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YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN CIVIC MONITORING: LESSONS FROM THE CIVIC-EU PROJECT



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INTRODUCTION

The Civic-EU project aims at fostering youth participation in democracy and civil society across Romania, Italy, Slovenia, Greece, and Latvia by providing training, capacity-building activities, and civic monitoring opportunities for young people and youth workers. It empowers participants to engage in citizen actions, propose ideas to decision-makers, and contribute to local, national, and European policy development.

Key objectives include equipping youth and youth workers with the necessary skills and tools to actively participate in civic life and influence policy-making. This is achieved through training programs, workshops, and civic monitoring teams composed of youth aged 16-29, who track local policies and practices. These activities present practical experience in civic engagement and provide insight into the impact of policies on their communities. The project also prioritises disseminating findings and recommendations through public events, seminars, and multimedia content such as videos, podcasts, and webinars, raising awareness and sharing best practices in youth participation across the five countries.

This policy paper aims to consolidate the lessons learned from the Civic-EU project, provide recommendations on scaling and capitalising on the results, and offer insights on integrating youth engagement practices into broader local and national policies. By highlighting the effective approaches in different countries, this paper highlights the importance of sustained youth involvement in policy-making to strengthen democratic resilience and promote social inclusion across Europe.



EMPOWERING YOUTH FOR CIVIC IMPACT: AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND TARGET GROUPS



The project aims to foster meaningful youth engagement in civic participation, with a focus on civic monitoring, gender equality, and the effects of COVID-19 on youth well-being. Participants from Latvia, Slovenia, Italy, Greece, and Romania engage in training, preparatory events, and youth dialogues. Key activities include developing civic monitoring skills, organizing youth debates, and addressing mental health and gender equality issues through a series of seminars and webinars.

The main goal of this initiative is to equip young people with practical skills for civic monitoring, empowering them to hold local governments accountable and improve public policies. Training sessions focus on tracking and assessing public policies, particularly in areas like gender issues and mental health, while also addressing challenges brought by the pandemic. With participants from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, the project fosters a spirit of cross-border collaboration, creating a network of youth advocates who are better equipped to engage with their communities and drive meaningful change.

Total number of participants reached by gender at the transnational level

1506

total number of participants

1016

female participants



480

male participants

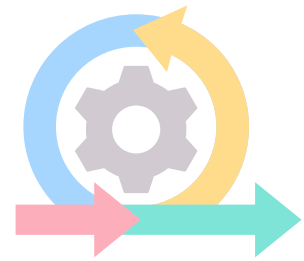


10

unknown gender



MEASURING PROGRESS



Greece

In Greece, the main focus was youth participation, inclusion of marginalized communities and fostering the knowledge of tools and skills for young people, to monitor and open dialogue for the topics that concern them. Various events and workshops were implemented, such as youth dialogue events with the presence of decision-makers, and workshops about the impact of COVID-19 on youth's mental well-being and gender equality. In total, 365 participants, comprising 71 males and 194 females, engaged in the events in Greece.

Key Activity	Details
Civic monitoring workshops (preparatory events)	These sessions involved 60 young people, who participated in the National Youth Festival and had the opportunity to present the civic monitoring reports to various stakeholders and other young people. Participants learned about researching and monitoring tools, concerning the University Police, the construction of a subway station in one of the main green squares, and restoring public schools and public services for vulnerable people.
Youth Dialogue Event	50 young people with various backgrounds had the opportunity to build a dialogue with decision-makers and managers in Organizations of Civil Society in Athens, discussing innovative ideas to strengthen the connection between young people and local authorities.
Seminars on COVID-19 impact and Gender Equality	Featured workshops led by skilled trainers, encouraging students to think critically and engage in discussions about the pandemic's effect on their social lives, challenges in returning to routine, gender equality, and combating hate speech.

Total number of participants reached by gender in Greece

265

total number of participants

194

female participants

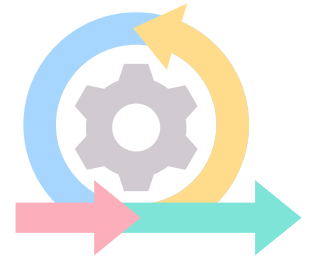


71

male participants



MEASURING PROGRESS



Italy

In Italy, civic monitors focused on public policies in the areas of employment, education, leisure, and integration. Local events gathered high school and university students, youth organizations, activists, rights movements, experts, academics, and decision-makers. In total, 364 participants, comprising 151 males and 213 females, engaged in the events in Italy.

Key Activity

Details

Civic monitoring workshops (preparatory events)

The young monitors helped organize events in Caselle and Turin, focusing on youth participation, migration, and environmental policies. These gatherings included 75 students, activists, youth organizations, and decision-makers.

Youth Dialogue Event

53 participants from various backgrounds connected to discuss and propose improvements in youth participation. Key insights included enhancing communication between youth and authorities and improving access to public services.

Seminars on COVID-19 impact and Gender Equality

Two seminars on COVID-19 and Gender issues addressed the pandemic's impact on youth participation and gender equality. Discussions centred on the social and mental health challenges post-COVID, gender disparities in education and employment, and strategies to combat gender-based discrimination and hate speech.

Total number of participants reached by gender in Italy

364

total number of participants

213

female participants

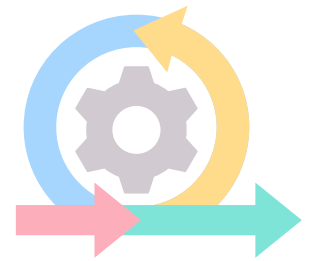


151

male participants



MEASURING PROGRESS



Latvia

In Latvia, key topics included the link between active participation, mental well-being, post-pandemic effects, gender equality, and the importance of volunteering. Regional authorities, decision-makers, experts, youth workers, and active youth collaborated on this initiative, resulting in a Policy recommendations report shared with all participants. In total, 187 participants, comprising 39 males, 138 females and 10 unknowns engaged in the events in Latvia.

Key Activity	Details
Civic monitoring workshops (preparatory events)	4 civic monitors held two preparatory events on volunteer work and youth involvement in local governance. At Aizpute Secondary School, discussions emphasised the importance of volunteerism and innovative ideas for municipal initiatives. The event at Jānis Čakste Secondary School focused on youth civic engagement, encouraging students to explore practical ways to participate in local decision-making.
Youth Dialogue Event	Youth Dialogue event fostered an open dialogue about the role of volunteering in civic participation and its impact on democracy. Collaborating with the Liepāja city municipality and Liepāja Youth House, participants engaged with local decision-makers, experts, and civic society representatives to discuss the essence of volunteering and its relevance in today's society. A video was designed to highlight the importance of volunteering as a civic engagement mechanism, featuring reflections from young monitors and experts on the subject.
Seminars on COVID-19 impact and Gender Equality	Two seminars on the impact of COVID-19 on youth mental health and well-being tackled challenges resulting from gender stereotypes, fostering discussions on how these issues affect youth engagement in civic activities.

Total number of participants reached by gender in Latvia

187

total number of participants

138

female participants



39

male participants

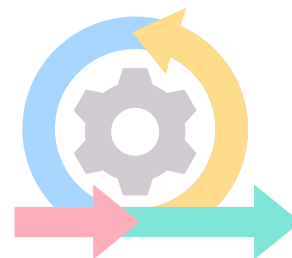


10

unknown gender



MEASURING PROGRESS



Romania

The events conducted in Romania focused on enhancing youth civic engagement and participation through workshops, dialogue events, and webinars that addressed local governance, leadership, and the effectiveness of both online and traditional activism. In total, 365 participants, comprising 97 males and 268 females, engaged in the events in Romania.

Key Activity	Details
Civic monitoring workshops (preparatory events)	The workshops involved 82 high school students who assessed local government actions and public policies. Participants learned to use civic tools to tackle issues such as pedestrian accessibility, equitable funding for educational renovations, revitalising green spaces, and improving public transportation.
Youth Dialogue Event	The Youth Dialogue event entitled “Youth and European Parliament Candidates: Face to Face” facilitated direct dialogue between young people and European Parliament candidates. It included a panel discussion with independent candidates and political party representatives, focusing on civic participation, youth engagement support structures, school civic education, and measures to combat gender inequality.
Seminars on COVID-19 impact and Gender Equality	<p>The webinar “From Idea to Leadership: Women Who Bring Change” highlighted inspiring women leaders in sustainability, politics, and social engagement, who shared their experiences and offered advice on leadership and advocacy, encouraging participants to explore their potential for effecting change.</p> <p>The webinar “Youth and Civic Participation: Challenges and Opportunities” addressed the rise of online activism post-pandemic, featuring a debate among young champions on its effectiveness compared to traditional civic engagement. Experts invited provided insights and local examples of successful civic participation, concluding with an interactive workshop for practical civic engagement guidance.</p>

Total number of participants reached by gender in Romania

365

total number of participants

268

female participants

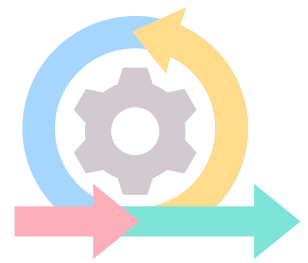


97

male participants



MEASURING PROGRESS



Slovenia

In Slovenia, the emphasis was on the implementation of selected areas of the youth strategy of the Municipality of Ljubljana: general needs of young people; projects and programs for the youth in rural areas; youth sector support networks; entrepreneurship and innovation. Young civic monitors highlighted the inclusion of rural youth as a vital issue for the local community. In total, 325 participants, comprising 122 males and 203 females, engaged in the events in Slovenia.

Key Activity

Details

Civic monitoring workshops
(preparatory events)

6 participants trained in civic monitoring methodologies and tools presented their research findings and discussed critical issues, including the challenges faced by the rural population and the role of the municipality during the two preparatory events.

Youth Dialogue Event

“Living in Ljubljana, Living in the Countryside” brought together young people, representatives from youth organizations, and municipality officials to explore collaborative solutions for engaging rural youth in the local community.

Seminars on COVID-19 impact and Gender Equality

The two seminars addressed the impact of COVID-19 and gender roles on the mental health of young people, fostering an open discussion on these pressing issues and giving the young people an insight into possible coping techniques.

Total number of participants reached by gender in Slovenia

325

total number of participants

203

female participants



122

male participants



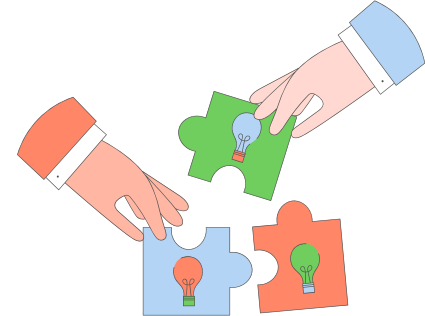
KEY CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

The project's primary objective was to **train young people in civic monitoring and research methods** while enhancing the skills of those working in organizations focused on youth participation. Throughout the program, we achieved several goals and gained valuable insights. However, challenges occurred, particularly in the post-pandemic context and due to the unique cases of each participating country and organization. **A significant challenge was to reach the young participants**, impacted by timing issues (e.g., summer breaks and exam periods) and language barriers. To address this, we explored alternative methods, such as online and hybrid events, to engage participants from remote areas. Another challenge was **ensuring the inclusion of young refugees and people with fewer opportunities**, who often face financial and educational obstacles. Involving cultural mediators and providing support measures like attendance certificates and daily allowances became very useful. Additionally, **language barriers in participating in activities** posed challenges, particularly for refugees who lack fluency in the native language and for communities, such as Russian speakers in Latvia. Maintaining **the interest and engagement of local authorities** throughout the project was also challenging, despite the relevance of topics addressed by the youth civic monitors.

Despite the abovementioned challenges, **the project provided valuable lessons and actionable recommendations**. We documented these insights throughout the implementation process and held collective discussions to pinpoint key areas for future enhancement. Our findings emphasize the following main areas:

- **Partnership collaboration**
- **Engagement with local authorities**
- **Youth engagement and recognition**
- **Capacity building for youth workers and local authorities**
- **Cross-country activities and networking**

1. PARTNERSHIP COLLABORATION



Partnership collaboration was essential for achieving the project's goals and facilitating activities across Romania, Italy, Slovenia, Greece, and Latvia. Each partner contributed their expertise, ensured local adaptations, and built strong relationships with target groups, particularly young people, local authorities, and other organizations:

Clear communication mechanisms enabled partners to stay aligned with timelines, deliverables, and expectations through regular formal and informal meetings. Open dialogue facilitated problem-solving and adjustments as needed, supported by online tools that kept everyone informed on progress.

Flexibility and adaptability: Each partner faced unique challenges based on local contexts, including political engagement and demographic differences. The flexibility in adapting approaches allowed the project to proceed smoothly, even when confronted with unforeseen circumstances such as difficulties in engaging local authorities or language barriers.

Knowledge sharing and capacity building: Emphasizing best practices and lessons learned, we held workshops, transnational meetings, and capacity-building sessions to foster mutual learning among partners. This collaborative approach enhanced the overall project outcomes by applying interactive methods across countries.

Best practices shared: By documenting successful strategies and tools developed during the project, partners established a set of best practices and recommendations. These included effective methods for engaging youth in civic monitoring, innovative training approaches, and collaboration strategies with local authorities, which were adapted to fit national and local contexts, amplifying the project's impact across all countries involved.

2. ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Local engagement: Engaging local authorities is essential for sustaining youth initiatives and influencing relevant policies. Strategies should differ based on municipality size: larger cities like Athens and Bucharest often require more effort to connect with decision-makers, while smaller areas benefit from closer relationships. To effectively empower youth, establish relationships with local authorities from the initial stage of the project. In large municipalities, proactively inform them about the project and secure their commitment by obtaining a letter of support that outlines their responsibilities. This formal commitment can facilitate cooperation and improve funding prospects.

Information access: many young citizens are unaware of their right to request public information on issues that affect them, and public officials often hesitate to provide this data, viewing citizen monitoring as intrusive rather than collaborative. To foster active citizenship, it is essential to promote civic monitoring among both youth and officials. Future projects should focus on training both groups in data research, analysis, and reporting. Additionally, establishing structured channels for ongoing dialogue can help integrate these practices into local governance, enhancing transparency and cooperation.

Impact of the recommendations for the authorities: The monitoring reports and 50 recommendations from the Youth Debates reflect extensive collaboration among partners. However, many results lacked real impact, as policymakers engaged but did not commit to meaningful change in citizen-public administration relations. For future projects, focus on concrete outcomes is essential. Local authorities should be encouraged to formally integrate these recommendations into policy documents and discuss them at council meetings, providing valuable feedback.



3. YOUTH ENGAGEMENT & RECOGNITION



Enhancing youth engagement in community activities: engaging young people in community projects is challenging due to their individualistic mindset, often prioritizing personal interests over collective concerns. To boost participation, projects should address specific social issues that directly affect them and involve them in identifying local needs. Additionally, starting youth engagement at a younger age can foster a sense of responsibility, helping them understand the connection between personal and community interests.

Strategies for effectively informing youth: reaching young people poses a significant challenge due to their diverse interests and habits. To engage them effectively, projects must identify specific target groups and tailor communication strategies accordingly. Use social media platforms popular among youth, but also consider traditional methods like posters and flyers in gathering spaces. Personal outreach and collaboration with existing organizations, such as schools and youth centres, can enhance outreach. Preparing a letter of support to define cooperation methods with these partners can help reach a broader audience, including less active youth.

Encouraging long-term engagement of youth, especially those with fewer opportunities, can be challenging as they often prioritize work and earning income. To foster long-term participation, project budgets should include funds for incentives to motivate their involvement. Additionally, providing certificates of participation for young migrants or refugees can help recognize their contributions and encourage community engagement.



4. CAPACITY BUILDING FOR YOUTH WORKERS & LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Role of youth workers and specialists: youth workers and specialists within local authorities are crucial for enhancing youth civic participation. They should be actively engaged in educational activities that align with national and European youth policy goals.

Targeted policies and outreach: local authorities need to develop targeted policies aimed at youth, reaching out to educational institutions, youth organizations, and informal groups to engage diverse youth, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Effective communication strategies should encourage civic participation at both local and broader levels.

Including civic participation in school curricula, emphasizing practical examples and good practices. This can be facilitated through meetings with active youth and civil society representatives who can share their experiences and provide guidance. Local authority representatives should also visit schools to introduce mechanisms for youth engagement.

Youth should learn not only how to be an active citizen but also how the engagement is facilitated by other actors (i.e. MPs, government representatives), what limitations it might entail, and how to cooperate with these actors. In these efforts, youth workers, youth trainers and specialists can contribute. Also, local authorities should be open to the public and show their governance structure, department divisions and their responsibilities.

Local authorities should develop targeted cooperation with youth civic society organisations: local authorities should foster cooperation with youth civic organizations, involving them in the development of youth policy documents and decision-making processes. Ensuring transparency and accountability in these decisions is essential. Youth organizations should be recognized as equal partners alongside decision-makers, advocating for the interests of young people.

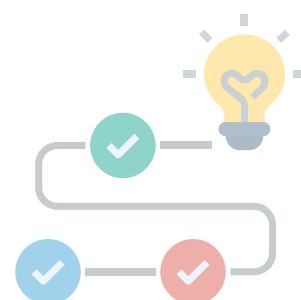


5. CROSS-COUNTRY ACTIVITIES & NETWORKING

Focus on youth engagement: the program focused on fostering youth involvement in urban areas, highlighting the need for transnational activities to enhance collaboration among civic monitors. Civic monitoring groups could engage in local projects while conducting comparative studies with partner cities, creating a civic fellowship for sharing best practices. Additionally, program development should prioritize informal activities to strengthen connections among participants, reflecting the key themes of youth engagement and intercultural involvement in European projects.

Expanding horizons in youth engagement: an essential lesson learned from the program is that its focus should extend beyond local projects and events to include European topics and their local or national impacts. For instance, in Greece, we developed a podcast, addressing the fundamental right of young refugees to vote in European elections. These discussions are vital as they resonate with both Greek and European communities. Monitoring issues related to marginalized youth is crucial, as it fosters open dialogue and raises awareness among the general population.

CONCLUSION



In conclusion, this paper reflects on the outcomes of the Civic-EU project and presents a roadmap for capitalising on its results. The project has shown that engaging young people in civic monitoring can foster greater democratic participation, provide refreshed perspectives to local and national policymakers, and create a more inclusive approach to governance. By supporting youth in developing skills that enable them to understand and influence public policies, Civic-EU has applied the foundation for long-term change.

This approach is relevant as it builds upon the statement that democracy thrives when its citizens, especially young ones, are actively involved in shaping their futures. The success of this initiative demonstrates that empowering youth and establishing strong networks between young people, civil society, and local authorities are essential for a dynamic and resilient democracy. Future efforts should focus on deepening these engagements, ensuring youth voices are integrated into decision-making processes at all levels.



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