory, participants learned through experience — by moving, talking, creating, reflecting and working as a team. This made the learning process more engaging, more personal and much more memorable.

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### **◆ What Non-formal Education Really Is**

Non-formal education is a way of learning that:

- puts young people at the centre of the experience,
- uses interactive, hands-on activities,

- focuses on skills, attitudes and values,
- recognises that learning happens everywhere — not only in classrooms.

It welcomes different learning styles and makes space for creativity, self-expression and teamwork.

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### ◆ Why This Approach Works So Well

NFE is effective because it:

- makes complex topics easier to understand through practical experience,
- creates emotional connections that strengthen learning,
- encourages active participation, not passive listening,
- helps young people learn about themselves as well as others.

When participants experience democracy through a simulation or empathy through a reflective game, the learning becomes real and personal — not abstract.

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### ◆ How We Used NFE in the Project

The programme included a wide variety of methods, such as:

- interactive games and energisers,
- role-plays and simulations,
- creative expression (art, movement, theatre),
- reflective exercises and group talks,
- problem-solving and teamwork challenges.

These methods helped participants build communication skills, cultural understanding, empathy and confidence — all while having fun and feeling included.

## ▼ 2.2 Key Learning Objectives and Competences Developed

The youth exchange was designed to support young people in growing not only as individuals, but also as active members of a diverse European community. Its main aim was to deepen their understanding of European identity, democratic participation, social inclusion and sustainability - not through theory, but through **practical, hands-on experience**.

The project encouraged participants to express themselves confidently, work together across cultures, and take initiative within their local communities. Above all, it helped them see diversity as a strength and recognise their own ability to create positive change.

### **Development of key competences**

Throughout the exchange, participants naturally developed several of the **EU Key Competences for Lifelong Learning**.

#### **◆ Communication and intercultural skills**

Working in multilingual teams, presenting ideas and listening to different viewpoints helped strengthen their communication skills and intercultural awareness.

#### **◆ Critical thinking and problem-solving**

Activities such as the **Parliament Simulation** and the **World Café** improved their ability to think critically, solve problems and engage in constructive, respectful dialogue.

#### **◆ Social and emotional learning**

Team challenges, creative tasks and reflection circles supported the development of **empathy, resilience, leadership and cooperation**, helping participants understand themselves and others better.

### **Citizenship and sustainability**

The project also encouraged the growth of **citizenship competence** - understanding rights, responsibilities and the importance of taking part in society.

Activities such as **Take a Step Forward** and **Image Theatre** allowed participants to explore fairness, inclusion and privilege in a personal and

reflective way.

Daily routines highlighted the importance of **sustainability**, motivating young people to adopt greener habits and recognise their role in protecting the environment.

## Outcomes

By the end of the exchange, participants reported feeling:

- **more confident** in expressing themselves,
- **more aware** of European issues and social challenges,
- and **more motivated** to join youth organisations, volunteer, and take part in future Erasmus+ opportunities.

They left the experience with stronger soft skills, wider perspectives and a clearer sense of belonging within the European community.

### ▼ 2.3 Main Activities and Learning Methods Used

The project brought learning to life through a mix of dynamic activities, creative tasks and reflective methods. Each day focused on a different theme - **citizenship, democracy, inclusion, culture and sustainability** - explored through non-formal education tools. Instead of receiving information passively, participants **experienced it**: they discussed, moved, created, played, reflected and made decisions together. This combination of physical, emotional and cognitive learning helped turn abstract ideas into personal insights.

#### ◆ **Activities that helped participants understand themselves and others**

- **Take a Step Forward** - a strong, visual activity that helped participants explore privilege and inequality.
- **Cross the Line** and **Circle of Trust** - exercises that built trust, openness and emotional safety within the group.
- **Image Theatre** - a creative method where participants expressed social issues through movement, showing that communication is not only about words

- **Parliament Simulation** - a structured activity that gave participants hands-on experience of how democratic processes work: how laws are proposed, negotiated and voted on.

#### ◆ **Reflection as part of everyday learning**

Reflection was woven into the whole process through:

- daily **reflection circles**,
- **Journalling**,
- **group discussions**,
- and the use of **Youthpass** to connect experiences with the eight key competences of Erasmus+.

Methods like the **World Café** supported shared reflection, helping young people explore complex topics together and build on one another's ideas.

#### ◆ **Teamwork and creative experiences**

Throughout the week, participants also took part in:

- team challenges,
- intercultural evenings,
- outdoor tasks,
- and creative video-making.

These activities strengthened cooperation, encouraged group spirit and highlighted the richness of European diversity. The learning was not only informative, but also **inspiring, memorable and deeply personal**.

#### ▼ 2.4 Youthpass – recognising and reflecting on learning

Youthpass helped participants understand that learning doesn't only happen in school — it also happens through teamwork, emotions, challenges and shared experiences. Throughout the youth exchange, Youthpass guided the reflection process and made personal learning visible, meaningful and empowering for every participant.

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#### ◆ **What Youthpass Means in This Project**

Youthpass is a tool that:

- helps young people reflect on what they learn,
- connects experiences to the **Eight Key Competences**,
- encourages personal growth and self-awareness,
- turns informal learning into recognised outcomes.

It gives young people a language to describe their development — something useful for school, future projects and even job applications.

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### ◆ **How Participants Reflected During the Exchange**

Reflection was integrated into the programme through:

- daily reflection circles,
- pair and small-group discussions,
- journaling and creative expression,
- debriefing after key activities.

These moments helped participants identify skills they developed, emotions they experienced and insights they gained.

**Examples of reflection topics included:**

- *What challenged me today?*
  - *What new skill did I practise?*
  - *How did this activity change my perspective?*
  - *What did I learn about Europe or myself?*
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### ◆ **Completing the Youthpass Certificate**

On the final days, participants:

- reviewed their learning experiences,
- matched them with the Eight Key Competences,
- wrote personal learning statements,

- created their official Youthpass certificates.

For many, this was a moment of pride — a chance to recognise how much they grew in just one week. Youthpass became more than a document; it became a reflection of their journey and a reminder of the skills they carry into the future.

## ▼ Chapter 3. Discovering Europe and Shared Values

### ▼ 3.1 Understanding European Identity and Diversity

One of the core goals of the exchange was to help young people explore what it really means to be European. Instead of reading definitions, participants discovered European identity by meeting each other, sharing cultures and discussing the values that connect us across borders. The experience showed that Europe is not a single story — it is a collection of many voices, backgrounds and traditions that together create something unique.

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### ◆ What European Identity Means to Young People

Throughout the project, participants explored questions like:

- *What makes us European?*
- *How do our cultures shape our identity?*
- *What values do we share despite our differences?*

They discovered that European identity is rooted in values such as:

- respect for human rights,
- freedom and democracy,
- solidarity and social justice,
- openness to diversity,
- cooperation and peace.

Participants learned that being European is not about being the same — it's about learning how to live together with curiosity and respect.

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## ◆ Experiencing Diversity First-Hand

Diversity became real through:

- intercultural evenings where each country shared food, music and traditions,
- informal conversations during meals and team challenges,
- group tasks that required combining different ideas and viewpoints,
- discovering how young people from other countries live, think, and dream.

These experiences helped participants see how cultural differences enrich learning and make European cooperation stronger.

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## ◆ Why This Matters for Young People

Understanding European diversity helped participants:

- break stereotypes and challenge assumptions,
- build empathy and intercultural communication skills,
- feel more connected to Europe and to one another,
- recognise their role in shaping Europe's future.

By the end of the exchange, many participants said they felt “more European” — not because they learned facts about the EU, but because they formed real relationships across borders and discovered shared values through experience.

### ▼ 3.2 Promoting Democracy, Equality and Human Rights

Democracy, equality and human rights were not just topics of discussion in this project — they were lived and experienced through interactive activities, open dialogue and teamwork. Young people explored these principles in practical, accessible ways that helped them understand why these values matter and how they can be protected in everyday life.

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## ◆ Understanding Democracy Through Experience

Instead of explaining democracy with definitions, the project brought it to life through:

- a **Parliament Simulation**, where participants proposed, debated and voted on laws;
- the **Dictator Game**, which highlighted power dynamics and the fragility of rights;
- group decision-making moments throughout the programme.

These methods helped participants understand:

- how democratic processes work,
- why compromise and dialogue are important,
- how easily rights can be lost when power is not shared,
- how every voice contributes to fair decisions.

Participants left with a stronger sense of what it means to participate actively in democratic life.

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## ◆ Exploring Equality and Human Rights

Sessions like **Take a Step Forward** and **Cross the Line** helped participants explore inequality in a personal and emotional way. By stepping into different social roles, they experienced how opportunities and rights are not always distributed fairly.

Participants deepened their understanding of:

- privilege and disadvantage,
- discrimination and stereotypes,
- the everyday reality of people whose rights are not fully protected,
- their own responsibility to promote fairness.

The reflections that followed these activities were some of the most powerful moments of the exchange.

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## ◆ Building a Culture of Respect

Through discussion and interaction, the group created a community based on human rights values such as:

- dignity and respect,
- freedom of expression,
- equality and inclusion,
- solidarity and cooperation.

Daily practice reinforced these values — whether through active listening, conflict resolution, or supporting peers who needed extra help.

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### ◆ **Why This Matters for Young People**

By experiencing democracy and human rights in action, participants learned that they have the power to:

- speak up,
- influence decisions,
- challenge injustice,
- support others,
- and help create fairer communities.

The exchange motivated many to become more active in their schools, youth centres and local organisations — proving that democracy grows stronger when young people are informed, confident and engaged.

### ▼ **3.3 Intercultural Dialogue and Respect for Differences**

Intercultural dialogue was at the heart of this youth exchange. With participants coming from Portugal, Germany, Poland and Spain, the project created countless opportunities to learn from one another's cultures, stories and everyday realities. Through conversations, shared tasks and cultural evenings, young people discovered that differences are not obstacles — they are invitations to understand the world more deeply.

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### ◆ **Creating Space for Real Intercultural Dialogue**

Intercultural dialogue happened naturally, but also through guided activities that encouraged curiosity and openness. Participants:

- shared personal stories about traditions, family life and cultural celebrations,
- discussed similarities and differences in values, education and community life,
- asked questions that helped break stereotypes gently and respectfully,
- took time to listen and understand before responding.

These moments supported meaningful connection and helped build trust across cultures.

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### ◆ Experiencing Culture Through Interaction

Intercultural understanding grew through practical experiences such as:

- **Intercultural Evenings**, where each country presented food, music, games or dances,
- cooking together using local products and sharing traditional recipes,
- collaborative tasks where mixed teams combined different approaches and ideas,
- informal conversations during meals, breaks and evening activities.

Participants discovered how culture influences communication, humour, teamwork and even decision-making — and learned to navigate these differences with respect.

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### ◆ Learning to Respect and Celebrate Diversity

Throughout the week, young people realised that respect means more than being polite. It involves:

- seeing the value in different perspectives,
- staying open-minded when something feels unfamiliar,
- acknowledging biases and challenging assumptions,

- appreciating that diversity brings creativity and strength to a group.

By the end of the exchange, participants described feeling more confident in engaging with people from different backgrounds and more aware of their own cultural identity.

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## ◆ Why Intercultural Dialogue Matters

Intercultural dialogue helps young people become:

- more empathetic,
- better communicators,
- stronger collaborators,
- more responsible global citizens.

The exchange showed that when young people talk openly, listen actively and respect each other's differences, they build bridges across borders — and create the foundation for a more peaceful and united Europe.

### ▼ 3.4 Building Active Citizenship and a Sense of Belonging

One of the most meaningful outcomes of this youth exchange was helping young people realise that they are not only observers of Europe — they are **active contributors**. Through discussions, simulations and shared experiences, participants discovered what citizenship truly means and how they can take part in shaping their communities. At the same time, they developed a stronger sense of belonging: to the group, to their countries, and to Europe as a shared home.

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## ◆ Understanding What It Means to Be an Active Citizen

Participants explored active citizenship through:

- democratic decision-making tasks,
- discussions about rights and responsibilities,
- real-life examples of youth-led initiatives,
- reflecting on the role young people play in their communities.

They learned that active citizenship is not only about voting — it's about engaging, helping others, staying informed and speaking up for what matters.

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## ◆ **Activities That Helped Build Citizenship Awareness**

Several key activities helped participants experience citizenship in action:

### **Parliament Simulation**

- proposing laws, debating them and negotiating compromises,
- understanding how democratic institutions function.

### **Minority Vote & Dictator Game**

- exploring how power works,
- seeing why protecting minority rights is essential.

### **World Café & Group Reflections**

- sharing ideas on how young people can influence society,
- learning from one another's experiences and perspectives.

These methods transformed abstract concepts into real, personal experiences.

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## ◆ **Developing a Sense of Belonging**

Belonging grew naturally through:

- teamwork in mixed-nationality groups,
- intercultural evenings,
- shared meals and informal conversations,
- supportive group dynamics and a safe emotional climate.

Participants felt connected not only to their peers but also to a wider European community. Many said they felt "more European" than before — not because of facts or lectures, but because of real relationships.

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## ◆ Why This Matters

Building active citizenship and belonging helps young people become:

- more confident and engaged in their communities,
- more aware of social issues and motivated to act,
- better equipped to participate in democratic life,
- more connected to Europe's values and future.

The exchange showed that when young people feel they belong and that their voice matters, they become powerful agents of positive change — in their schools, towns and at the European level.

### ▼ Chapter 4. Inclusion, Diversity and Participation

#### ▼ 4.1 Creating a Safe and Welcoming Space for Everyone

A safe and welcoming environment is the foundation of any successful youth exchange. In this project, creating such a space was not optional — it was essential. From the first moment in Almeirim, participants were encouraged to be themselves, express their feelings, ask questions and take part in activities without fear of judgment. This atmosphere allowed everyone, especially young people with fewer opportunities, to feel included, valued and ready to grow.

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## ◆ Building Trust from the Very Beginning

The first steps towards creating safety came through:

- icebreakers that helped participants get to know each other,
- co-creating group agreements about respect and behaviour,
- clear communication about roles, expectations and support,
- leaders and facilitators modelling openness, kindness and patience.

These early moments showed participants that their well-being mattered just as much as the activities.

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## ◆ Ensuring Emotional Safety Throughout the Exchange

To support emotional comfort and mental well-being, the team focused on:

- daily emotional check-ins and reflection circles,
- offering space for quiet time and rest when needed,
- encouraging peer support and buddy systems,
- making sure leaders were available for one-on-one conversations.

This helped participants feel secure even when activities challenged them or pushed them outside their comfort zones.

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### ◆ **Practical Steps for Inclusivity and Accessibility**

The project also created safety through practical measures such as:

- accessible explanations in simple English,
- visual instructions and translations when helpful,
- mixed-nationality groups that reduced isolation,
- adapting activities so everyone could participate equally,
- supporting participants with fewer opportunities through mentoring.

These steps ensured that no one was left behind — in understanding, participation or confidence.

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### ◆ **Why a Safe Space Matters**

When young people feel safe and welcomed, they can:

- express their thoughts freely,
- take risks and try new things,
- connect deeply with others,
- reflect honestly on their learning,
- grow emotionally and socially.

The safe space created in this exchange became the foundation for trust, friendship and meaningful learning — proving that inclusion starts with the environment we build together.



## ▼ 4.2 Supporting Young People with Fewer Opportunities

One of the core commitments of this youth exchange was ensuring that young people with fewer opportunities could participate fully, confidently and safely. The project recognised that barriers — financial, social, linguistic or emotional — can limit access to international experiences. That's why the partners worked together to remove those barriers and create conditions where every young person could thrive, regardless of their background.

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### ◆ Providing Extra Support Before the Exchange

The preparation phase focused on making participation accessible from the start. Partner organisations:

- held online meetings to explain the project step-by-step,
- offered one-to-one support for families and young people,
- helped with travel planning, documents and logistics,
- prepared participants emotionally for living abroad,
- shared simple, clear information in accessible language.

This early support helped reduce anxiety and made the first day of the exchange much easier for everyone.

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### ◆ Creating Equal Opportunities During Activities

Throughout the programme, facilitators adapted activities so that every participant could contribute comfortably. This included:

- using simple English supported by gestures and visuals,
- organising mixed-ability and mixed-nationality groups,
- giving extra time for tasks when needed,
- offering alternative roles to reduce pressure,
- encouraging peer support and team-based problem-solving.

Participants were encouraged to take leadership roles at their own pace, creating a natural and supportive learning environment.

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### ◆ Emotional and Social Support

Young people with fewer opportunities often face emotional challenges, such as lower confidence or fear of judgment. The team addressed this by:

- using daily emotional check-ins,
- offering space for private conversations with leaders,
- encouraging the group to celebrate small successes,
- paying attention to group dynamics and inclusion,
- creating a non-judgmental environment where mistakes were normal.

This approach helped participants gradually open up, find their voice and feel part of the group.

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### ◆ Impact on Participants

By the end of the exchange, many young people who had arrived shy or uncertain were:

- leading energisers and games,
- contributing confidently in discussions,
- expressing their opinions freely,
- building friendships across borders,
- feeling more capable and motivated for future opportunities.

The project showed how powerful Erasmus+ can be when support, empathy and accessibility are truly prioritised.

#### ▼ 4.3 Gender Balance and Equal Participation in Practice

Gender balance and equal participation were guiding principles throughout the youth exchange. The project aimed to ensure that every young person — regardless of their gender identity or expression — felt equally valued,

equally heard and equally empowered to take part. This meant going beyond equal numbers and actively creating a culture where everyone had the same opportunities to contribute, lead and learn.

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### ◆ **Ensuring Balanced Representation**

From the selection phase, all partner organisations worked to:

- create groups with balanced gender representation,
- encourage participation from girls, boys and non-binary young people,
- avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes in roles or tasks,
- ensure diverse leadership among group leaders and facilitators.

This helped create a group dynamic where no gender dominated the space or conversations.

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### ◆ **Creating Inclusive Group Dynamics**

During activities, facilitators and leaders paid attention to how gender influenced group interactions. They encouraged:

- equal speaking time in discussions,
- diverse voices in decision-making moments,
- rotation of group roles so no one was assigned a role “because of their gender”,
- mixed-gender teams for teamwork and problem-solving.

These practices helped participants gain confidence and recognise each other’s strengths beyond gender expectations.

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### ◆ **Challenging Stereotypes Through Learning**

Several activities explored identity, respect and equality, helping participants reflect critically on gender roles. Sessions such as:

- **Image Theatre,**
- **Take a Step Forward,**

- **Corners of Truth,**
- and structured debriefings

encouraged participants to discuss assumptions, cultural norms and the impact of stereotypes in everyday life. These conversations helped the group develop a more open and respectful understanding of gender diversity.

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### ◆ **Encouraging Equal Leadership and Expression**

Throughout the week, participants were invited to take leadership roles — leading energisers, presenting ideas, facilitating small tasks or helping coordinate intercultural evenings. Leaders encouraged:

- quieter voices to speak up,
- confident participants to create space for others,
- anyone interested to try leadership without pressure,
- respect for all styles of communication.

This approach helped everyone feel that their contribution was important and appreciated.

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### ◆ **Why Gender Balance Matters**

By practising gender equality in everyday moments, participants learned that:

- inclusive spaces are created intentionally,
- equality requires awareness and active choice,
- diversity in leadership makes groups stronger,
- respect and fairness are essential European values.

The exchange helped young people recognise gender equality not as a rule, but as a lived experience — one that shapes healthier, more respectful and more democratic communities.

#### ▼ 4.4 Youth Involvement in All Phases – from design to follow-up

This project was truly *“by young people, for young people.”* Participants were not passive recipients — they were active co-creators who shaped the exchange from the earliest planning stages to the follow-up activities after returning home. Their involvement gave the project authenticity, energy and relevance, and helped build their confidence as leaders and changemakers.

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### ◆ Youth Involvement in the Design Phase

Long before the exchange started, young people contributed to:

- brainstorming the original idea for the project,
- choosing the main themes (citizenship, diversity, inclusion, sustainability),
- suggesting methods and types of activities,
- helping prepare the application with their organisations,
- shaping the Infopack and proposing accessibility improvements.

This early involvement ensured that the project reflected real interests and needs of young people, not assumptions made by adults.

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### ◆ Active Participation During the Exchange

Throughout the programme, participants were involved in:

- co-facilitating energisers and group games,
- leading small-group discussions and tasks,
- helping organise intercultural evenings,
- suggesting adaptations to activities,
- supporting peers who needed translation or encouragement.

Their initiative brought diversity to the programme and created a collaborative learning environment.

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### ◆ Youth Leadership in Group Decisions

Young people played an active role in shaping everyday group life by:

- agreeing on group rules and responsibilities,
- making collective decisions about time management and shared spaces,
- resolving conflicts respectfully,
- proposing improvements to activities and routines,
- taking initiative when tasks needed to be organised.

This showed them that leadership is not about authority — it is about teamwork, responsibility and empathy.

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### ◆ Youth-Led Follow-Up and Dissemination

After the exchange, participants continued contributing by:

- co-creating this **Digital Guide**,
- collaborating on the **Project Journey video**,
- presenting the project in their schools and communities,
- sharing experiences on social media,
- joining online follow-up meetings to reflect on long-term impact.

These actions helped keep the project alive and spread its results across countries.

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### ◆ Why Youth Involvement Matters

Being involved at every stage helped participants:

- feel ownership and pride in the project,
- develop leadership and organisational skills,
- gain confidence in expressing ideas and taking initiative,
- understand Erasmus+ more deeply,
- act as multipliers of Europe's values in their communities.

When young people are trusted, supported and included, they don't just participate — they lead, innovate and inspire others.

## ▼ Chapter 5. Green and Digital Dimensions

### ▼ 5.1 Our Eco-Friendly Choices and Sustainability Actions

Sustainability was not just a topic in this youth exchange — it was a daily practice. The project encouraged young people to reflect on how their choices impact the environment and how small habits can create positive change. By integrating eco-friendly actions into everyday life, participants experienced sustainability as something simple, practical, and achievable for everyone.

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#### ◆ Choosing Local and Sustainable Resources

One of the most meaningful choices was prioritising local, low-impact resources. Throughout the exchange:

- meals were prepared using **local and seasonal products**,
- food waste was monitored and reduced,
- plastic packaging was avoided whenever possible,
- reusable plates, cups and cutlery were encouraged.

This not only reduced environmental impact, but also helped participants connect with the local culture of Almeirim.

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#### ◆ Reducing Waste and Reusing Materials

Creativity and sustainability went hand in hand during the activities. The team promoted:

- reusing paper, cardboard and craft materials in workshops,
- replacing printed materials with digital tools,
- recycling bins clearly marked and accessible,
- bringing personal water bottles to avoid disposable plastics.

Participants saw how easy it is to give materials a second life — without losing quality in learning.

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### ◆ **Eco-Friendly Habits in Daily Life**

Sustainability was also part of the group's daily routine. Participants practised:

- turning off lights and AC when leaving rooms,
- taking shorter showers to save water,
- walking whenever possible rather than relying on transport,
- sharing responsibilities for keeping the venue clean.

These habits helped everyone understand that sustainability is built through everyday actions, not big gestures.

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### ◆ **Learning Through Reflection**

Sustainability activities were not complete without reflection. The group discussed:

- why environmental responsibility matters in Europe today,
- how climate actions start at personal and community levels,
- ways to bring eco-friendly habits back to their homes and schools,
- how young people can influence greener choices in their communities.

These conversations encouraged participants to see themselves as part of Europe's transition to a greener future.

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### ◆ **Why Sustainability Matters in Erasmus+**

Through their choices, participants learned that:

- sustainable living is accessible to everyone,
- small steps can inspire larger changes,
- caring for the planet is a shared European value,



- eco-friendly habits can be fun, creative and empowering.

The project showed that a greener Europe begins with young people who understand their impact — and take responsibility with confidence and enthusiasm.

## ▼ 5.2 Sustainable Travel and Everyday Green Habits

Sustainability starts long before a youth exchange begins — even in the way we travel. In this project, the partners encouraged young people to make conscious choices that reduced environmental impact while still keeping the experience accessible and safe. Once in Portugal, participants continued to practise simple eco-friendly habits that made daily life greener, more mindful and more responsible.

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### ◆ Choosing More Sustainable Travel Options

Even though participants came from different parts of Europe, the project prioritised the most sustainable travel options possible within the programme rules. Partner organisations encouraged:

- **group travel** by plane, train or bus to reduce emissions per person,
- choosing **direct routes** to minimise unnecessary flights and connections,
- planning **efficient airport transfers** to reduce local transport impact,
- supporting participants with fewer opportunities to travel confidently in new, sustainable ways.

These small decisions helped reduce the ecological footprint of the entire group.

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### ◆ Eco-Friendly Habits Practised Every Day

During the exchange, sustainability became a shared responsibility through practical actions such as:

- **using reusable water bottles** instead of disposable plastic,
- **sorting waste** using clearly marked recycling bins,

- **saving water** by taking shorter showers and closing taps properly,
- **turning off lights and electrical devices** when leaving rooms,
- **sharing resources** (like chargers, materials or leftover food) to avoid waste.

These habits may seem simple, but together they made the group more mindful of their impact.

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### ◆ Sustainable Living Through Group Routines

Young people integrated greener habits into their group life by:

- walking to nearby places instead of using transport,
- reusing materials for creative tasks and workshops,
- cooking with minimal waste and using local seasonal ingredients,
- organising cleaning teams to keep shared spaces tidy and eco-friendly.

These routines helped participants realise that living sustainably is not difficult — it's about daily choices made together.

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### ◆ Understanding the Bigger Picture

Reflection moments helped participants explore sustainability from a European perspective. They discussed:

- how individual actions connect to global environmental challenges,
- the importance of sustainable behaviour for future generations,
- how they can bring these habits back to their families, schools and communities,
- their role as young Europeans in supporting climate goals.

These conversations inspired many to continue making green choices after returning home.

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### ◆ Why Sustainable Travel and Habits Matter

The project showed young people that:

- sustainability is achievable for everyone,
- conscious travel can reduce environmental impact without reducing experience,
- daily habits shape our mindset and our future,
- young people play a key role in building a greener, more responsible Europe.

The exchange proved that when sustainability becomes part of everyday life, it becomes part of who we are as active European citizens.

### ▼ 5.3 Digital Tools for Learning, Communication and Sharing

Digital tools played a key role in connecting the participants before, during and after the youth exchange. They made communication smoother, supported collaborative learning and helped the group document and share their experience creatively. By using simple but powerful digital platforms, participants developed skills that are essential for today's world — from teamwork and organisation to media literacy and digital expression.

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#### ◆ Tools for Preparing and Staying Connected

Before meeting in Portugal, digital platforms helped participants get to know each other and understand the project. The group used:

- **Zoom** for online preparation meetings,
- **Google Meet** for Q&A sessions and updates,
- **WhatsApp** for practical information and informal communication,
- **Google Drive** for sharing documents and accessibility materials.

These tools ensured everyone arrived well-prepared and confident.

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#### ◆ Digital Tools Used During the Exchange

Throughout the programme, digital tools supported learning, creativity and coordination. The group used:

- **Notion** to co-create the Digital Guide and organise reflections,
- **Google Drive** to store photos, videos and shared documents,
- **Canva** to design posters, visual materials and social media posts,
- **Smartphones** for quick research, translation and collaborative tasks.

These tools helped participants work as a team, even across languages or learning styles.

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### ◆ **Creating and Sharing Project Results**

Digital tools also played an important role in dissemination. Participants used:

- **CapCut / iMovie / PowerDirector** to edit the *Project Journey* video,
- **Instagram and TikTok** to share insights, photos and stories from the exchange,
- **YouTube** to publish the final video and reach a wider audience,
- **Notion and Google Docs** to write and organise this guide collaboratively.

These platforms allowed young people to share their creativity and make the project visible beyond the group.

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### ◆ **Digital Learning as a Key Competence**

Using digital tools helped participants strengthen important 21st-century skills:

- online collaboration and organisation,
- safe and responsible digital communication,
- creativity in video and media production,
- critical thinking when using online information.

These competences will support them at school, in future Erasmus+ projects and in their everyday digital lives.

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## ◆ Why Digital Tools Matter in Youth Exchanges

The project showed that digital tools:

- make international cooperation easier,
- support inclusive communication,
- help document and celebrate learning,
- give young people a voice in the online space,
- create long-lasting results, like this Digital Guide.

Digital literacy is now part of what it means to be an active European citizen — and this youth exchange helped participants develop it with confidence and creativity.

### ▼ 5.4 Combining Online and Offline Learning Approaches

The project showed how powerful learning can be when online and offline methods work together. Digital tools helped the group prepare, collaborate and stay connected, while in-person activities created deeper emotional experiences and stronger relationships. By combining both approaches, participants enjoyed a smooth learning journey that was flexible, inclusive and enriched by multiple perspectives.

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## ◆ Online Preparation Before Meeting in Portugal

Online tools made it possible for participants to feel comfortable even before arriving at the venue. Partner organisations organised:

- **online introduction meetings** on Zoom,
- **team-building games** to reduce anxiety and build early connections,
- **information sessions** about logistics, expectations and safety,
- **digital sharing of materials** through Google Drive and Notion,
- **WhatsApp group chats** to break initial language barriers and build trust.

This preparation helped ensure that the first day of the youth exchange felt warm, familiar and welcoming — not stressful.

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## ◆ Offline Learning Through Experience

During the exchange in Almeirim, learning happened mainly through in-person activities, including:

- energisers, simulations and role-plays,
- creative tasks, theatre and group challenges,
- intercultural evenings and hands-on workshops,
- reflection circles and emotional check-ins,
- outdoor activities and teamwork.

These offline moments created strong memories, deepened bonds and made learning feel real and meaningful.

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## ◆ Digital Support During the Exchange

Even while working offline, digital tools supported the learning process by:

- helping participants **document activities** with photos and videos,
- enabling easy **sharing of group work**,
- offering translation support for participants who needed it,
- organising materials and instructions digitally to reduce paper waste,
- using Notion and Google Docs for collaborative tasks.

This balance prevented digital overload while still making technology a helpful ally.

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## ◆ Online Follow-Up After Returning Home

Once back in their countries, participants continued working together online. They:

- joined **follow-up meetings** to reflect on long-term learning,
- collaborated on the **Digital Guide** using Notion,
- co-created social media posts to share results,
- edited and published the **Project Journey video**,

- stayed connected through WhatsApp and Instagram.

This online phase extended the project's impact and kept the international friendships alive.

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### ◆ **Why the Blended Approach Worked**

By combining online and offline learning, the project:

- ensured accessibility and better preparation,
- gave participants time to build trust before meeting,
- made on-site learning deeper and more experiential,
- supported reflection and creativity after the exchange,
- offered a more holistic, flexible and inclusive learning experience.

Participants discovered that blended learning is not just a trend — it is a powerful way to connect young people across borders and keep learning alive long after the exchange ends.

## ▼ **Chapter 6. Impact and Follow-up**

### ▼ 6.1 Impact on Participants – personal and social growth

The youth exchange created a powerful space for personal and social transformation. For many young people, it was their first time living abroad, working in an international team or speaking English daily. These experiences pushed them beyond their comfort zones while surrounding them with support, encouragement and friendship. As a result, participants returned home more confident, more aware and more connected — both to themselves and to Europe.

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### ◆ **Personal Growth: Confidence, Independence and Self-Awareness**

Throughout the exchange, participants developed important personal skills such as:

- **greater confidence** in expressing themselves in an international group,
- **more independence** in managing daily routines away from home,

- **stronger emotional awareness** through reflection circles,
- **resilience** gained from facing challenges in a supportive environment,
- **initiative and leadership**, especially through group tasks and energisers.

Many young people described the project as a turning point — a moment when they realised their own strengths and discovered what they are capable of.

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### ◆ **Social Growth: Communication, Empathy and Cooperation**

Living and learning together helped participants build social competences essential for life in a diverse Europe. They developed:

- **intercultural communication skills**,
- **active listening and empathy**,
- **teamwork and problem-solving abilities**,
- **respect for different perspectives**,
- **strong international friendships** that continued after the project.

These skills emerged naturally through shared meals, joint challenges, intercultural evenings and everyday conversations.

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### ◆ **Becoming More Open-Minded and Curious**

The exchange encouraged participants to:

- question stereotypes,
- stay open to new ideas and cultures,
- understand how diversity enriches societies,
- reflect on their own identity and values,
- see themselves as part of a wider European community.



For many, this was their first time experiencing diversity in such a deep and personal way.

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### ◆ Motivation for Future Engagement

The project ignited a sense of motivation and possibility. After the exchange, participants felt:

- more inspired to join new Erasmus+ projects,
- motivated to volunteer or take action in their communities,
- confident in participating in democratic and civic life,
- eager to continue learning languages and exploring Europe.

Several expressed interest in becoming youth leaders or helping organise future exchanges — showing the long-term impact of the experience.

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### ◆ Why This Impact Matters

Personal and social growth gives young people the tools they need to shape their futures. By building confidence, empathy and cooperation skills, the project empowered participants to become active citizens who contribute positively to their communities — locally, nationally and across Europe. This is the true magic of Erasmus+: it helps young people realise they have a place, a voice and a role in Europe.

#### ▼ 6.2 Impact on Organisations and Local Communities

The youth exchange created impact far beyond the participants themselves. It strengthened the partner organisations, inspired new ideas in youth work, and brought positive visibility to local communities in all four countries. By working together across borders, the organisations deepened their cooperation, expanded their capacity and built stronger connections with young people. At the same time, the local community of Almeirim became an active part of the experience, benefiting from international exchange and cultural interaction.

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### ◆ Impact on Partner Organisations

The project strengthened the organisations involved by:

- **improving teamwork and cooperation** across Portugal, Germany, Poland and Spain,
- building capacity to design and manage international Erasmus+ projects,
- gaining experience in inclusive, youth-led and intercultural methodologies,
- strengthening communication skills in English and digital project management,
- developing new tools for preparation, follow-up and blended learning.

Many organisations expressed that the project helped them professionalise their youth work and prepare more ambitious Erasmus+ applications in the future.

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### ◆ **New Opportunities and Long-Term Partnerships**

Through this exchange, the organisations:

- established **stronger, trust-based partnerships**,
- planned future youth exchanges and training courses together,
- expanded their network of local supporters, teachers and youth workers,
- gained confidence to apply for new Erasmus+ grants,
- involved more young people in international mobility programmes.

The project became a foundation for long-term cooperation within the Youth Line network and beyond.

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### ◆ **Impact on Local Communities**

The community of Almeirim and the home communities of all partners benefited from:

- increased **visibility of Erasmus+ opportunities**,

- intercultural interactions during city visits and local excursions,
- youth-led dissemination events in schools and youth centres,
- new awareness about inclusion, sustainability and active citizenship,
- the *Project Journey* video and Digital Guide being shared widely online.

Local residents were excited to see young people from different European countries engaging with their community — creating a positive image of diversity and cooperation.

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### ◆ **Strengthening Youth Participation Locally**

After returning home, participants became ambassadors of European values in their own towns. They:

- shared what they learned with classmates and friends,
- encouraged peers to join Erasmus+ activities,
- inspired local youth organisations to host future exchanges,
- contributed ideas for community projects and volunteering.

This ripple effect showed how one week abroad can energise entire youth communities.

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### ◆ **Why Organisational and Community Impact Matters**

Strong organisations create stronger opportunities for young people. Local communities that welcome diversity help young people feel connected to Europe. By strengthening both, the project contributed to a more inclusive, active and interconnected European youth sector — proving that the impact of Erasmus+ extends far beyond the exchange itself.

#### ▼ 6.3 Follow-up Actions and Dissemination Activities

The end of the mobility was not the end of the project. After returning home, participants and partner organisations continued working together to ensure that the learning, results and impact of the exchange reached much wider audiences. Through creative digital outputs, school

presentations, social media content and community events, the group made sure that the knowledge gained in Portugal continued to inspire others across Europe.

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### ◆ Youth-Led Follow-Up Actions

Participants played an active role in follow-up activities by:

- joining **online reflection meetings** to discuss long-term learning,
- contributing to this **Digital Guide – “Discovering Europe Together”**,
- helping edit and produce the **Project Journey video**,
- sharing personal testimonies with peers,
- staying connected through WhatsApp groups and digital collaboration tools.

These activities helped young people digest their experience and transform it into something meaningful for their communities.

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### ◆ Dissemination in Schools, Youth Centres and Communities

Back home, participants helped spread the project results by:

- giving presentations in their **schools**,
- speaking at **youth clubs and local organisations**,
- discussing the project with teachers, neighbours and friends,
- organising small workshops based on the project methods,
- displaying posters and photos from the exchange in community spaces.

These actions increased visibility for Erasmus+ and motivated other young people to participate in future mobilities.

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### ◆ Online Dissemination and Social Media Outreach

The group used digital platforms to reach an even wider audience. Together with partner organisations, participants:

- shared photos, reflections and stories on **Instagram, TikTok and Facebook**,
- posted highlights on organisational social media pages,
- published the **Project Journey video** on YouTube and other platforms,
- used Canva to create visually engaging posts and infographics,
- contributed to Erasmus+ visibility hashtags and campaigns.

These online efforts helped the project reach young people far beyond the four participating countries.

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### ◆ Collaborative Creation of a Digital Guide

One of the major results of the dissemination phase is this **Digital Guide**, co-created by participants using Notion and Google Docs. The guide:

- documents the project's learning methods and impact,
- provides inspiration and tools for youth workers across Europe,
- highlights good practices in inclusion, sustainability and intercultural learning,
- demonstrates the long-term results of the exchange.

It stands as a lasting contribution to the Erasmus+ community.

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### ◆ Why Follow-Up and Dissemination Matter

These actions helped ensure that:

- the project continued to influence young people even after it ended,
- Erasmus+ opportunities reached new audiences,
- organisations strengthened their visibility and networks,
- the impact of the exchange became sustainable and long-lasting.

Through follow-up and dissemination, the participants proved that learning does not end with a mobility — it expands, multiplies and becomes a spark for new ideas and future projects.

#### ▼ 6.4 Ensuring Long-term Results and Sustainability

A youth exchange creates meaningful impact only when its results continue to live beyond the project week. From the start, the partners and participants designed this exchange with long-term sustainability in mind — ensuring that the skills, relationships and knowledge gained in Portugal would continue to grow, inspire and influence others. Through follow-up activities, ongoing cooperation and responsibility for shared European values, the project built a foundation for lasting change.

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#### ◆ Keeping the Learning Alive After the Mobility

Participants were encouraged to carry their new insights into everyday life. After the exchange, they continued to:

- reflect on personal growth through Youthpass and journaling,
- apply communication and teamwork skills in school and community settings,
- stay connected with international friends and exchange cultural ideas,
- stay active in local youth organisations,
- participate in future Erasmus+ opportunities.

Many described the exchange as a turning point that shaped how they see themselves and their place in Europe.

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#### ◆ Strengthening Organisational Capacity and Future Projects

The partner organisations ensured long-term impact by:

- integrating the project's tools and methods into their regular youth work,
- training new volunteers and leaders using lessons from the exchange,

- developing new project ideas inspired by this experience,
- strengthening their international partnerships for future cooperation,
- gaining experience in inclusive, youth-led and sustainable project design.

This exchange became a building block for future Erasmus+ collaborations.

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### ◆ Long-Term Digital Outputs

To make the results accessible to others, the project produced long-lasting digital resources:

- the **Project Journey video**,
- this **Digital Guide – “Discovering Europe Together”**,
- photo archives, reflections and materials shared online,
- documentation of methods used in the sessions.

These tools help youth workers, teachers, and organisations apply the project’s methods in new contexts.

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### ◆ Ongoing Community and Peer Impact

Sustainability also comes through the ripple effect participants create in their communities. They contributed to long-term impact by:

- sharing intercultural perspectives with classmates and peers,
- organising small workshops and presentations,
- inspiring friends to join Erasmus+ projects,
- raising awareness about inclusion, sustainability and safe spaces,
- helping organisations strengthen their outreach to young people.

This peer-to-peer influence ensures that the project benefits more than just those who attended.

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### ◆ Why Long-term Sustainability Matters

Ensuring sustainability means that:

- the project's lessons don't fade after one week,
- young people continue growing as active European citizens,
- organisations stay motivated and capable of running new mobilities,
- communities benefit from fresh ideas and new perspectives,
- Europe's values of diversity, democracy and cooperation become part of everyday life.

By combining follow-up, long-term planning and youth leadership, the project created results that will continue to shape participants and communities for years to come.

## ▼ Chapter 7. Tools, Practices and Recommendations

### ▼ 7.1 Good Practices and Examples from Our Project

Throughout the youth exchange, several practices proved especially effective in creating meaningful learning, strong group dynamics and impactful results. These approaches were simple, easy to adapt and highly powerful in supporting inclusion, participation and intercultural understanding. By sharing them here, we hope to inspire youth workers and young people to use similar methods in their own Erasmus+ projects.

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#### ◆ 1. Co-Creating Group Rules and Shared Responsibility

One of the first activities was inviting participants to create their own group agreements. This simple step helped the group develop a feeling of ownership and safety from the beginning.

##### **What made it effective:**

- everyone contributed their ideas,
- rules were discussed, not imposed,
- expectations became clear and shared,
- responsibility and trust grew naturally.

##### **Why it matters:**



A co-created safe environment empowers participants to speak freely, take initiative and support one another.

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## ◆ 2. Mixed-Nationality Teams for All Activities

From energisers to deep reflection tasks, mixed-nationality groups ensured that participants interacted beyond their national teams.

### **What made it effective:**

- reduced cultural “cliques”,
- encouraged English practice in a natural way,
- helped build international friendships,
- strengthened teamwork and cooperation.

### **Why it matters:**

When young people work closely with peers from different countries, intercultural learning becomes a lived experience — not just a topic.

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## ◆ 3. Learning Through Simulations and Creative Methods

Activities such as **Take a Step Forward**, **Image Theatre**, **World Café**, and the **Parliament Simulation** helped participants explore complex topics through experience.

### **What made it effective:**

- simulations created emotional engagement,
- theatre methods allowed expression beyond language barriers,
- group discussions encouraged critical thinking,
- creative tasks made learning enjoyable and memorable.

### **Why it matters:**

Non-formal learning tools transform abstract values like democracy and inclusion into real, personal understanding.

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## ◆ 4. Daily Reflection and Youthpass Integration

Reflection circles held every evening supported emotional well-being and helped participants recognise key learning moments.

**What made it effective:**

- guided questions simplified self-reflection,
- young people practised giving and receiving feedback,
- participants connected experiences to Youthpass competences,
- openness strengthened group trust and emotional safety.

**Why it matters:**

Reflection transforms experience into meaningful, long-term learning.

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## ◆ 5. Blended Learning: Combining Digital and In-Person Work

The project integrated digital tools before, during and after the exchange.

**Examples:**

- online preparation meetings,
- shared documents on Google Drive,
- collaborative work on Notion,
- digital storytelling through photos and videos.

**Why it matters:**

Blended learning improves accessibility, keeps participants connected and supports creative dissemination.

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## ◆ 6. Eco-Friendly Habits Built Into Daily Routine

Sustainability was practised through simple choices and collective responsibility.

**Good practices included:**

- using local products for meals,
- reusing materials in workshops,

- reducing plastic and waste,
- practising water and energy saving habits.

### **Why it matters:**

Embedding green habits into daily life helps participants internalise sustainability as a core European value.

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## **◆ Why These Practices Worked**

These approaches were successful because they were:

- **inclusive** and adaptable to different needs,
- **participatory**, encouraging youth leadership,
- **practical**, requiring minimal resources,
- **meaningful**, connecting directly to Erasmus+ goals,
- **engaging**, combining learning with fun and creativity.

They can be easily transferred to other youth exchanges, training courses, school environments or local youth activities.

### **▼ 7.2 Useful Tools and Templates for Future Projects**

Running a successful youth exchange becomes much easier when you have the right tools and templates. During our project, we used a mix of digital platforms and ready-made documents that helped us stay organised, prepare participants effectively, and keep communication smooth. These tools were simple to use, accessible for all, and adaptable to different contexts — making them ideal for anyone planning future Erasmus+ activities.

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## **◆ 1. Tools for Preparation and Organisation**

These tools helped the partner organisations and group leaders coordinate tasks, share information and stay aligned from the very beginning.

### **Useful platforms:**

- **Google Drive** – storing files, infopacks, agendas, consent forms, travel plans
- **Notion** – co-creating documents, organising content, writing the Digital Guide
- **Google Sheets** – participant lists, arrival/departure tables, budgeting
- **Zoom / Google Meet** – online preparation meetings and Q&A sessions
- **WhatsApp Groups** – instant communication and updates for all teams

#### **Why they help:**

They reduce stress, avoid lost information, and make collaboration transparent and easy to follow.

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## ◆ 2. Templates for Communication and Logistics

Having templates ready saves time and ensures clarity for both participants and organisers.

#### **Recommended templates:**

- **Participant Application Form** – with questions on motivation, needs and expectations
- **Parental Consent and Medical Forms** – especially for minors
- **Travel Reimbursement Form** – standardised, clear instructions
- **Infopack Template** – including venue details, packing list, rules and safety info
- **Agenda Template** – hour-by-hour plan with learning outcomes
- **Emergency Contact List** – for all partners and local stakeholders

#### **Why they help:**

Consistent templates ensure that everyone receives the same information and that important details are never forgotten.

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## ◆ 3. Tools for Learning, Reflection and Documentation

These tools supported non-formal learning, reflection and creative output during and after the exchange.

**Useful tools:**

- **Youthpass Guide & Reflection Sheets** – connecting activities to key competences
- **Journaling Templates** – daily reflection prompts for participants
- **Feedback Forms (Google Forms)** – mid-term and final evaluation
- **Canva Templates** – for posters, visual summaries and social media
- **Video Editing Apps (CapCut / iMovie)** – for the “Project Journey” video
- **Photo & Media Folders** – shared space for documentation

**Why they help:**

They make learning visible, encourage creativity and support high-quality dissemination.

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## ◆ 4. Templates for Follow-Up and Dissemination

These resources help maintain momentum after the mobility and share the results with wider audiences.

**Examples:**

- **Follow-Up Meeting Template** – structure for reflection after returning home
- **Social Media Content Plan** – photos, quotes, key messages and hashtags
- **Project Presentation Slides** – for schools or youth centres
- **Dissemination Report Template** – tracking activities and impact
- **Digital Guide Outline** – for documenting best practices and methods

**Why they help:**

They ensure that follow-up is structured, visible and aligned with Erasmus+ expectations.

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## ◆ Why Tools and Templates Matter

Using simple digital tools and ready-made templates:

- makes the project smoother and less stressful,
- helps include young people with fewer opportunities,
- keeps everyone informed and prepared,
- improves transparency and teamwork across partners,
- ensures high-quality documentation and long-lasting results.

Good tools don't replace creativity — they support it. They give teams more time and energy to focus on what truly matters: meaningful learning, strong cooperation and unforgettable experiences.

### ▼ 7.3 Practical Tips for Youth Workers and Leaders

A successful youth exchange depends greatly on the skills, awareness and mindset of youth workers and group leaders. Based on our experience in Portugal, we collected the most practical and effective tips that supported the group's safety, learning and overall well-being. These recommendations are simple to apply and can make a significant difference in the quality of any Erasmus+ project.

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## ◆ 1. Prepare Your Group Before the Project Starts

Good preparation builds trust and reduces anxiety — especially for young people with fewer opportunities.

### Useful practices:

- organise **online meetings** to explain the programme clearly,
- share the **infopack** early and walk through it together,
- discuss expectations, fears and needs with each participant,
- create a **WhatsApp group** for updates and informal bonding,

- talk about cultural differences and how to navigate them respectfully.

**Why it matters:**

Well-prepared participants arrive more confident, open and ready to engage.

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**◆ 2. Build a Safe and Inclusive Atmosphere from Day One**

Your behaviour sets the tone for the whole exchange.

**How to do it:**

- co-create group rules with the participants,
- use inclusive icebreakers to help everyone feel welcome,
- learn names quickly and encourage positive interactions,
- pay attention to quieter participants and gently include them,
- avoid assumptions about background, gender, abilities or culture.

**Why it matters:**

A safe space encourages honest sharing, creativity and deeper learning.

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**◆ 3. Support Emotional Well-Being Throughout the Programme**

Youth exchanges can be exciting but also emotionally intense.

**Recommended practices:**

- check in with participants daily (individually if needed),
- encourage breaks, rest and self-care,
- notice signs of stress or homesickness early,
- mediate conflicts calmly and fairly,
- create opportunities for participants to support each other.

**Why it matters:**

Emotional safety is just as important as physical safety.

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## ◆ 4. Facilitate Learning Through Clear Guidance and Reflection

Youth workers make learning meaningful by guiding participants through experience.

### **Tips for effective facilitation:**

- give clear instructions in simple English,
- use visual or physical examples when language is a barrier,
- debrief activities using open questions (What? So what? Now what?),
- encourage Youthpass reflection every day,
- adapt methods to the group's needs, not the other way around.

### **Why it matters:**

Reflection helps transform activities into real learning.

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## ◆ 5. Balance Structure and Flexibility

Youth exchanges need planning — but also space for spontaneity and adaptation.

### **Good practices:**

- follow the agenda but allow for changes when necessary,
- observe group energy and adjust timing accordingly,
- be ready with alternative activities,
- allow participants to lead tasks and share responsibility,
- stay calm when things don't go as expected.

### **Why it matters:**

Flexibility keeps learning engaging and responsive to the moment.

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## ◆ 6. Communicate Openly with Partner Organisations

Strong cooperation is essential before, during and after the exchange.

### **Best practices:**



- hold regular check-in meetings during preparation,
- clarify roles and expectations early,
- share challenges openly and look for solutions together,
- coordinate follow-up activities and dissemination,
- treat partners with respect, trust and transparency.

### **Why it matters:**

Solid partnership is the foundation of a high-quality Erasmus+ project.

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### **◆ Why These Tips Matter**

Youth workers and leaders shape the entire experience. Their guidance, empathy and organisational skills help young people feel safe, supported and inspired. With thoughtful preparation and a youth-centred approach, any project can become a transformative journey — not only for participants, but for leaders as well.

### **▼ Conclusion**

This youth exchange was a reminder that when young people come together, something truly meaningful happens. For eight days in Portugal, a group of strangers became a community — learning to listen, to support one another, to respect differences and to stand together around shared values. What began as a project soon transformed into a space of trust, curiosity and personal courage, where each participant discovered not only Europe, but also new parts of themselves.

Throughout the journey, young people learned that challenges can be faced with empathy, that dialogue bridges misunderstandings, and that understanding grows from patience and openness. They learned that cooperation is not always easy, but always possible — and that responsibility, kindness and respect are not just European values, but universal principles that shape peaceful coexistence.

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### **◆ What This Experience Taught Us**

- **Unity grows through small acts of understanding** — a shared meal, a conversation, a moment of support during a difficult activity.
  - **Respect is the foundation of meaningful relationships** — especially when perspectives differ, languages clash or emotions rise.
  - **Belonging is created through acceptance** — when each young person feels seen, heard and valued, transformation becomes possible.
  - **Citizenship begins with awareness** — of oneself, of others, and of the impact our choices have on society and the environment.
  - **Learning is a lifelong process** — shaped by curiosity, reflection and the courage to try again.
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## ◆ A Shared Responsibility for Europe's Future

The exchange showed that Europe is not defined by borders, but by people — by the relationships we build and the values we uphold. Young participants became ambassadors of democracy, inclusion and sustainability, carrying these principles back to their schools, families and communities. Their actions, however small, contribute to a more just, peaceful and united Europe.

This guide itself stands as proof of their commitment — a collective expression of their learning, creativity and desire to inspire others. It shows that young people are not only beneficiaries of Erasmus+; they are its drivers, shaping meaningful experiences for future generations.

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## ◆ A Final Reflection

As the project comes to an end, what remains are not only memories but skills, friendships and a deeper understanding of what it means to be European. The participants learned that *diversity is not something to manage, but something to celebrate*. They discovered that their voices matter — and that change begins with individuals who care.

The youth exchange may be over, but its impact continues.

In every conversation, in every choice, in every act of kindness, the spirit of this project lives on.

Because Europe grows stronger each time young people choose understanding over fear, connection over separation, and hope over indifference.

And this is what we learned together.

▼ **Final Words**

May every young person who reads this guide feel encouraged to take their own first step — towards new cultures, new friendships and a stronger, more united Europe.

Because every journey begins with curiosity, every change begins with courage, and every future begins with young people who dare to dream together.

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