



Voices of Europe: Youth Guide for Democracy and Inclusion

▼ About This Guide

▼ About the Project

Voices of Europe: Youth for Democracy and Inclusion was an Erasmus+ Youth Exchange held in **Figueira da Foz, Portugal, from 14 to 22 May 2026**. The project was coordinated by **Associação TDM Portugal** under project number **2025-1-PT02-KA151-YOU-000299318**.

The project brought together young people from different European countries to explore **democracy, youth participation and inclusion**. It created a space where participants could share different perspectives, learn from each other and better understand how young people can take an active role in their communities and in democratic life.

Through non-formal learning activities, participants explored what democracy means in everyday life, barriers to youth participation, inclusion, active and empathic listening, dialogue and respectful disagreement. They also reflected on Erasmus+ opportunities, Youthpass and ways to turn their learning into future actions.

The programme was based on active participation. Instead of only receiving information, young people worked together through discussions, practical exercises, group work, reflection and intercultural learning. An important part of the exchange was learning how to listen to different perspectives and remain connected even when opinions differ.

During the final part of the exchange, participants transformed their learning into practical ideas and jointly contributed to the development of the **Voices of Europe: Youth Guide for Democracy and Inclusion**. The guide brings together key topics, reflections and tools explored during the project and makes them available to other young people and youth workers.

▼ About the Guide

The **Voices of Europe: Youth Guide for Democracy and Inclusion** was developed as a practical result of the youth exchange. It brings together the main ideas, learning points and tools explored by participants during the project.

The guide is designed **by young people, for young people**, but it can also be useful for youth workers, youth organisations and anyone interested in democracy, inclusion and youth participation.

Its purpose is to make the learning from the exchange useful beyond the project itself. The guide explores how young people can participate in democratic life, make their voices heard, listen to different perspectives, communicate respectfully and turn their ideas into action.

Rather than giving complex definitions, the guide offers simple explanations, reflection questions and practical activities that can be used individually or with a group.

We hope this guide encourages more young people to speak up, listen to others, participate and contribute to more inclusive and democratic communities.

▼ How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed to be practical, flexible and easy to use. You can read it from beginning to end or choose the sections that are most relevant to you.

Each chapter includes short explanations, key ideas, practical examples and reflection questions connected to democracy, inclusion and youth participation.

You can use this guide:

- individually, to reflect on your own role and participation;
- with friends or other young people to start a discussion;

- during workshops and non-formal learning activities;
- in youth organisations, schools and community groups;
- as inspiration for your own youth initiative or local action.

The ideas and activities can be adapted to different groups and local contexts. There is no single correct way to use them.

Most importantly, do not only read the guide. Discuss the questions, exchange perspectives, try the ideas and use what you learn in practice.

Listen. Respect. Participate. Act.

▼ 1. Democracy Starts With Us

▼ What Is Democracy?

Democracy is more than voting in elections. It is a way of organising society in which people have the right to express their views, participate in decisions and be heard.

During the youth exchange, participants explored democracy from different perspectives and reflected on what it means in their own countries and everyday lives. Instead of looking for one perfect definition, they discussed the values and practices that make democratic participation possible.

Democracy is closely connected to:

participation – having opportunities to take part in decisions that affect us;

- equality – ensuring that everyone has the same rights and opportunities to participate;
- freedom – being able to express ideas and opinions;
- inclusion – making space for people with different backgrounds and experiences;
- dialogue – listening to others and discussing different points of view;
- respect – recognising the rights, dignity and opinions of other people.

Democracy therefore does not happen only in parliaments or during elections. It can also be practised in schools, youth organisations, local communities and everyday situations where people make decisions together.

For young people, democracy starts with understanding that their voice matters and that participation can take many different forms.

▼ Young People and Democracy

Young people are an important part of democratic life. Democracy becomes stronger when young people have opportunities to express their opinions, participate in decisions and contribute to their communities.

Youth participation can happen in many ways. It can mean joining a youth organisation, taking part in a youth council, participating in a community initiative, volunteering, starting a campaign, discussing local issues or developing an idea together with other young people.

During the youth exchange, participants reflected on the role young people play in democracy and explored the barriers that can make participation more difficult. They also discussed how young people can become more involved in decisions that affect their lives.

Meaningful youth participation requires more than simply inviting young people to an activity. Young people need opportunities to:

- express their views and be taken seriously;
 - access information and understand their opportunities;
 - participate in decisions that concern them;
 - work together with people from different backgrounds;
 - develop their own ideas and initiatives;
 - feel that their contribution can make a difference.

Young people do not have to wait until they are older to participate in democratic life. Participation can start with small actions, conversations and initiatives in the places where they already live, study, work and spend their free time.

▼ Ways to Participate

There is no single way to participate in democratic life. Young people can choose different forms of participation depending on their interests, opportunities and the issues that matter to them.

During the youth exchange, participants explored different ways young people can make their voices heard and contribute to their communities.

Young people can participate by:

- joining youth organisations, associations or local youth groups;
 - taking part in youth councils and other spaces where young people

can contribute to decisions;

- volunteering and supporting community initiatives;
- organising activities or small local projects;
- participating in consultations, discussions and public meetings;
- creating awareness campaigns around issues that matter to them;
- using digital tools and social media to inform, connect and mobilise people;
- taking part in elections when eligible to vote;
- joining European opportunities such as Erasmus+ activities and the EU Youth Dialogue;
- developing their own initiatives together with other young people.

Participation does not always have to start with a large project or campaign. A conversation, a small community activity or an idea shared with others can be the first step.

What matters is moving from “someone should do something” to asking: “What can I do, and who can I involve?”

▼ Why Your Voice Matters

Your voice matters because democracy depends on people being able to express their views, share their experiences and take part in decisions that affect their lives.

Young people often see challenges from perspectives that may be different from those of older generations. Their experiences, needs and ideas can contribute to better decisions in schools, youth organisations, local communities and society.

Having a voice does not mean that everyone will always agree with you. Democratic participation also means listening to other perspectives, discussing differences respectfully and being open to dialogue.

Your voice can help to:

bring attention to issues that affect young people;

- represent needs and experiences that may otherwise be overlooked;
- challenge stereotypes and exclusion;
- contribute ideas and possible solutions;
- encourage other young people to participate;
- influence positive changes in your community.

Making your voice heard can start with something small: sharing an idea, joining a discussion, asking a question or speaking about an issue that matters to you.

One voice may start a conversation. Many voices working together can turn that conversation into action.

▼ 2. Participation for Everyone

▼ Inclusion and Diversity

Inclusion means creating opportunities for everyone to participate, regardless of their background, personal situation or the barriers they may face. Diversity means recognising and respecting the different experiences, identities, perspectives and realities that people bring to a group.

During the youth exchange, inclusion was explored as an essential part of democratic participation. Participants reflected on the fact that not all young people have the same opportunities to be heard, get involved or take part in community and democratic life.

An inclusive environment should:

- welcome people with different backgrounds and experiences;
 - respect different opinions and perspectives;
 - provide equal opportunities to participate;
 - recognise that some people may need additional support;
 - avoid discrimination, stereotypes and exclusion;
 - create a safe space where people feel comfortable expressing themselves;
- actively involve people whose voices are often less represented.

Diversity can make democratic spaces stronger. When people with different experiences participate, groups can understand issues from more than one perspective and develop solutions that respond to a wider range of needs.

Inclusion is therefore not only about inviting everyone to participate. It is about identifying and reducing the barriers that may prevent some people from participating fully and making sure that everyone has a real opportunity to contribute.

▼ Barriers to Participation

Not all young people have the same opportunities to participate in democratic and community life. During the youth exchange, participants explored the barriers that can prevent young people from getting involved and reflected on their causes, consequences and possible solutions.

Some young people may face:

- financial barriers, such as limited resources or costs related to participation;
- geographical barriers, especially when living in rural or remote areas;
- social barriers, including discrimination, exclusion or lack of support;
- cultural or language barriers;
- lack of accessible information about opportunities;
- limited confidence or fear of not being taken seriously;
- stereotypes about young people and their ability to contribute;
- lack of inclusive spaces where different voices are welcomed.

These barriers can overlap. A young person may experience several of them at the same time, making participation even more difficult.

Understanding barriers is the first step towards reducing them. Youth organisations, communities and institutions can make participation more accessible by providing clear information, creating safe and inclusive spaces, offering appropriate support and actively reaching young people who are less represented.

Meaningful participation should not depend on where a young person comes from, their financial situation or their personal circumstances. Everyone should have a real opportunity to take part and be heard.

▼ Voices That Are Often Missing

Democratic participation should be open to everyone, but some young people have fewer opportunities to make their voices heard.

During the youth exchange, participants reflected on groups that can be less represented in democratic and community life, including young people from rural areas, migrants, minorities and young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs). They explored why

some voices are heard more easily than others and what can be done to create more inclusive participation.

Young people may be less represented because of:

limited access to information and opportunities;

- financial or geographical difficulties;
- language or cultural barriers;
- discrimination and stereotypes;
- lack of confidence or previous negative experiences;
- feeling that their opinions will not be taken seriously;
- lack of accessible and welcoming spaces for participation.

When some voices are missing, decisions may not reflect the needs and experiences of the whole community.

Inclusive participation means actively asking who is not represented, understanding why, and finding ways to involve them. It is not enough to say that everyone is welcome. Sometimes additional support, different communication methods or direct outreach are needed to make participation genuinely accessible.

A useful question for any youth initiative is:

“Who is not in the room, and what can we do to make it easier for them to participate?”

▼ Creating Inclusive Spaces

An inclusive space is a place where people feel respected, safe and able to participate. During the youth exchange, participants explored how youth organisations, projects and communities can create environments where different young people have a real opportunity to contribute.

Creating an inclusive space starts with paying attention to the needs of the people in the group. Different participants may need different forms of support to feel comfortable and participate fully.

Some useful principles are:

create clear group agreements together;

- treat different opinions and experiences with respect;
- use language that is understandable and inclusive;
- give everyone opportunities to speak and contribute;
- listen without judging or interrupting;

- avoid stereotypes and discriminatory behaviour;
- provide additional support when participants need it;
- use different methods of participation, not only speaking in front of a large group;
- regularly ask participants whether they feel comfortable, included and heard.

During the project, participants also practised active and empathic listening and reflected on respect, inclusion and communication as important elements of a safe learning environment.

An inclusive space does not mean that everyone has the same opinions or needs. It means creating conditions where differences can exist and everyone can participate with dignity and respect.

A simple question can help us check our activities:

"Can everyone in this group participate meaningfully, and if not, what can we change?"

▼ 3. Listening and Dialogue

▼ Active and Empathic Listening

Listening is an important part of democratic participation. It is difficult to have meaningful dialogue if people only focus on expressing their own opinions without trying to understand others.

During the youth exchange, participants practised active and empathic listening through pair exercises, group activities and reflection. They explored what can block listening and how listening can help people with different experiences and opinions remain connected.

Active and empathic listening means:

giving another person your full attention;

- listening without interrupting;
- trying to understand before responding;
- avoiding immediate judgement or advice;
- paying attention to the feelings and needs behind the words;
- asking questions when something is unclear;
- showing the other person that their perspective has been heard.

Listening does not mean that you have to agree with everything another person says. You can understand someone's perspective and still have a

different opinion.

This distinction is especially important in democratic dialogue. When people feel heard, it becomes easier to discuss differences, reduce misunderstandings and look for common ground.

A simple practice is to listen to someone for a few minutes without interrupting or preparing your response. Afterwards, try to summarise what you understood before sharing your own perspective.

▼ Debate vs Dialogue

Debate and dialogue are both ways of discussing different ideas, but they have different purposes.

During the youth exchange, participants explored the difference between debate and dialogue and reflected on how the way we communicate can either increase polarisation or help people stay connected despite disagreement.

In a debate, people often focus on defending their position and convincing others that their argument is stronger. In a dialogue, the aim is to understand different perspectives and create space for meaningful exchange.

Debate often asks:

- How can I defend my position?
- Why is my argument stronger?
- How can I respond to the other side?

Dialogue asks:

- Why does this person see the issue differently?
- What experiences or needs may be behind this perspective?
- What can I learn by listening?
- Is there anything we understand or value in common?

Dialogue does not require everyone to reach the same conclusion.

People can strongly disagree and still listen, ask questions and treat each other with respect.

In democratic life, this ability is especially important. When disagreement becomes only a competition between opposing sides, people can become more divided. Dialogue creates an opportunity to understand differences without losing connection.

Before responding to an opinion you disagree with, try asking yourself:

"Am I listening to understand, or am I only waiting for my turn to answer?"

▼ Understanding Different Perspectives

People can experience the same situation in very different ways. Our opinions are influenced by our experiences, backgrounds, values, needs and the communities we live in.

During the youth exchange, participants worked in international groups and explored different perspectives on democracy, participation and inclusion. Sharing experiences from different countries helped participants see that there may be more than one way to understand the same issue.

Understanding another perspective means:

being curious instead of making quick assumptions;

- asking questions to understand the person's point of view;
- listening to the experiences behind an opinion;
- recognising that our own perspective is not the only one;
- separating understanding from agreement;
- looking for common needs or values even when opinions differ.

Understanding someone does not mean that you must change your opinion or accept every idea. It means making an effort to understand why another person may see an issue differently.

This is especially important in diverse and democratic societies. When we make space for different perspectives, conversations can move away from stereotypes and assumptions towards dialogue and mutual understanding.

When you hear an opinion that is very different from your own, try asking:

"What experiences or values might have shaped this perspective?"

▼ Dialogue in Democratic Life

Dialogue is an essential part of democratic life. In diverse societies, people have different experiences, needs and opinions. Democracy requires spaces where these differences can be expressed, heard and discussed with respect.

During the youth exchange, participants practised dialogue as a way to communicate across disagreement. They explored how active listening, empathy and respectful communication can help people stay connected even when they do not share the same point of view.

Democratic dialogue means:

creating space for different voices and perspectives;

- listening to understand before responding;
- expressing opinions without attacking or judging others;
- asking questions instead of making assumptions;
- recognising disagreement without treating the other person as an enemy;
- looking for common needs, values or possible solutions;
- making sure that less represented voices also have opportunities to participate.

Dialogue does not mean avoiding difficult topics or always reaching agreement. It means creating conditions where disagreement can happen without excluding, disrespecting or silencing others.

Young people can practise democratic dialogue in many places: youth organisations, schools, community activities, online spaces and everyday conversations.

Democracy becomes more meaningful when people are not only free to speak, but are also willing to listen.

▼ 4. Disagreeing With Respect

▼ Why Disagreement Matters

Disagreement is a natural part of democratic life. People have different experiences, values, needs and opinions, so it is normal that they do not always see issues in the same way.

During the youth exchange, participants explored how disagreement can be expressed without creating unnecessary division. They reflected on the risks of polarisation and practised ways to remain in dialogue even when opinions were different.

Disagreement can be valuable because it can:

- bring different perspectives into a discussion;
- challenge us to think more deeply about our own opinions;

- reveal needs or concerns that might otherwise remain unheard;
- encourage critical thinking;
- help groups explore different solutions;
- create opportunities for learning and change.

The problem is not disagreement itself, but how we respond to it. When disagreement becomes personal, judgemental or hostile, communication can quickly turn into conflict and polarisation.

In a democratic environment, we should be able to disagree while still recognising the dignity and right to speak of another person.

The goal is not to eliminate disagreement or make everyone think the same way. The goal is to learn how to disagree while remaining respectful, curious and open to dialogue.

A useful question to ask during a disagreement is:

“Can I strongly disagree with this idea while still listening to and respecting the person expressing it?”

▼ Communication Without Polarisation

Polarisation happens when differences between people or groups become stronger and communication turns into an “us versus them” situation. Instead of trying to understand each other, people may focus only on defending their own position or proving that the other side is wrong.

During the youth exchange, participants explored the risks of polarisation and practised expressing disagreement through dialogue. They learned that it is possible to communicate strong opinions without attacking or rejecting the person who holds a different view.

To communicate without increasing polarisation:

focus on the issue rather than attacking the person;

- describe what you observe instead of making assumptions;
- express your own perspective without presenting it as the only possible truth;
- listen before preparing your response;
- ask questions to better understand different viewpoints;
- avoid stereotypes and generalisations about groups of people;
- recognise emotions and needs behind different positions;
- look for shared concerns or values where possible.

Respectful communication does not mean avoiding controversial topics or hiding disagreement. It means creating space where different opinions can be discussed without turning differences into personal conflict.

Before responding in a difficult conversation, ask yourself:

"Will what I am about to say help us understand each other better, or will it make the distance between us greater?"

▼ Respectful Communication

Respectful communication means expressing our thoughts, feelings and opinions clearly while recognising the dignity and perspective of the other person. It is especially important when discussing topics where people have different views.

During the youth exchange, participants explored communication through principles inspired by Nonviolent Communication. They worked with four elements: observations, feelings, needs and requests, and practised using them in situations involving disagreement.

Respectful communication can help us to:

describe a situation without immediately judging the other person;

- express how we feel instead of blaming;
- recognise the needs and values behind our reactions;
- listen to what may be important to the other person;
- make clear and realistic requests;
- express disagreement without insults or personal attacks;
- remain open to dialogue.

For example, instead of saying:

"You never listen to anyone."

we can try to explain what happened, how it affected us and what we need:

"When I was speaking and was interrupted, I felt frustrated because it is important for me to feel heard. Could I finish my point before we continue?"

Respectful communication does not mean hiding our opinions or avoiding difficult issues. It gives us tools to express them in a way that makes dialogue more possible.

Before reacting, try asking yourself:

“Can I express what matters to me without attacking the other person?”

▼ Difficult Conversations

Difficult conversations are a normal part of democratic and social life. They can happen when people strongly disagree, feel misunderstood, or discuss sensitive issues connected to discrimination, exclusion or social conflict.

During the youth exchange, participants practised difficult conversations through role-play and dialogue exercises. The aim was not to avoid disagreement, but to explore how empathy, active listening and respectful communication can help people stay connected during challenging discussions.

When a conversation becomes difficult, it can help to:

slow down and listen before responding;

- focus on the issue instead of attacking the person;
- ask questions rather than making assumptions;
- describe what happened without exaggeration or judgement;
- recognise your own feelings and needs;
- try to understand what may be important to the other person;
- avoid stereotypes, insults and generalisations;
- take a short break if emotions make respectful dialogue difficult;
- return to the conversation when everyone is ready to continue.

Not every difficult conversation will end with agreement. Sometimes the most realistic result is simply a better understanding of why people see an issue differently.

Being able to stay respectful during disagreement is a skill that develops through practice.

When a conversation becomes difficult, ask yourself:

“Am I trying to understand and be understood, or am I only trying to win?”

▼ 5. From Ideas to Action

▼ Identifying an Issue

Every meaningful action starts with understanding the issue we want to address. Before creating an initiative, campaign or activity, it is important

to look beyond the first impression and understand what is actually happening.

During the youth exchange, participants explored barriers to youth participation and worked with methods such as the “problem tree” to identify causes, consequences and possible solutions. This helped them move from recognising a problem to thinking about realistic actions.

To identify an issue, ask:

What is happening?

- Who is affected by it?
- Why is this issue important?
- What are the main causes?
- What are the consequences?
- Which voices or perspectives might be missing?
- What could realistically be changed?

For example, “young people do not participate” is very broad. Looking deeper may reveal specific barriers such as lack of information, limited opportunities, geographical difficulties, financial barriers or the feeling that young people will not be taken seriously.

Understanding these causes helps us avoid creating solutions that do not respond to the real problem.

Before moving to action, try to describe the issue in one clear sentence:

“The issue we want to address is...”

A clear understanding of the problem makes it easier to decide what kind of action can create meaningful change.

▼ Turning Ideas into Action

Having an idea is an important first step, but participation becomes meaningful when ideas are transformed into concrete actions.

During the youth exchange, participants moved from identifying barriers and community needs to developing ideas for youth initiatives. They reflected on what they would like to change and how young people could contribute to that change.

A simple action process can start with:

define the issue you want to address;

- decide what change you would like to achieve;

- identify who you want to involve or reach;
- think about the resources and support you already have;
- choose an action that is realistic and achievable;
- divide responsibilities between the people involved;
- decide when and where the action will happen;
- communicate your idea to others;
- evaluate what worked and what could be improved.

An action does not have to be large to have value. It could be a local workshop, discussion, awareness activity, youth meeting, digital campaign or another initiative responding to a real need in the community.

Start with something realistic. A small action that is actually implemented can be more useful than an ambitious idea that never leaves the planning stage.

Ask yourself:

"What is one concrete step we can take to turn this idea into action?"

▼ Digital Tools for Participation

Digital tools can make it easier for young people to share ideas, work together and participate in issues that matter to them. They can connect people across different places and create new opportunities for involvement in community and democratic life.

During the youth exchange, participants explored digital tools that can support youth participation and civic engagement, including online polls, collaborative platforms, digital campaigns and social media.

Digital tools can be used to:

collect opinions through online polls and surveys;

- develop ideas together using collaborative platforms;
- organise activities and coordinate youth initiatives;
- create digital campaigns around important issues;
- share information and opportunities with other young people;
- raise awareness about local or social issues;
- connect people who have similar interests or concerns;
- communicate project results and encourage others to participate.

However, using a digital tool does not automatically create meaningful participation. It is important to think about who can access it, whether

the information is clear and reliable, and whether people have a real opportunity to contribute rather than simply receive information.

Digital participation should also be respectful. Before sharing content, consider its accuracy, the privacy of other people and the possible impact of your message.

A useful question before choosing a digital tool is:

“How will this tool help people participate, contribute or be heard?”

▼ Green and Civic Responsibility

Civic responsibility means recognising that our choices and actions can affect other people and the communities we live in. Environmental responsibility is also part of this: decisions about our environment influence both present and future generations.

During the youth exchange, participants reflected on the connection between environmental responsibility and democratic participation. They discussed how young people can contribute to environmental decisions and encourage more sustainable practices in their communities.

Young people can combine green and civic responsibility by:

making more conscious choices in everyday life;

- reducing waste and using resources responsibly;
- taking part in local environmental activities;
- raising awareness about environmental issues;
- discussing environmental challenges with other young people;
- supporting community initiatives that promote sustainability;
- sharing ideas with local organisations and decision-makers;
- encouraging others to take part in positive environmental actions.

Individual choices are important, but environmental challenges also require cooperation and participation. Young people can contribute by bringing environmental topics into community discussions and taking part in initiatives that seek practical solutions.

Being an active citizen also means thinking about the impact our actions have on the world around us.

Ask yourself:

“What environmental issue matters in my community, and how could young people participate in addressing it?”

▼ Creating a Youth Initiative

A youth initiative is a practical way to turn an idea into action. It can respond to a local need, encourage participation, promote inclusion or bring young people together around an issue that matters to them.

During the youth exchange, participants worked on ideas for small initiatives that could encourage youth participation and inclusion in their local communities. The focus was on creating actions that are realistic, relevant and possible to continue after the project.

When developing a youth initiative, think about:

NEED – What issue or need do we want to address?

- GOAL – What change do we want to achieve?
- TARGET GROUP – Who do we want to involve or reach?
- ACTION – What exactly are we going to do?
- TEAM – Who will be involved and who will be responsible for what?
- RESOURCES – What people, materials, spaces or digital tools do we need?
- INCLUSION – How can we make the initiative accessible to different young people?
- COMMUNICATION – How will we reach participants and share our message?
- IMPACT – What result would show us that our initiative made a difference?
- FOLLOW-UP – What can happen after the first activity?

A youth initiative does not need to be complicated. It could be a workshop, community discussion, awareness campaign, local event, peer activity or digital action.

The important thing is that young people are actively involved in developing and implementing the idea rather than being only participants in an activity created for them.

Start with one achievable goal and one concrete action.

Ask your team:

"What can we realistically do together to create the change we want to see?"

▼ 6. Opportunities in Europe

▼ Erasmus+ Opportunities

Erasmus+ offers young people opportunities to learn, connect with others and participate in international and local activities. It is not only about travelling. It is also about developing skills, discovering different perspectives and becoming more active in society.

During the youth exchange, participants explored Erasmus+ and discussed how young people can find opportunities, involve others and share information about European mobility programmes.

Through Erasmus+, young people can:

take part in Youth Exchanges with participants from different countries;

- learn through non-formal and intercultural activities;
- develop personal, social and communication skills;
- explore topics that matter to young people and their communities;
- meet people with different backgrounds and perspectives;
- participate in activities promoting inclusion, diversity and active citizenship;
- develop ideas together with other young people;
- discover opportunities for further learning and participation in Europe.

Erasmus+ activities can also be an important first step for young people who have had fewer opportunities to participate in international projects. Youth organisations and group leaders can help make these opportunities more accessible by providing information, preparation and support.

The experience does not have to end when an Erasmus+ activity finishes. Participants can share what they learned, encourage other young people to get involved and use their experience as inspiration for new initiatives.

Ask yourself:

"What opportunity could help me take the next step and become more active?"

▼ Youth Exchanges

A Youth Exchange is an opportunity for young people from different countries to meet, learn together and explore topics that are important to

them.

The Voices of Europe project was itself a Youth Exchange. Participants from different European countries spent several days learning together through discussions, practical exercises, group work, reflection, intercultural activities and informal peer learning.

Youth Exchanges are based on non-formal learning. This means that participants learn actively through experience, cooperation, discussion and reflection rather than through traditional classroom lessons.

A Youth Exchange can help young people to:

meet and cooperate with young people from other countries;

- discover different cultures and perspectives;
- develop communication and teamwork skills;
- explore social and European topics;
- express their ideas and experiences;
- become more confident in international environments;
- learn from each other;
- reflect on their own learning;
- build connections that can continue after the project.

An important part of a Youth Exchange is active participation. Young people are not only there to receive information. They contribute their experiences, ideas and perspectives and help shape the learning process.

Our exchange showed how an international group can become a space for dialogue, inclusion and learning, where different voices can meet and work together.

A Youth Exchange may last only several days, but the learning, connections and ideas created during it can continue much longer.

▼ Youthpass and Learning

Youthpass is an important part of the learning process in Erasmus+ youth projects. It helps participants recognise, reflect on and describe what they learned through their experience.

During the youth exchange, Youthpass was introduced at the beginning of the programme and remained part of the reflection process throughout the project. Participants regularly reflected on their learning

and, during the final day, took part in a dedicated Youthpass workshop focused on identifying competences and personal learning outcomes.

Youthpass helps young people to think about questions such as:

What did I learn during this experience?

- What new skills did I develop?
- What did I discover about myself?
- How did I learn from other participants?
- What challenges did I overcome?
- How can I use this learning in the future?

Learning in a Youth Exchange does not happen only during organised sessions. It can also happen through teamwork, intercultural experiences, informal conversations, solving problems together, taking responsibility and reflecting on new situations.

Youthpass makes this learning more visible. It is not only a certificate received at the end of a project, but a process that encourages participants to understand and recognise their own development.

At the end of the exchange, participants were encouraged to look back at their experience and identify the knowledge, skills, attitudes and competences they had developed.

A useful question to continue this process is:

"What can I do now that I could not do, understand or explain in the same way before this experience?"

▼ Getting Involved

Getting involved starts with finding an issue, activity or opportunity that matters to you. You do not need special experience to participate. Often, the first step is simply being curious, asking questions and connecting with other people.

During the youth exchange, participants explored different opportunities for youth participation and reflected on how they could use their learning after returning home. They also discussed future cooperation, local dissemination and possible youth initiatives.

You can start by:

- joining a local youth organisation or youth group;
- taking part in community activities or volunteering;

- looking for youth councils and other participation opportunities;
- joining discussions and consultations on issues that affect young people;
- participating in Erasmus+ and other European youth opportunities;
- organising a small activity with other young people;
- sharing useful opportunities with friends and your community;
- developing an idea for a local youth initiative;
- using digital tools to connect with people and support a cause;
- encouraging young people who are less represented to participate.

You do not have to start with something big. One meeting, one discussion, one volunteer activity or one Erasmus+ experience can lead to new connections and opportunities.

The important thing is to move from interest to participation and from participation to action.

Ask yourself:

"What is one concrete opportunity I can explore after reading this guide?"

▼ 7. Our Next Steps

▼ From Learning to Impact

Learning becomes more meaningful when we use it beyond the project. A Youth Exchange can create new knowledge, skills and perspectives, but its impact can continue when participants bring this learning back to their everyday lives and communities.

During the final part of the youth exchange, participants reflected on the key lessons they wanted to take with them and how these could be transformed into future actions.

Learning can create impact when we:

apply new skills in everyday situations;

- share useful knowledge with friends, peers and local communities;
- use new communication and dialogue skills in difficult conversations;
- encourage other young people to participate;
- create more inclusive spaces in our organisations and communities;
- develop small local initiatives based on identified needs;

- share Erasmus+ opportunities with other young people;
- stay connected and cooperate with people met during the project.

Impact does not always need to be large or immediate. A participant sharing an opportunity, organising a small activity, changing the way they communicate or involving someone whose voice is often missing can already create a positive effect.

At the end of the exchange, participants were encouraged to think about how their learning could move from personal experience to practical action.

Ask yourself:

"What is one thing I learned here that I can use to create a positive change around me?"

▼ Personal Action Plan

A personal action plan helps turn learning into clear and realistic next steps. It connects what you discovered during the project with what you want to do after returning home.

During the final part of the youth exchange, participants reflected on the impact of their learning and how they could use their experience in future actions, local communities and youth initiatives.

A simple personal action plan can include:

- **WHAT DID I LEARN?** – Identify the knowledge, skills or perspectives you want to take with you.
- **WHAT MATTERS TO ME?** – Choose an issue connected to democracy, inclusion or youth participation that you care about.
- **WHAT DO I WANT TO DO?** – Define one concrete action you would like to take.
- **WHO CAN I INVOLVE?** – Think about friends, young people, youth organisations or other people who could support or join you.
- **WHEN WILL I START?** – Set a realistic timeframe for your first step.
- **WHAT DO I NEED?** – Identify the information, support, tools or resources that could help you.

- WHAT CHANGE DO I WANT TO SEE? – Think about the result you would like your action to achieve.

Your plan does not need to be complicated. A realistic action could be sharing an Erasmus+ opportunity, organising a discussion with other young people, joining a local initiative, creating an awareness activity or bringing a new idea to your organisation.

Complete these sentences:

One thing I want to take from this experience is...

One issue I care about is...

One action I can take is...

People who can support or join me are...

My first step will be...

I will start by...

▼ Sharing the Results

Sharing project results helps the learning and ideas developed during a Youth Exchange reach people beyond the participants themselves. It is also an important way to extend the impact of the project after the international activity has ended.

During the final part of the youth exchange, participants discussed dissemination and future cooperation. They explored how the knowledge, experiences and results of the project could be shared with other young people and local communities.

Results can be shared in different ways:

organise a workshop or discussion in a school, youth organisation or local community;

- present the project and its learning outcomes to other young people;
- share useful activities and methods with youth workers and organisations;
- publish project results through websites and digital platforms;
- use social media to communicate key messages and reach new audiences;
- share this Youth Guide as a practical educational resource;
- tell other young people about Erasmus+ opportunities;

- use the ideas and tools from the project in future youth activities;
- organise local follow-up actions connected to democracy, inclusion and youth participation.

Good dissemination is more than posting photos from the project. It means sharing something useful: knowledge, methods, learning outcomes, practical tools or opportunities that other people can understand and use.

When planning dissemination, think about three questions:

Who do we want to reach?

What would be useful for them?

What is the best way to reach them?

The end of a Youth Exchange does not have to be the end of its impact. By sharing what we learned and created, we can involve new people and allow the results to continue travelling beyond the project.

▼ Keep the Conversation Going

The youth exchange may have ended, but the conversations, ideas and connections created during the project can continue.

Democracy, inclusion and youth participation are not topics that can be explored only during one project. They are part of everyday life and develop when people continue to listen, question, discuss and take action together.

You can keep the conversation going by:

- discussing the topics from this guide with friends and other young people;
- using the activities and questions in youth groups, schools or community spaces;
- sharing different perspectives and creating space for respectful dialogue;
- involving young people whose voices are less often heard;
- sharing this guide with youth workers, organisations and local communities;
- staying connected with people and organisations you met through Erasmus+;
- developing new activities or initiatives inspired by your learning;

- encouraging other young people to discover Erasmus+ opportunities.

You do not need to have all the answers to start a meaningful conversation. Sometimes asking the right question, listening carefully and inviting another person to participate can already be an important first step.

Keep asking:

Whose voice needs to be heard?

Who can we invite into the conversation?

What can we learn from each other?

What can we do together?

The project ends. Participation continues.

▼ About the Youth Exchange

▼ Project Information

Project title:

Voices of Europe: Youth for Democracy and Inclusion

Project number:

2025-1-PT02-KA151-YOU-000299318

Programme:

Erasmus+

Activity:

Youth Exchange

Dates:

14–22 May 2026

Activity days:

15–21 May 2026

Location:

Figueira da Foz, Portugal

Coordinating and host organisation:

Associação TDM Portugal

Participating countries:

Portugal, Slovakia, Greece, Germany and Italy

Partner organisations:

Portugal – Associação TDM Portugal

Slovakia – Youth Line Slovakia

Greece – Youth Line Greece

Germany – EUth Wonders e.V.

Italy – Associazione TDM 2000

Main topics:

Democracy, youth participation, inclusion, diversity, dialogue, active citizenship and intercultural learning.

The project brought together young people from different European countries to learn, exchange perspectives and explore how young people can participate more actively in democratic and community life.

The programme used non-formal and participatory learning methods, including group work, discussions, practical exercises, reflection activities, intercultural learning and peer exchange.

One of the results of the learning and co-creation process was the Voices of Europe: Youth Guide for Democracy and Inclusion, developed to make the project's ideas, methods and learning accessible to other young people and youth workers.

▼ Partners and Participants

The youth exchange brought together young people and group leaders from five European countries: Portugal, Slovakia, Greece, Germany and Italy.

The participating organisations were:

Portugal – Associação TDM Portugal

Slovakia – Youth Line Slovakia

Greece – Youth Line Greece

Germany – EUth Wonders e.V.

Italy – Associazione TDM 2000

Associação TDM Portugal coordinated and hosted the youth exchange in Figueira da Foz.

The international composition of the group was an important part of the learning process. Participants brought different experiences, perspectives and cultural backgrounds into discussions about democracy, inclusion and youth participation.

The project aimed to create an inclusive environment and involve young people with different backgrounds and opportunities. Particular attention was given to the participation of young people with fewer opportunities, including those facing social, economic or geographical barriers.

Throughout the exchange, participants were not only recipients of activities. They actively contributed through international group work, discussions, reflection, intercultural activities, peer learning and the co-creation of project results.

Working together across countries gave participants the opportunity to experience diversity in practice, challenge assumptions, listen to different perspectives and build connections with other young people in Europe.

▼ Erasmus+ Acknowledgement

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