Turning volunteering into voting: Taking a stand in the European elections!

Between 6 and 9 June 2024, young people were able to vote in the European elections, in some cases for the first time ever. These elections are a crucial moment in our democracy, giving you the opportunity to shape the European Union's political direction. You had the opportunity to contribute to steering which initiatives the EU will implement to promote peace around the world, make our society more inclusive, fight climate change, and ensure high-quality education and jobs for all Europeans. Using your vote to support a more diverse and representative European Parliament that will reflect your views and concerns.

Finding your voice

Want to get involved, but don't know where to start? You're not alone. A little over half of the young people (aged between 16 and 30 years old) who responded to the 2021 Eurobarometer Youth Survey said they did not understand much or anything at all about the EU, and two-thirds felt that they had very little or no say about decisions in the EU. It's time to change that.

European democracy is about much more than just voting – it is also about political participation and engaging in society. Getting involved in EU youth programmes is a great way to express your opinions and gain a deeper understanding of Europe's values and important policy focuses. It is a chance to better understand how Europe impacts your daily life and the lives of those around you, and to exchange points of view and discuss common challenges with people from different backgrounds. Programmes like the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+ Youth provide wonderful and unique experiences where you can network and build your skills, while also learning in practice about real-world issues and societal challenges, such as sustainability, digital advancement, solidarity, inclusion, diversity, and freedom of movement.

Natalia's new perspective

Take Natalia, for example. When Natalia finished school, she left her home in Romania to volunteer with the European Solidarity Corps in Southern France for a year. During this time, she lived with people from various European countries, including Italy, Germany, and Spain, and participated in projects on interculturality and non-violent communication. Natalia is keen to highlight the transformative impact that participating in an EU-funded programme had on her.

"*I got to better know my European identity,*" she says. "*Volunteering transformed me and gave me new perspectives. The choice to become a volunteer brought me incredible personal growth and different insights on life.*"

Putting knowledge into action

So, you participated in an EU-funded programme and gained a new perspective on your European identity. Now what?

Voting in European elections is a vital way to put the insights you gained into action and help shape the priorities of the European Union for the coming years. In the 2019 European elections, the high voter turnout was driven by a surge in the participation of young people. Was this also the case in 2024? We will know more in the coming weeks when we have the results of the first poll. In any event, spreading the word to promote our right to vote and engagement in EU democracy is important in European as well as in national, regional and local elections.