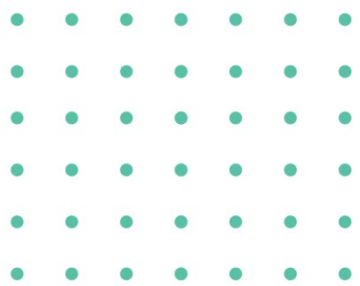# REPORT

YOUTH ACTION FOR EUROPE

Youth Exchange
17-21 May 2022

The purpose of this report about the project Youth Action for Europe is to motivate other non-governmental organisations and youth workers to develop similar projects and initiatives to promote active participation, democracy, human rights and activities that contribute to the sustainable development of democratic societies in Europe.

Host organisation:

Foundation for Entrepreneurship, Culture and Education, Bulgaria

Partners:

Hidak Ifjúsági Alapítvány, Budapest, Hungary
Association for sustainable development SFERA International, Bitola, North Macedonia
Asociația Europeană de Dezvoltare a Adulților (AEAD), Timisoara, Romania
Ekolosko udruzenje fanova kampova (Eco fun Kamp), Kragujevac, Serbia

The youth exchange *Youth Action for Europe* took place in Detelina Hotel located at Golden Sands, a major seaside resort town on the Northern Bulgarian Black Sea coast. Situated on a slope that gently slopes down to the beach, the hotel is away from the big noise of the city and it's an ideal place for conducting activities outdoors.

32 young people participated in the youth exchange, aged 18-30, from five European countries: Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Hungary. The participants arrived in Golden Sands on 16 May in the evening and left in the morning on 22 May.

The topics of the project were:
- European citizenship
- Active Citizenship
- Civic engagement
- Democracy and human rights
- Solidarity and volunteering
- Ecology and sustainable development
- European and national identity
- Citizenship competence development

The project aimed to:
- To develop key skills of young people such as civic awareness, critical thinking, integrated problem solving, as well as skills for argumentation and constructive participation in community activities
- To promote European citizenship and involve young people in the social and democratic life of their communities
- To raise awareness among young people about democracy and human rights and increase their civic participation, and thus make young people active citizens and informed about their future
- To improve the work of youth organisations in promoting democratic values and building competencies in young people for active contribution to society

The used methods of non-formal learning included:
- Ice-breaking games and energizers
- Simulations and role-playing
- Intercultural and experiential learning
- Brainstorming, discussions and reflection
- Creativity and teamwork

The reached results of the project are:
- Participants are encouraged to be active citizens and to participate in social and civic events, as well as, be highly motivated for positive change
- Participants are now more able to make decisions for themselves and others in their communities, are aware of common EU values, such as democracy, solidarity, equality, of their human rights and are ready to defend their freedoms and take responsibilities
- Empowered through individual and teamwork.
- Actively engaged in the democratic life of their communities
- Gained complex social and civic competences, soft and leadership skills, critical thinking, constructive participation in dialogue and debate, decision-making and negotiation skills, intercultural competences and civic awareness skills
- Learned about the possibilities that are offered by the Erasmus+ Programme

Energizers to Wake the Body Up

Every morning, the working day started with an inspiring phrase about participation, democracy and human rights:

The ballot is stronger than the bullet. - Abraham Lincoln

A government of the people, by the people, for the people. - Abraham Lincoln

Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others. - Winston Churchill

Human rights are not a privilege conferred by the government. They are every human being's entitlement by virtue of his humanity. - Mother Teresa

Democracy belongs to those who exercise it. - Bill Moyers

After breakfast, the participants engaged in collective energizers to wake their bodies and get ready for the other activities. In this way, they started the day in a good mood and with high tonus. The exercises were different every morning, taking basic elements of gymnastics, physical exercises, dance and random short games such as counting and hide-and-seek games.

Citizenship

Participants created definitions of citizenship through a group activity that aims to gather the thoughts and ideas of small-sized groups of peers.

> *Citizenship is the <u>juridical status</u>, consecrated by the state's Constitution where you have specific <u>freedoms</u>, <u>rights</u> and <u>duties</u>.*

> *Belonging filled with historical charge which classified us and gives the opportunity to travel and provides you protection in return for fulfilling your duties as a citizen.*

> *Citizenship is a set of privileges and duties, which are established between the state and individuals belonging to a certain community.*

Participants discussed the three types of citizens. They suggested their solutions in the light of each type of citizen.

Personally responsible citizen is one who donates, obeys laws, and is responsible in general.

> *Community: Small village*

> *Problem: Absence of a park in the community, for the young people to hang out (old people too)*

> *Solution: Write a project and then organising a charity event to raise money for the project (concert, exhibitions, etc.)*

Participatory citizen is where a person holds leadership positions in the community and puts effort into making a difference, they understand the <u>government</u> agencies and policies.

Problem 1: Pollution

Solution: Street cleaning programs, education, garbage sorting (in every household)

Problem 2: Poverty and homelessness

Solution: Creating job opportunities (construction sights), charity programs and homeless shelters, canteens, volunteering programs.

Justice-oriented citizen This person wants to understand why things are the way they are. They will do research and get to the bottom of the issue and suggest ways to improve that concern.

Problem: People aren't educated on the effects of producing a lot of waste; lack of community trying to solve the problem; little/no recycling, no resources to start

Solution: Include education on recycling in schools, include the parents, free recycling bins and transportation, organise events to promote sustainability, days off from school/work to take part in recycling events, no waste shops.
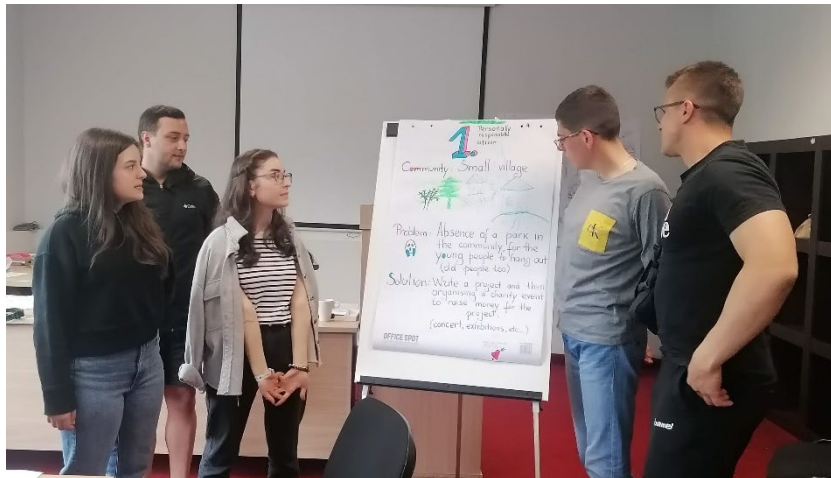
Participation

Participation generally means the action of taking part in something. Participation can have different forms, such as traditional participation, linked to representative democracy, voting or standing for election, but also a trendy new form of "alternative forms of participation" connected and appealing to young people.

Young people are sometimes described as apathetic to politics and political processes, but this doesn't mean that they can't be actively engaged in their communities through other activities. The recently conducted 2022 Flash Eurobarometer on Youth and Democracy shows a growing youth engagement: a majority (58%) of young people are active in the societies they live in and have participated in one or more youth organisations over the last 12 months. This is an increase of 17 percentage points since the last Eurobarometer in 2019. (Flash Eurobarometer on Youth and Democracy, 2022).

Participants were divided into four groups and formulated five key functions of each actor in society:

Government
- *Providing a leadership and representing the community*
- *Providing national security and protection from external threats*
- *Economic security*
- *Decides the distribution of the resources*
- *Assure the welfare of the community and maintaining order*

NGOs
- *Achieve what the government or the opposition can't*
- *Educating a group of people about a topic*
- *Make a good impact in the society*
- *Promoting interculture*
- *Including everyday people in decision-making*

Media

- *Inform*
- *Educate society – cultural transition, influencing societal norms*
- *Influence the public opinion*
- *Bridge role between civic society and government*
- *Entertainment*

Citizens

- *Form institutions – governmental, non-governmental*
- *Social obligations, e.g. taxes, military service*
- *Activism*
- *Elect representatives and vote*
- *Core of society*

Democracy

Democracy is believed to have begun in Ancient Greece when the words dēmos (meaning "people") and Kratos (meaning "rule", "power") were joined together, and a group of smart people gathered to deliberate on matters of communal importance. Joining the two words we end to "power of the people" or governance according to the will of the people.

Modern democracies are representative democracies, meaning people participate in elections to select representatives to govern on their behalf. Representative democracies lay on the principles of equality (one person – one vote) and the right of every individual to some degree of personal autonomy.

Democracy, human rights and participation go hand in hand. For a democratic society to be truly democratic people should actively participate in decision-making processes and respect each other's rights and civil liberties.

In the form of a moving debate, young participants discussed seven statements related to democracy and human rights:

> *We have a moral obligation to use our vote in elections.*
> *Some rights are more important than others.*
> *We aren't born with rights; we get them through citizenship.*
> *We should obey all laws, even unfair ones.*
> *The only people who have any power in a democracy are the politicians.*
> *"People get the leader they deserve".*
> *Freedom of expression means you can say that you want.*

Human Rights

Universal human rights are rights we have simply because we exist as human beings - they are not granted by any state. These universal rights are **inherent** to us all, regardless of nationality, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. They range from the most fundamental - the right to life - to those that make life worth living, such as the rights to food, education, work, health, and liberty.

Fundamental rights that belong to every person, simply by being a human being.

Principles:

- Universality
- Equality
- Non-discrimination

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, was the first legal document to set out the fundamental human rights to be universally protected. The UDHR, which turned 70 in 2018, continues to be the foundation of all international human rights law. Its 30 articles provide the principles and building blocks of current and future human rights conventions, treaties and other legal instruments.

A group activity in the form of a role-play on five articles of the UDHR was conducted. The articles were distributed on a random basis in the five groups of participants. They prepared short performances that pictured the articles/rights chosen.

Article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 6: Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 15: 1. Everyone has the right to a nationality. 2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

Article 19: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Group Non-Formal Activities
to promote Active Citizenship
and develop critical thinking, leadership skills and social and civic competences among young people

Electioneering: Discussion-based activity that addresses the rights and responsibilities of citizens connected to democracy. The impact of the game on participants helped to consider some of the controversial aspects of a democratic society, practice and develop skills of listening, discussing and persuasion and encourage cooperation and open-mindedness.

Who are I?: Buzz groups and brainstorming activities to explore issues of identity, increase understanding of the concept of identity and widen self-awareness; develop communication skills; promote solidarity and respect.

Making links: A simulation game of the rights and responsibilities of citizens, the government, the media and the NGOs in a democratic society. Through the game, participants develop an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of each actor, develop soft and cooperation skills, and promote civic responsibility and civil engagement as well as how to freely and democratically express opinion.

Citizenship game: A discussion-based activity where participants are asked to define by themselves a given concept. After they have individually defined the concept (of citizenship) they start to work in small groups, first of two people, then of four and finally of eight to come up with one agreed definition per group.

Sustainable Development Goals

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015. The agenda provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 goals, which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.

During the youth exchange, the participants were divided into groups of four and wrote their thoughts and ideas on some of the goals connected with active citizenship. They acted as a small community of young people, experts in the field and listed ideas for the sustainable development of each of the chosen goals. After this, they presented their recommendations to the other groups.

#6 Clean water and sanitation

- *Improve sanitation facilities by providing toilets that flush into safe enclosure*
- *Penalties for illegal sewages*
- *Restrict dumpling waste into rivers/lakes (also for households)*
- *Improve pipes*
- *Research water cleaning methods more*
- *Start educating kids about it*

#7 Affordable and clean energy

- *Passive/Autonomous/Active houses (solar panels, geothermal energy)*
- *Installing wind turbines, solar panels*
- *Government level support of reusable energy*

#9 Industry, innovation and infrastructure

- *Improving the quality of public transport*
- *Invest in organising hackathons for young inventors*
- *Support small/local business*
- *Tax reduction to sustainable businesses*

#11 Sustainable cities and communities

- *Installing solar panels and wind turbines*
- *Protecting and creating green areas*
- *Hunting is not allowed*
- *Reuse garbage waste (after burning) = 0 waste*
- *No cars in the city centres*
- *Improve public transportation*

#12 Responsible consumption and production

- *Reusing second-hand products*
- *Don't buy things that you don't need*
- *Divide products between countries*
- *Donate or give big discount on almost expired food*
- *Donate all cooked food from restaurants at the end of the day*
- *Using reusable bags*
- *Websites for exchanging goods*

#13 Climate action

- *Eco transports*
- *Use air-conditioner, not coals and others*
- *Use eco-friendly packaging*
- *Rely more on reasonable energy sources*
- *Limit CO_2 emissions of companies (factories)*
- *Plant trees*
- *Improving and promoting public transport*

#14 Life below water

- *More trashcans on the beach*
- *No plastic cups and straws on the beach*
- *Regulate ships more so they don't dump oil in seas*
- *Growing marine life in farms and move them in the oceans*
- *More awareness of endangered species*
- *Regulate companies/households on dumping waste into waters*

#15 Life on land

- *Promote recycling more*
- *Prohibit cutting down rainforests*
- *Regulate hunting more*
- *Replace big and large roads from the cities with parks*
- *Regulate noise pollution*
- *Promote knowledge about animal species*
- *Increase protection of national parks and wild life*

Varna Adventure Activity

On the fourth day of the youth exchange, an adventurous game was organised. The participants were divided into groups of five and took part in an adventure game to explore the sea garden in the city of Varna. The game had 6 tasks to be fulfilled by each group. The winners received symbolic awards.

The tasks were:
1. Each group must create a team name
2. Each group must pick a symbol that represents the group: a stone or a seashell, or anything else that represents your group
3. Each group must meet a local young person that speaks English and tell them about the YAfE project and give out a YAfE sticker
4. Each group will have to take a photo with an animal and another local of all ages
5. Each group must find the secret bridge of wishes, hidden in the Varna Sea Garden and make a wish there
6. Film a video message as a group wishing what you would like to see a change in your society.

Secret Friend Game

This activity involved granting each participant a **secret friend** from the pool of participants. At the beginning of the youth exchange, all participants' names were written on a piece of paper and each participant picked a paper with the name of another participant. 32 envelopes were stuck to the wall, with the names of each participant. During the youth exchange, participants had to leave small presents in the envelopes of their secret friends, without revealing who is their actual secret friend. The activity ended on the last day, where an interactive game was played to reveal the secret friends of each participant.

Intercultural Dialogue

Intercultural dialogue can be enhanced through non-formal learning and sharing national culture. The organization of cultural evenings gives opportunities for young people to learn more about other groups' culture, cuisine, music, dance and interesting facts. The cultural evenings are full of Kahoot games, dances, food and a lot of fun. These evenings foster the formation of intercultural groups and develop a sense of tolerance among young people.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us:

E-mail: foundation.ece@gmail.com

Web: https://foundationece.eu/