

8th Cycle of EU Youth Dialogue

NWG Reporting Tool for Qualitative Activities

Introduction

This reporting tool is used to collect information from the National Working Groups on the theme “Space and Participation for All”. These responses are collected separately, as the findings will be used by the European Steering Group for the 2nd EU Youth Conference in Portugal and feed into relevant Council documents.

You should use this tool for reporting outcomes of your qualitative consultation only. References to other studies, quantitative data, or policy responses from institutions will not be analysed.

Section 1

By completing this form you agree that the European Youth Forum has the right to share this document along with any accompanying survey data publicly under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#). You must ensure that this form contains no identifying or sensitive personal data, other than the contact name and email address attribution on the first page.

Overview

Contact Name: Jonas Lage Roelsgaard
Contact Email: jro@duf.dk
Country of Working Group: Denmark
<i>Who was involved in your working group:</i> Number of youth representatives: 4 Number of government representatives: 1 Number of national agency representatives: 2 Number of experts: 1 Other: 1
<i>Attributions: Please list the names of any individuals or organisations who wish to be attributed as contributing to the creation of this document and any derivative works or publications produced from it. (300 WORDS MAX)</i> Researcher at Center for Ungdomsdomsforskning (Center for Youth Research) Maria Bruselius-Jensen has contributed with material from her ongoing research project:

Bruselius-Jensen, Maria: 'Nye veje i demokratiske ungefællesskaber' (translated: »The Ways in Democratic Youth Communities«) (not yet published/2021).

Analysis institute 'Epinion': 8 in-depth interviews for DUF.

THIS INFORMATION WILL BE USED AS PART OF THE CREDITS IN THE 8TH CYCLE REPORTS IF YOU DO NOT PROVIDE IT, YOUR CONTRIBUTION WILL BE CREDITED WITH THE NAME OF YOUR WORKING GROUP

Please briefly describe the methodology you used to conduct your consultation (no more than 250 words):

In the NWG group, we discussed how we could collect as much data as possible for the consultation. We ended up with the following four areas:

1. Focus group interviews conducted by DUF and the youth delegates. Here the delegates visited schools, as DUF was already there due to the project 'Democracy Day'. At each school, delegates spoke to 5-6 students.
2. In-depth interviews (30 minutes each) with young people without an association background conducted by the analysis company Epinion. This was paid for with funds from the 2019-2020 funding.
3. Focus group interviews with young people from various Danish associations conducted by the Center for Youth Research (CeFU), which is part of the NWG group. These interviews are also part of a research project, which is part of another project in DUF.
4. Questionnaire surveys conducted by DUF through DUF's and NWG group's channels. In total, DUF conducted four surveys aimed at different target groups (youth in general, school children, youngsters with good knowledge about EU/politics, and organizations).

The data from these four areas form the basis of the results of this consultation. Thus, we have data from a total of 350 young Danes, both data in the form of quotations and in the form of quantitative nature. The amount of data is too large for it all to be included in this consultation, but DUF makes use of a larger part of the data in DUF's further work in the EU's Youth Dialogue and in DUF's other work.

How many Face to Face Youth dialogue events did you hold?	36
Total number of young people taking part in face to face youth dialogue events:	121
How many online Youth Dialogue events did you hold? (Y/N)	12
Total number of young people taking part in online youth dialogue events:	237

How many action research projects did you run?	0
Total number of young people taking part in action research projects:	-
Did you use visual methods? (Y/N)	No
Total number of photos and of videos received for Participatory Visual methods (if known):	-
Number of young people participating through other methods (please describe):	I could have listed the online surveys here, but I've placed them under 'online events'.
Total number of young people participating in your dialogue overall:	-

Breakdown of participants

These questions are optional. There may be specific laws within your country which you need to take into account when gathering this information and you should comply with any local, national and EU legislation at all times. Please be aware that questions about young people's backgrounds are sensitive personal data under GDPR if they can be linked to any data which identifies the person. It should always be optional for participants to give you this information.

If you did not monitor the backgrounds of young people participating, or feel it is not appropriate to do so, please leave these questions blank. If you monitored the backgrounds of only some of the young people you can use the “Number not disclosing / Not known” option to show this. You can also include numbers of people who choose not to provide you with this information in the “Number not disclosing / Not known” category.

In general, best practice when collecting this sort of data is to allow young people to self-define their identity, for example by asking “do you consider yourself to have a disability?”, rather than asking “are you registered as disabled with the state”, but you may follow your own practices when collecting this information. You can use the template participant monitoring form (see Appendix 2) as a tool to help you collect this information during face to face activities if you wish to do so.

Breakdown of participants	
Gender of young people who participated	Number of males: 172 Number of females: 178 Number of other gender: Number not disclosing / Not known / Not asked:
Age of young people who participated	Number aged under 16: 56 Number aged 16-18: 153 Number aged 19-25: 32 Number aged 26-30: 2 Number not disclosing / Not known / Not asked: 107
Number of young people with disabilities*	Number who identify as not having a disability: Number who identify as having a disability: 3 Number not disclosing / Not known / Not asked: 347.
Ethnicity**	Number of young people from the majority ethnic group: Number of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds: Number not disclosing / Not known: 350.
Religion**	Number of young people from the majority religious group: Number of young people from minority religious backgrounds: Number not disclosing / Not known: 350.
Sexuality	Number who identify as heterosexual: Number who identify as homosexual, bisexual or other sexuality: Number not disclosing / Not known / Not asked: 350.
Rural areas	Number of young people living in rural areas: 67 Number of young people living in towns or small cities: 175 Number of young people living in large cities***: 57 Number not disclosing / Not known / Not asked: 51
Employment/Education	Number of young people in work: Number of young people in education: 236 Number of young people not in education, employment or training: Not know: 114

* By disabilities, physical and mental impairments are covered.

** The question on ethnicity and religion is country specific. The majority group is defined by what is the major ethnic group in the country the young person lives in.

*** a large city has over 250,000 inhabitants

Section 2 Guiding questions report

Taking into consideration the guiding questions please report on the targets of the Youth Goal 9, Space and participation for All, and measures for their implementation that were discussed in your activities. If some targets were not touched upon in your activities, leave the space blank.

Youth Goal 9 Target: Ensure young people can adequately influence all areas of society and all parts of the decision-making processes, from agenda setting to implementation, monitoring and evaluation through youth-friendly and accessible mechanisms and structures, ensuring that policies respond to the needs of young people.

Guiding question: What measures/actions can be implemented to ensure young people influence policy and decision making at all levels?

(Suggested word limit 500 words.) *Please report here a summary of general trends and information coming from young people.*

Young people from associations

The young people we have talked with who are active in associations experience that being active in an association can do something significant for the issues that matter to them. This way, many young people who are active in NGOs experience that they can influence the political development both locally and nationally. They experience that the association they are apart of gives them the ability to exercise influence for the benefit of their cause.

"There is something in putting so much work into voluntary work, firstly to help to make a difference... [to help in] the political struggle, to make the world more accessible to those with disabilities as well, and then there is the social part of it".

School students

The school students (age 14-18) with whom we have spoken experience that social media, demonstrations, and petitions on the internet make it easier to be heard for young persons today. But at the same time, they find that they need an adult facilitator who can help them navigate the political landscape so that they can ultimately exert greater influence.

When we ask if they feel that they have an influence on everyday life at school, they answer that they do not feel that they exert any particular influence. They are aware that there are student councils that can be used to influence development locally, but many of them believe that most students do not know much about what a student council does and how it works. Several of them find that teachers do not listen to their wishes.

We have also asked them how they themselves think they can influence decision makers. Here, some answer that one must first and foremost say one's opinion out loud

and debate with other people. Others answer that it can be done by being involved in a community that works together for a given purpose (association, student council, group of friends). One responds pretty precisely that it can be done: *“Through student councils, by having knowledge about single parties and politics in general, by being part of a political party when you are young and in general by making sure to be well-educated”*.

School students suggest:

- that more politicians come out to the schools and talk to the young people about their everyday lives.
- that young people have access to an adult who can help them facilitate their political wishes.
- that they get a physical place to meet where they can talk about politics

Young people without an association background

The young people (22-25 years) without an association background, with whom the analysis company Epinion has spoken, believe that participation in democracy first and foremost goes through voting in elections. However, they also see other possibilities for actively participating in democracy, namely by participating in demonstrations, joining a party, debating with friends or supporting a citizens' proposal (Borgerforslag.dk) or a petition. Especially, they emphasize the informal discussions with friends / family / fellow students on political topics, but also the citizen proposals (which the majority of them have signed at some point of time).

Conclusion

It is difficult to conclude anything final for all young people. There is, of course, a difference between being a 14-year-old school student at a vocational school or being a 28-year-old who is active in an association. Nevertheless, it can be stated that all the target groups considered that there were many ways to participate actively in the democracy. Both in traditional ways such as through elections, debate posts, demonstrations, but also in new ways such as through social media and online citizen proposals.

Young people are certainly also politically active today, but they prefer to discuss politics with friends, family, classmates. In other words, our consultation suggest that they prefer to be political in the private sphere and not in the public sphere, which was probably more prevalent in previous generations.

Diverse voices - Did any groups of young people have experiences or views that differed from the overall messages? What were these groups and what did they say? (Suggested word limit 500 words.) *If you identified that particular groups of young people, such as young women or young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, had particular concerns that differed strongly from the overall trend, you can report them here. It is not necessary to complete this section if you did not identify any differences.*

Youth Goal 9 Target: Ensure equal access to everyday decision making for all young people from different backgrounds.

Guiding question: What actions/measures should be implemented to ensure young people from different backgrounds have access to decision making processes?

(Suggested word limit 500 words.) *Please report here a summary of general trends and information coming from young people.*

Young people who are active in associations

Association-active young people answer that they work actively to get everyone included. The association can do this by arranging courses and events that are targeted at the group they seek to include. However, they are aware that they have not yet reached the goal of getting everyone included, but the mere fact that they are aware of the issue is positive.

An association called 'Metal Youth' (a youth union) is concerned with getting more women into the association. A person from the organization says that there are far too few women in the organization, but that they are aware of the problem and they are actively working to ensure that this group will be more included in the future:

“But lately we have had some success in getting more women to join our organization, by doing youth courses at our youth center, where we arrange 12 courses per year. And now we have a 13th course which is specifically targeting women, and it is called ‘Female role models’. And we usually have a quite good turn-up there”.

In DUF's own survey for organizations active, we have received some interesting suggestions on what can be done to include young people with a minority background more:

“The adults, who are close to the young people, must be good at spotting those youngsters who need an extra push to get the courage to use their own voice more actively. It is better for everyone, regardless of their background. It is also necessary to have the courage to speak about more controversial subjects, that way the »democratic muscles« are strengthened, and young people are encouraged to speak their mind. At the same time, you show that democracy is not only for the few, but is really about dialogue”.

Some emphasize the importance of role models:

“Emphasize role models and include them in decision-making processes”.

Other suggests beginning with topics that interests them specifically:

“By designing some processes for involvement, with a starting point in the young people’s values, thus including the ambiguous experiences the young people with minority backgrounds have”.

And:

“By ensuring they can work with topics and ideas that interest them”.

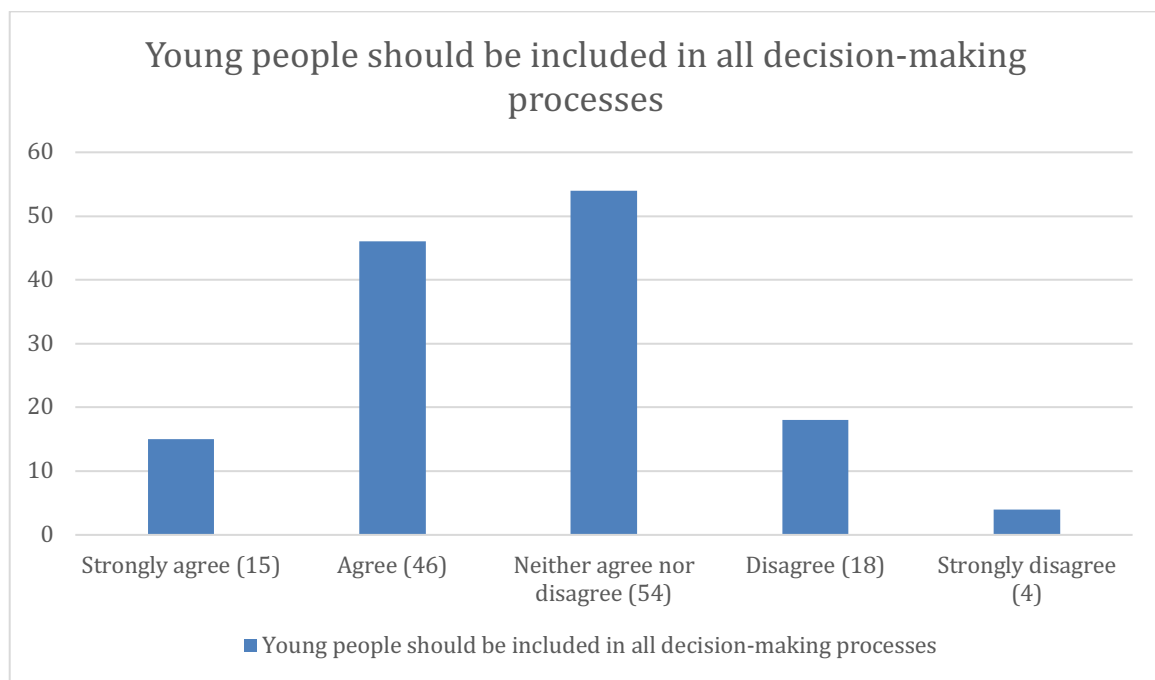
And to meet them where they live:

“We try to work in their local networks, to ensure their inclusion in the overall civil society and its work”.

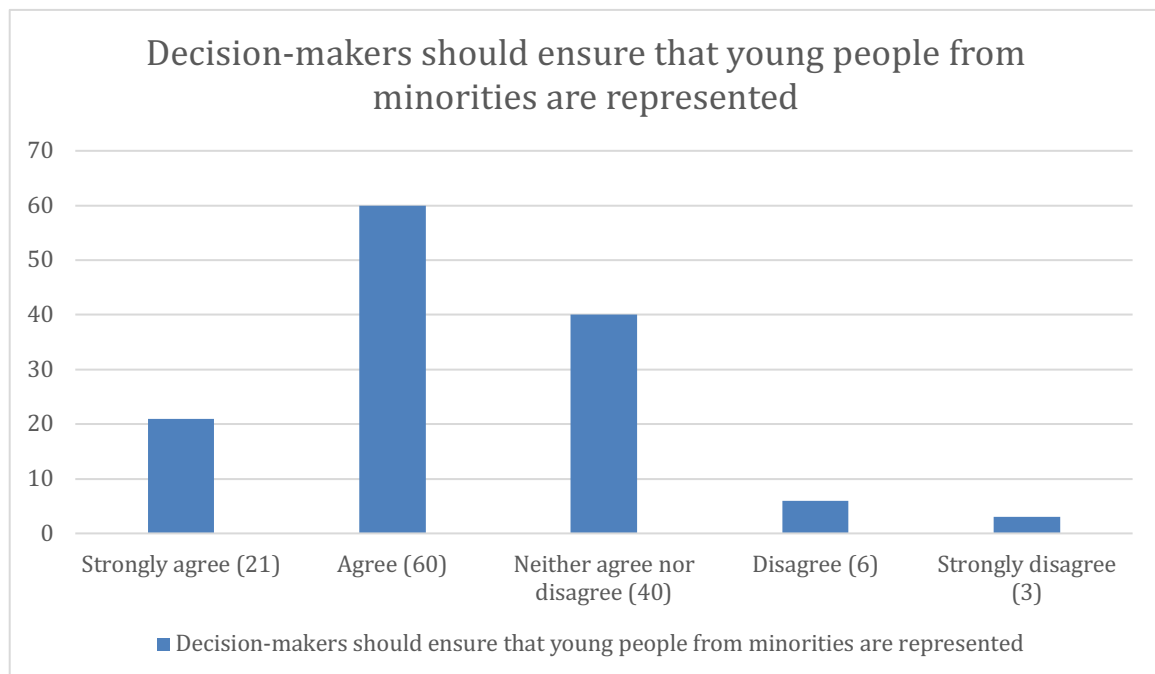
All in all, young people from associations are aware of the problem and have lots of ideas for how the change can be directed the right way.

School students

In our questionnaire surveys, we asked school students (14-18 years) whether they think young people should be included in all decision-making processes. 137 have answered, of which 61 agree that young people should be included, while 22 disagree (54 people neither agree, nor disagree).



When we ask them whether decision-makers have a special responsibility to ensure that young people with a minority background are represented politically, 81 answer that they agree, while only nine answer that they disagree (40 neither agree nor disagree). It is possible that the many young people who do not have an opinion on these two issues indicate that it is difficult to understand the problems in this age group.



Conclusion

Among young people in associations, it is clear that one is aware that not all young people are included in their work. This entails a risk that there is not equal access to influence decision-makers for all young people. However, many of the associations work

actively to include more young people and in this way the development points in a positive direction. By working actively to include more youth groups in the associations' daily work, associations contribute to more youth groups getting closer to decision-makers and who then can influence political decisions more easily.

Among school students, it can be said that those who are not indifferent to the problem generally believe that young people should be included in all decision-making processes, and that decision-makers must ensure that young people with a minority background are also represented.

Diverse voices - Did any groups of young people have experiences or views that differed from the overall messages? What were these groups and what did they say? (Suggested word limit 500 words.) *If you identified that particular groups of young people, such as young women or young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, had particular concerns that differed strongly from the overall trend, you can report them here. It is not necessary to complete this section if you did not identify any differences.*

Youth Goal 9 Target: Increase youth participation and thus equal representation in the electoral process as well as in elected bodies and other decision-making organs at all levels of society.

Guiding question: What measures/actions can be implemented to increase young people's representation in electoral bodies?

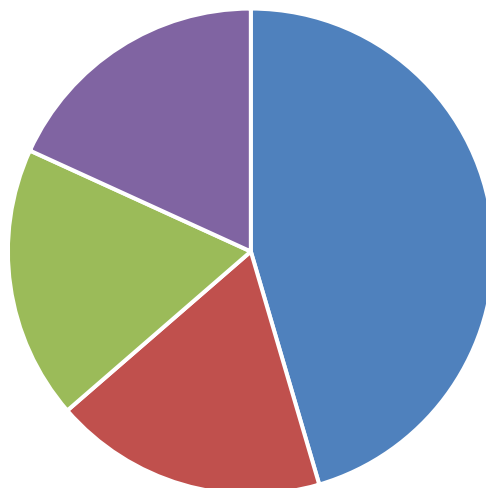
(Suggested word limit 500 words.) *Please report here a summary of general trends and information coming from young people.*

To examine young people's attitudes towards this goal, we have decided to take a closer look at what young people think about lowering the voting age from 18 to 16 years (today it is 18 years in Denmark). An effective way to increase young people's participation and representation in electoral processes, in decision-making processes and in democratic institutions is to lower the voting age. In this way, young people have a direct influence on who is elected, and politicians are forced to listen to young people to a greater extent than is the case now. Therefore, DUF has investigated what different youth groups think about lowering the voting age below. In addition, DUF have asked in what other ways young people's participation in, and influence on, decisions can be increased.

Young people who are active in associations

In our questionnaire survey for young people who are active in associations, we asked if they thought it would be a good idea to lower the voting age. Five people think it is a good idea, while two think it is a bad idea (two answer that it is neither a good nor a bad idea, while two others do not answer the question at all).

What do you think about lowering the voting age?



■ Good idea (5) ■ Bad idea (2) ■ Neither good nor bad (2) ■ No answer (2)

The following two quotes states two examples of why it could be both a good and a bad idea according to them:

“That is a good idea, as it will encourage democratic education in schools”.

“I don’t think that is a good idea, as too many young people are not conscious about what politics is”.

Participants from this survey have a lot of good ideas on how young people can be included more in decision-making processes. One says:

“They can be included in two ways: 1) Through structures of involvement, for example through student or youth councils. Here, it is important that for example the municipalities have ensured necessary resources across the political- and managerial areas. There should also be a better connection between youth workers and the strategic level. 2) Ad hoc arenas for involvement, for example workshops for the future. In these arenas, it is important to consider the experience of youth and not top-down formulated agendas and policies”.

Another one thinks the education sector can do more to include youngsters in decisions:

“There should be a much greater extent of ‘learner autonomy’ in the education [sector] where students should have a much greater say in what they work with, why and how... and subsequently they should be involved in evaluation processes. Students must experience democracy and responsibility”.

A third person says: *“Young people should be taken seriously, and know that they are heard, and it should be reflected politically”.*

A fourth person says they include young members in the planning of activities: *“We invite them to ensure that they themselves can decide what kind of activity they would like to do, and we support them when they want to conduct their own projects”.*

School students

In our questionnaire survey for school students, we also asked them if they think it is a good idea to lower the voting age to 16 years. Out of 160, only 33 answer that it is a good idea, while 85 think it is a bad idea (16 people don’t know). This is surprising, as schoolchildren are in the age group that would benefit directly from lowering the voting age. This may be because students do not feel they have enough knowledge to be able to vote in an election:

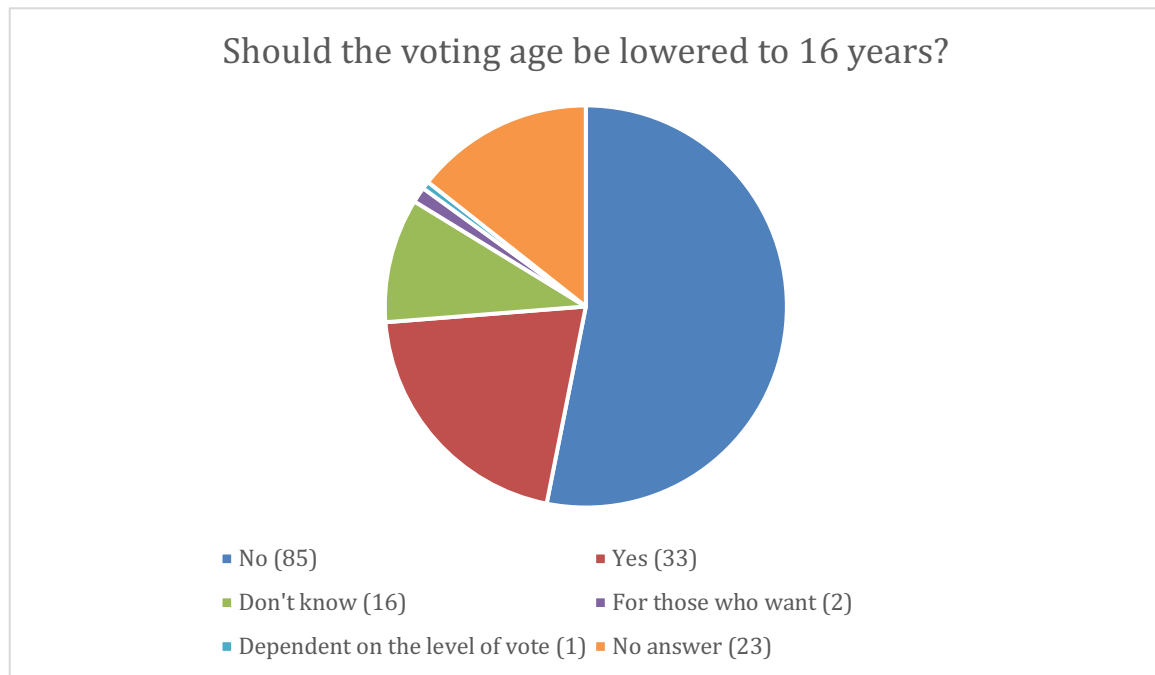
”I don’t think we should lower the voting age. I personally feel that there are so many youngsters who are not ready to take a political stance at the age of 16. And if the argument is that you already are considered an adult in other aspects of life, then I think we should instead change those restrictions to 18, as 16 isn’t an age where you are prepared to make your own choices and [understand the] consequences, as we still lack experience”.

Another believes, on the contrary, that interested young people under the age of 18 should be given the chance if they are interested. At the same time, however, the person believes that many young people under the age of 18 would not take it seriously and that it would therefore be wrong to give them the right to vote:

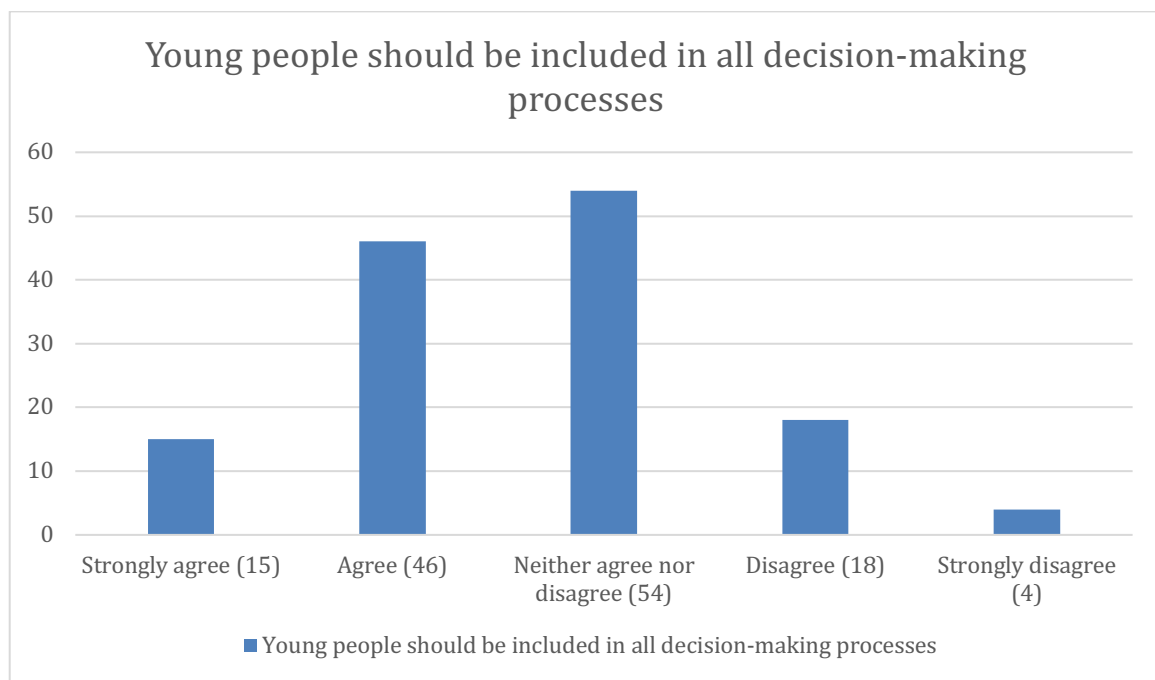
"I think it could be a good opportunity for the ambitious young people under the age of 18, who are interested in politics, to let them influence politics. However, I feel it would be wrong to give unambitious young people the right to vote as I feel they would just make fun of it, and not take the voting right seriously."

A third person thinks it would be a good idea as it will force politicians to meet the interests and needs of young people:

"I think it would force politicians to think more about the situations of young people, as they will all of a sudden become a group that can influence the next election".



As described further above, several schoolchildren still think that young people should be included more in all stages of the decision-making processes. Here are only a few against:



Young people who do not have an association background

These youngsters all believe that it is incredibly important for the young generation to get involved and take an active part in democracy. Youth is the future, and young people are aware that it is their generation that must live with the consequences of decisions taken today.

However, there is a consensus among the study participants that this should not create discrimination against other age groups. Young people should participate in democracy on an equal footing with citizens of other age groups. For democracy to function optimally, there must be room for everyone to be heard. Thus, it is important to include the youth - but it is not more important than including other generations.

Several also point out the importance of young people forming their own political views rather than just being a reflection of their parents. Therefore, it is important that young people are well informed, for example, through the school's teaching. However, one cannot expect young people to know everything, which is why they participants think it is legitimate not to take a stand on all topics as well as it's okay to vote blank.

In the eight in-depth interviews (22-25 years) that Epinion has conducted for DUF, we have also examined what these participants think about lowering the voting age to 16 years. Only one in eight responds that it is a good idea to lower the voting age, while six of them respond that it is a bad idea (one respondent doesn't know).

They believe that the opportunity to vote in an election is closely linked to coming of age. In the eyes of the system, you are an adult as an 18-year-old, which is consistent with the responsibility and duty that a right to vote entails. Some mention that some young people may be ready to vote at the age of 16, but "then they will have to participate in another way". They have a notion that most young people benefit from

waiting until they are 18, so they have more time to form their own attitudes and opinions. One person believes that it is a good idea to lower the voting age, as an early opportunity to vote can lead to young people being involved in society and democracy earlier.

Conclusion

The majority of the young people we have spoken to believe that it is a bad idea to lower the voting age to 16 years. This applies to both young people under the age of 18 and over the age of 18, just as it applies to both young people who are active in associations and young people who are not active in associations. However, this is not an indication that young people do not want and need to be consulted in political decision-making processes. The majority express that it is important that young people are active in politics and that they are heard and involved in decision-making processes, but at the same time several emphasize that you are not mature and knowledgeable enough as a 16-year-old to vote in political elections.

Several of the participants have suggestions for how young people can be better involved in political decision-making processes. Among other things, it is proposed that young people should have a greater say in their educational institution and that associations must ensure that their target group is involved in the planning and development of activities. It is also mentioned that youth councils and associations play an important role in channeling young people's political wishes.

Diverse voices - Did any groups of young people have experiences or views that differed from the overall messages? What were these groups and what did they say? (Suggested word limit 500 words.) *If you identified that particular groups of young people, such as young women or young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, had particular concerns that differed strongly from the overall trend, you can report them here. It is not necessary to complete this section if you did not identify any differences.*

Youth Goal 9 Target: Provide youth-led physical facilities and infrastructures called youth spaces defined by being autonomous, open and safe, accessible to all, offering professional support for development and ensuring opportunities for youth participation. **Guiding question:** What kind of physical facilities and infrastructures should be available to young people and what actions/measures should be taken to ensure that they are autonomous, open, safe and accessible?

(Suggested word limit 500 words.) *Please report here a summary of general trends and information coming from young people.*

Young people from associations

We have asked young people, who are active in associations, what kind of physical facilities they think are missing to ensure more inclusion of young people in political processes.

One answers: *“It’s important that young people have access to physical rooms, where they can meet to discuss political issues and democracy in a more organized way. It’s crucial that we have room for young people and give room to their wild, unfiltered ideas”*. Other persons are of similar opinions: *“We lack more open rooms, for example youth houses, where young people can come and take part of local processes”*. Another one says that *“There should be meeting places that are open and informal, maybe libraries [can be used more in this matter]”*.

Not everyone thinks that there is a lack of physical facilities: *“There is not a lack of physical facilities, but more likely a lack of time to think about politics”*.

A person from the minority association MINO believes that it is very important to have local associations that are present where the young people live. It is important that the place is also accessible to all, so that active participation is not hindered by large distances or lack of physical spaces. In cases where there is a lack of physical space or where there is a long way to the facilities, there is a risk that young people become inactive or never get the offer to join.

People from the associations SIND, which works for mental well-being, and DGS, which is the association of Danish high school students, also emphasize that young people must have a physical place to meet. And preferably the same place every time, so they can feel safe and comfortable in the facilities. This is important to create an environment where they can speak freely and learn new things. As one of them says:

“Yes, I also think it means a lot that you feel comfortable. It must be a safe space. We know these rooms quite well by now, and it is also about the fact that when you are here a lot, you also develop a good relationship with the secretariat and the daily management. Now I feel more at home here than I did last year”.

School students

In DUF's focus group interviews with schoolchildren, we asked if they have a (physical) place where they can meet and talk about politics. They respond that they think they need someone who can speak for them and also someone who can help them and take their problems on to the school board. They feel that they are being seen as children who are not to be taken seriously. Further, they answer that they need a place to meet where they can talk and gather as young people. According to them, it is unfair that just because they are under 18, they should not have the same opportunities to gather as others.

Persons without an association background

In our in-depth interviews with young people who have not been active in associations, no one directly relates to whether there is a lack of physical facilities for young people. But all participants say they talk about political issues with either friends, family or classmates. Many of them see this as a way to participate actively in democracy.

Conversations are seen as an opportunity to enter into and build an “open and good dialogue”, where one can discuss political points of view and gain insight into different, political views. Several of them mention that the conversation can be an active choice if you want to talk about politics, and in some cases the conversation can be a more effective way to become wiser about politics than by e.g. participating in a demonstration. Through conversation, according to the participants, you can acquire new knowledge and become more aware of your own action patterns.

If we assume that conversations between young people is an important arena for discussing politics, becoming wiser about society and developing political views, then one can argue that it is very important that there are both physical and virtual facilities where young people can meet.

Conclusion

Many of the young people we have spoken to have not spoken directly about physical facilities, but in the cases where we have asked about it, it is clear that young people consider it important that they have access to physical facilities where young people can meet and talk. Conversations between young people are an important arena for political conversations for young people. This could suggest that young people today prefer to have political discussions in the private sphere and not to the same extent in public. Therefore, it seems logical that physical facilities for young people also lead to more conversations between young people about politics and whatever they are interested in.

Diverse voices - Did any groups of young people have experiences or views that differed from the overall messages? What were these groups and what did they say? (Suggested word limit 500 words.) *If you identified that particular groups of young people, such as young women or young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, had particular concerns that differed strongly from the overall trend, you can report them here. It is not necessary to complete this section if you did not identify any differences.*

Youth Goal 9 Target: Ensure safe virtual youth spaces are accessible to every young person which provide access to information and services as well as ensure opportunities for youth participation.

Guiding question: How can virtual spaces and tools be used to increase young people's participation?

(Suggested word limit 500 words.) *Please report here a summary of general trends and information coming from young people.*

Today's young people have grown up with a digital world in addition to the physical world. They have cell phones, computers, iPads and they have profiles on social media. Social media fills a lot for today's youth and young people interact a lot with each other virtually. Young people also use virtual solutions when communicating with the school or with the associations in which they are active.

2020 has for a fact been a special year. The COVID19-pandemic has led to lockdown of societies across the world for many months the last year. The lockdowns have included schools, universities, youth associations and physical places where young people usually meet. Logically, it has created a greater need to communicate using virtual solutions.

The young people we have been in contact with in this consultation, we have talked to at a time when the corona pandemic was raging at its worst, which means that the answers below are undoubtedly influenced by it.

Young people who are active in associations

Young people from associations have also used digital technologies to conduct activities and meetings before the COVID 19 pandemic, but before the corona virus came, virtual meetings were a supplement to physical meetings and activities. It thus complemented the primary work that took place physically, in situations where it was beneficial. During the pandemic, the associations have used digital solutions as a replacement for the physical meetings.

The association SUHM, which works for the rights of the disabled, thinks positively about virtual spaces. These have made it possible for the volunteers to meet across the country during lockdown. SUHM also emphasizes that one saves time and that it makes decision processes go faster:

"(...) But it has also had its advantages because we have been able to complete a lot of things quickly. We don't have, as Signe mentioned, to travel from Aalborg to Copenhagen, now we just be at home, turn on the computer and then we are ready. And it's super cool that all of a sudden we can have an extraordinary board meeting on Saturday so quickly, and also different matters can be arranged so efficiently in the digital world".

SIND has a different view on the matter. Here, the virtual space has acted as an obstacle or it has constraint their work. This has led to a large drop-out of participants in their activities: *“Yes, and as soon as we were allowed to meet [again] we did that, and instantly we could feel that the need [for meeting in person] was great, and the drop-out at Zoom was really big. So, it [digital spaces] did not have the effect we thought it might have at all, the feeling of presence was just not there at all”*. The Extinction Rebellion (XR) network also sees disadvantages when virtual spaces completely takes over the physical meeting places:

“Well, just when the corona hit, everything was suddenly held online and all plans were postponed or canceled or changed, and that changed our entire strategy. [Normally] we had to go out and meet a whole lot of people and, well, the community that you are also interested in, it also dies when you only meet people online. Because when you meet people for online meetings, everything is over as soon as the meeting is over, because you leave it there. But if you met physically somewhere, you would sit for five minutes before and half an hour after the event and talk. It changes the whole community that you can't meet physically and it becomes really difficult for new ones to continue to be part of the community when they do not get to know other people properly. So we could clearly feel that we lost a lot of activists”.

Although SIND and XR look negatively at virtual spaces above, that does not mean they always do so. It's likely that they used virtual spaces as a supplement to physical encounters before the pandemic. But their quotes underline the point that virtual spaces are important, but they act as a supplement to physical encounters.

In DUF's questionnaire survey, we also asked association activists which digital skills young people lack in order to be able to participate more in (digital) political decision-making processes. Here, we got several good answers:

“I don't know if they lack anything, but our system is built around e-mails, calendars, etc. The young people should either be included in that system, or we should find other ways to organize. Regardless, I believe they could benefit from learning more about communication in an early stage of their (school-)lives. That would make it easier for them to contribute to all the fun and innovative stuff - and they won't have to use their energy to learn systems”

“They don't lack digital skills, however some patience and power of action to enter debates and learn to not always be right or be heard”.

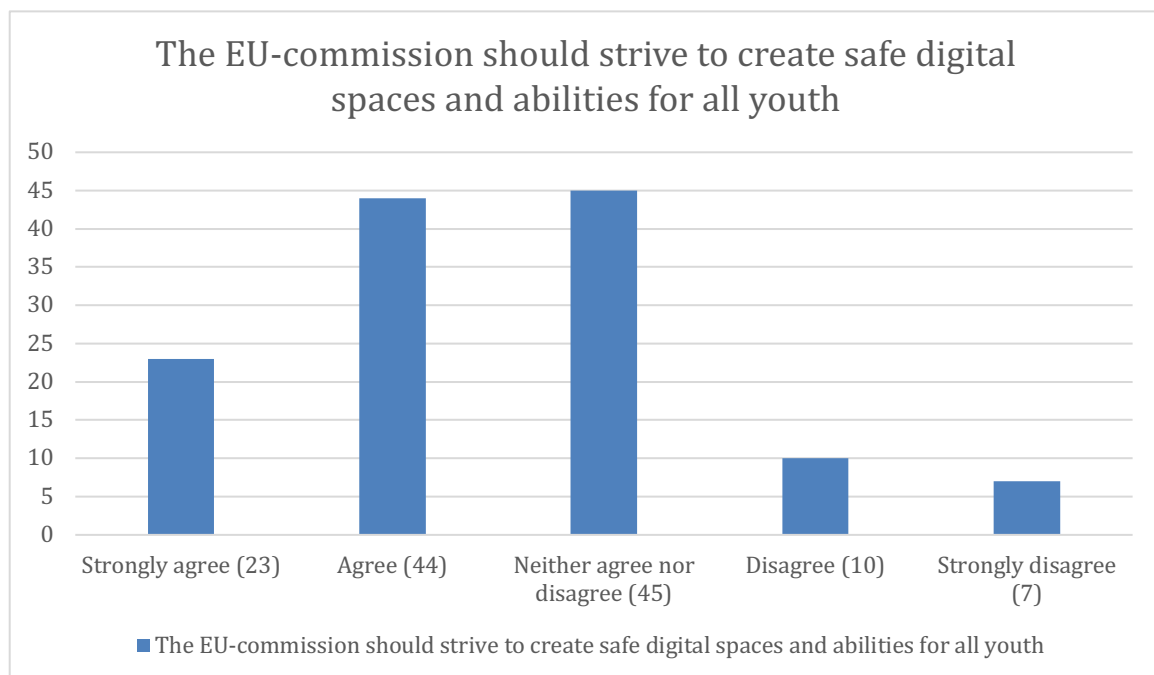
“For young people with handicaps there might be a need for more plugins, which can help with translation for example”.

“We need better IT-infrastructure accessible for all. Possibilities to access debates with politicians and officials should be improved”.

These answers say pretty clear that youngsters don't lack digital skills. Assisting digital programs (e.g. translation plugins) could help sudden groups. Also, some of the comments indicate that young people need to learn things besides from digital skills to participate online (like communication and patience).

School students

The schoolchildren in our study did not say much about the need for virtual meeting places, but we asked them in one of our questionnaires if they think the European Commission should try to create secure, digital meeting places for young people. We got the following answer, where surprisingly many thought it was a good idea:



Young people who do not have an association background

The young people we have spoken to in our in-depth interviews (22-25 years) see digital solutions and social media as an effective way to participate in democracy, and they think that a large part of young people's participation in democracy happens online. They believe that social media creates the opportunity for faster sharing of news and information, and the large amount of information makes it almost impossible for individuals not to be informed. In addition, the distance between citizen and politician feels shorter for the young people due to digital platforms, as it is possible to follow and contact decisionmakers via social media.

However, the youngsters also know that there is another side of the coin. The large amount of news can lead to a feeling of being "bombarded", which can lead to opting out of it all. The media is constantly producing news and the young people are finding it difficult to cut through the noise.

The advantages of virtual spaces and digital solutions are, on the other hand, that it is easy to find information, it is easier to participate in digital debates and you can make

direct contact with decision makers. The downside is that the huge amount of information can make it difficult to get an overview, just as it makes it difficult to distinguish between fake news and true news.

Yet young people believe that technological solutions and social media are a fixed part of their everyday lives. It gives them new opportunities and especially social media forms a central part of their political participation.

Conclusion

Although the answers above are largely influenced by the corona pandemic, it is likely that the answers would have been more or less the same even if the pandemic had not occurred. Virtual spaces are important for young people and take up a lot of space in young people's everyday lives, but they serve as a complement to something more important: the physical encounter between people.

In the associations, some emphasize that the virtual opportunities have been of great importance during the pandemic and that it has enabled them to continue their work despite closures, restrictions on physical contact and travel restrictions. Others emphasize that virtual space has been more of an obstacle or a constraint to their work, as it has meant that far fewer young people have participated and that it has been difficult to carry out meaningful activities.

Virtual solutions are important tools for activities, meetings and general communication, whether you use it in an association, at a school or in a group of friends. It emphasizes that there is a general need for virtual meeting places for young people, regardless of whether the corona pandemic is included in the picture or not. At the same time, the virtual space itself is not enough to keep the communities going. Some young people say that communities die out when you can only communicate digitally.

Diverse voices - Did any groups of young people have experiences or views that differed from the overall messages? What were these groups and what did they say? (Suggested word limit 500 words.) *If you identified that particular groups of young people, such as young women or young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, had particular concerns that differed strongly from the overall trend, you can report them here. It is not necessary to complete this section if you did not identify any differences.*

Youth Goal 9 Target: Ensure sustainable funding, common recognition and development of quality youth work in order to strengthen youth organizations and their role in inclusion, participation and non-formal education.

Guiding question: What measures/actions should be taken to smart youth work so it appropriately supports young people's participation?

(Suggested word limit 500 words.) *Please report here a summary of general trends and information coming from young people.*

Young people who are active in associations

In our questionnaire surveys, young people in associations were asked how they think that funds/pools can help ensure permanent structures for youth involvement. Here are some of the answers we got:

"Make it easier for young people to apply to pools. Less bureaucracy, easier application procedures".

"More support to operational expenditures, so that organizations don't always have come with new ideas to receive support".

"We must hand it to young people, and you should know from the beginning: 'this is how you participate'"-

"EU-pools can support meeting forums and allocate resources to incorporate youth and kids into the democratic work. E.g., through conferences, education and physical and virtual meetings".

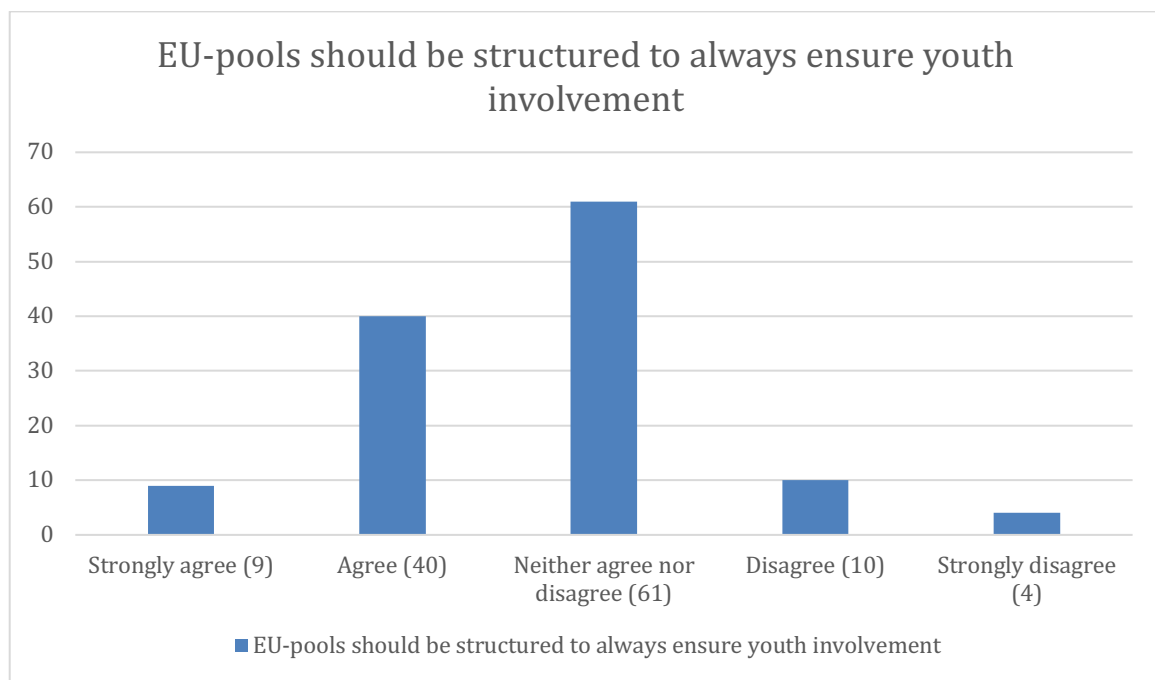
"The inclusion of youth happens as one cooperates with organizations in existing forums - you don't always have to create new things".

"More local anchoring in the projects. More focus on public information".

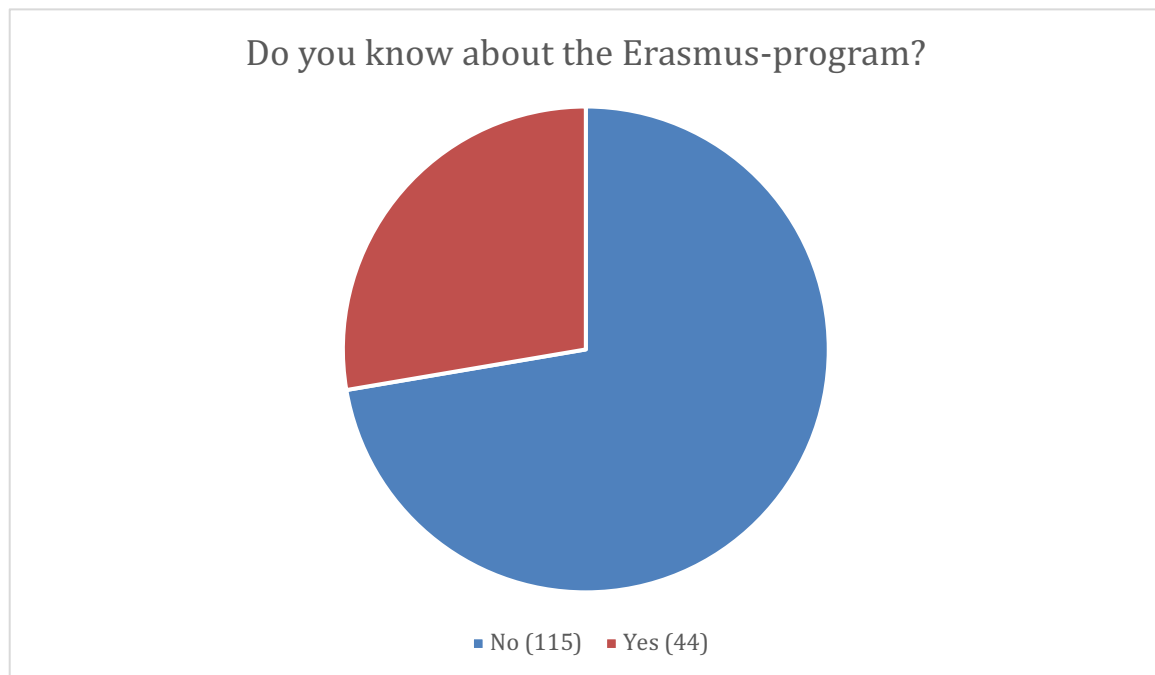
As can be seen, several answer that one can change the criteria for various funds and thus support the involvement of young people to a greater extent. Part of the solution to getting young people more involved can thus lie in formal criteria funds and by making it easier to apply for support.

School students

DUF did not go in depth with this question for school students. Nevertheless, we asked them a simple question about whether EU pools should always involve young people. Although 61 did not have an opinion, we were a little surprised to see that 49 agreed with the statement:



On a sidenote, more than 1 out of 4 schoolchildren say they know about the Erasmus+-program:



Conclusion

This issue was easiest to discuss with young people who are active in associations. Probably because they are used to working with external funding in their activities and projects. These young people basically believed that one can create better conditions for young people's involvement by changing the formal requirements when applying for pools. School students are probably too young to fully understand the question, but they are in favor of young people being involved in all stages of the structures.

Diverse voices - Did any groups of young people have experiences or views that differed from the overall messages? What were these groups and what did they say? (Suggested word limit 500 words.) *If you identified that particular groups of young people, such as young women or young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, had particular concerns that differed strongly from the overall trend, you can report them here. It is not necessary to complete this section if you did not identify any differences.*

Youth Goal 9 Target: Provide youth-friendly, relevant, comprehensive information, also developed by and with young people, in order to enable youth participation.

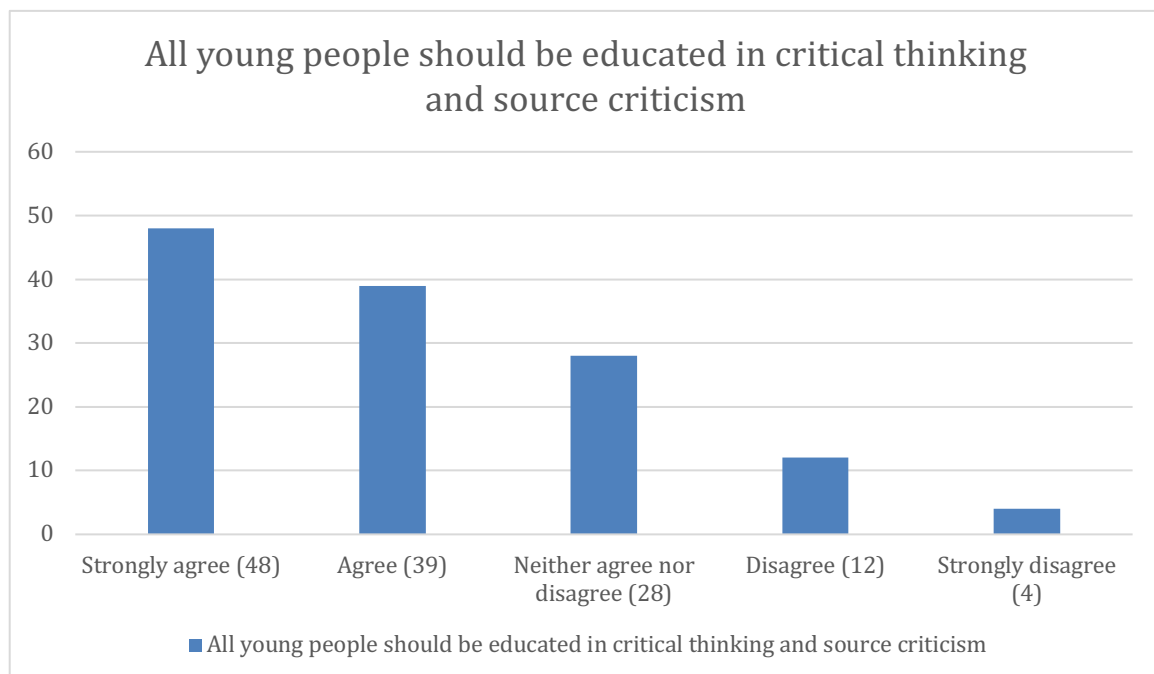
Guiding question: What actions/measures can be implemented to ensure young people have access to youth-friendly, relevant and comprehensive information to participate in decision making processes and society at large?

(Suggested word limit 500 words.) *Please report here a summary of general trends and information coming from young people.*

Schoolchildren:

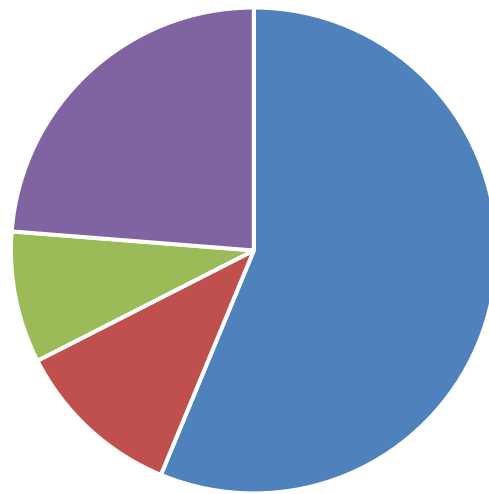
One way to ensure young people's participation in debates and in politics is by giving schoolchildren tools to navigate in all the information available on the web, in newspapers and elsewhere, so that they feel more able to understand the information they “work” with. Such tools could be critical thinking and source criticism. In our questionnaire survey for school students, we therefore asked the students whether they agreed or disagreed that all young people should be taught critical thinking and source criticism. This was the answer:

[Statement: All young people between 10-16 years of age should be given education in critical thinking and source criticism for at least an hour per week in school to fight misinformation, fake news and to promote their engagement in debates].



As can be seen, young people generally agree with this statement. 87 respond that they agree, while only 16 disagree. DUF also asked the students if they think they have been taught enough about critical thinking in school:

Do you have enough critical thinking?



■ Yes (90) ■ No (18) ■ Maybe (14) ■ Not answered (38)

Fortunately, a large majority answer that they think that is the case. Only 18 answer no.

Young people who do not have an association background

The young people we have spoken to in our in-depth interviews (22-25 years) mention that they do not feel they have enough knowledge or are qualified enough to participate in many discussions and in politics. However, they mention that the digital opportunities make it easier for young people to have an impact on society and feel heard by politicians. But despite the fact that technology brings many advantages, young people also point to disadvantages. With the constant flow of information, it can become difficult to maintain an overview of things. Therefore, some youngsters completely opt out of following the news. But they also point to a solution: They think it is important that young people are enlightened through good teaching in the school system.

"I don't think I know what to do [to participate more actively in society or in order to change things]. How I, just a small citizen in a big society, could do something different (...). I also think I have thought that there is probably a good explanation [on political issues] that I just don't understand. So, I just choose to go with the flow, and then that it's probably fine".

Conclusion

We have not investigated this question to the same extent as many of the other questions, but the answers above suggest that young people find it difficult to overlook the enormous amount of information they can access on the internet. This indicates that there is a need for more youth-friendly, easily accessible information. Many of them also answer that the school are also responsible properly inform and teach young people, so that youngsters can participate more actively in society.

Diverse voices - Did any groups of young people have experiences or views that differed from the overall messages? What were these groups and what did they say? (Suggested word limit 500 words.) *If you identified that particular groups of young people, such as young women or young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, had particular concerns that differed strongly from the overall trend, you can report them here. It is not necessary to complete this section if you did not identify any differences.*