8th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue process

SPACE AND PARTICIPATION FOR ALL

Youth survey report

Under the Trio Presidency Germany-Portugal-Slovenia

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1. Introduction

In the framework of the consultation process of the 8th cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue, supervised by the European Steering Group, whose members are representatives from youth councils, youth ministries, the European Youth Forum and the European Commission, an online survey was conducted to understand young people's views on the European Youth Goal No 9: Space and participation for all. This goal is oriented towards the strengthening of young people's democratic participation and autonomy through provision of dedicated youth spaces in all areas of society (Youth Goals, 2021).[1] It is particularly destined to ensure adequate influence of all areas of society and all stages of the policy making process, to ensure equal access to everyday decision making for all young people from different backgrounds, to increase youth participation and representation in the electoral process and elected bodies, to provide youth-led physical facilities and infrastructures to facilitate youth participation, to ensure safe virtual youth spaces providing access to information and services as well as ensure opportunities for youth participation, to ensure sustainable funding for organizations supporting participation and to provide youth-friendly, relevant, comprehensive information co-created by young people (ibid.).

In order to inform stakeholders about possible ways to create bridges between young people and political institutions, young people were asked about the kind of (public) spaces they want to spend time in in order to interact with each other, discuss political views, meet decision-makers and organise projects that are important to them. In addition, the survey intended to collect information on public matters that are of particular interest to young people as well as their capacity to critically assess them. The following sections provide an insight into young people's views on key issues related to this youth goal and should thus be considered as important evidence in creation of policies aimed at securing it. They are structured into three thematic sections: Politics and decision-making; Youth spaces, and Education and information.

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[1] European Youth Goals. Available at https://youth-goals.eu/yg9

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2. Data and survey design

The data were collected from a web survey published at europa.eu website available from 3 March 2021 until 15 June 2021. Respondents were invited to participate in the survey though a broad range of stakeholders and their communication channels. The invitation included an introduction to the topics of the study and a hyperlink that directed respondents to the survey. Overall, a total of 8569 respondents took part in the web survey. Due to invalid answers for the age variable, respondents who did not answer with a valid value had to be excluded (a total of 380 responses). The respondents with an age range between 15 and 34 were included. We also had to exclude all respondents for whom we could not obtain population data for age (a total of 1925 responses) as this was the variable we weighted our data sample by. As a result, 6264 responses remained available for data weighing process and further statistical analyses. The final sample prior to data weighing is presented in the appendix (see Appendix 1).

Due to differences between the population and sample distribution in some key demographic variables (i.e. age, gender, country of residence) we employed a data weighting procedure. In order to avoid biases of point estimates, we adjusted age differences for different countries using weights so that the age marginal totals by country are match the population. These adjustments were done using raking method, which adjusts the sampling weights of the cases in the sample so that the marginal totals of the adjusted weights on specified characteristics (i.e., age by countries), referred to as control variables, match with the corresponding totals for the population. The data for the population for year 2020 was obtained from Eurostat (2021). The survey raking was done using R Project for Statistical Computing (R Core Team, 2018) version 3.5.1, with the RStudio development environment (RStudio Team, 2016) and survey package.

3. Participation in politics and decision-making

3.1 Level of participation in different stages of policy-making process

There are many arguments for youth political participation. The positive ones put forward the notion that it is an essential mechanism performed by citizens to influence decision-makers and

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a necessary precondition for the existence of a democratic polity. It enhances the quality of democratic governance since the input of information and articulation of citizens' interest contributes to better organised knowledge and more accurately recorded preferences of the political community, thus leading to improvement in the quality of public policies. Participation also has the potential to educate and invigorate citizens to expand their understanding and capacities and improves satisfaction as higher levels of participation, especially membership in groups and involvement in social networks, are connected to higher individual satisfaction with the quality of individual and community life (Macedo et al. 2005, 6).

The negative argument for youth political participation, on the other hand, puts forward the nature of political institutions as they are the most responsive to those who mobilise (ibid.). Although other age groups can represent youth's interests, the accumulated empirical evidence shows that this is not the case (see Macedo et al. 2005; Martin 2012). Greater levels of political participation of various groups of citizens, including youth, therefore safeguard the principle of equity (Levine 2007, 22-27). It is thus not a surprise that broad political participation is present in the most successful communities, such as those with the highest standards of living and best functioning institutions, even when we control for economic causes (ibid.).

Nevertheless, participation per se is not a sufficient condition to attain its abovementioned impact. It primarily has to be meaningful and without frequently demonstrated pattern of tokenism, decoration and manipulation (Hart 2008). That translated to the actual influence on process as well as outcomes of public policies, including their evaluation and termination. The first item observed in the survey was the ability of young people to influence what topics enter public or political debates (i.e., agenda-setting power). The survey revealed that 24,8% young people feel that they cannot at all influence what topics enter public or political debates and additional 40,8% have not much influence. 27,2% of young people reported that they can influence the topics that enter public or political debates to some extent and only 7,2% feel they could influence this to a large extent (see Figure 1).

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Figure 1. When it comes to public policy and political decision making, to what extent do you feel you can …? (in%)
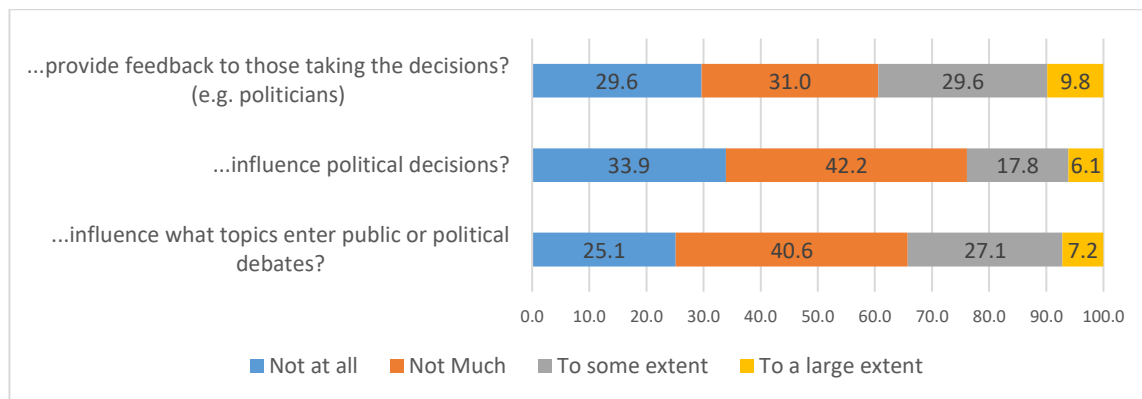
The results remain virtually unchanged when we look at young people's perception of their ability to influence political decisions (decision-making power). To be precise, 33,6% of them reported that they have no influence on political decisions at all and additional 42,4% of them feel they have not much influence. Again, about a quarter of participants reported at least some influence, with 17,9% of them feeling they have influence to some extent and 6,1% declaring influence to a large extent. The image is a bit more positive when it comes to the ability of providing feedback to those taking the political decisions (e.g., politicians). This was to be expected as this item does not measure the willingness of politicians to release power over decisions but rather their ability to accept feedback and with this also potential criticism. The results are a bit more balanced as 29,2% of young people reported that they cannot provide feedback to politicians at all and another 31,2% declaring they cannot provide much feedback. On the other hand, 29,7% of survey participants feel they can to some extent provide feedback to those taking the decisions and 9,8% of surveyed young people feel they can do this to a large extent.

3.2 Topics of participation

There are many policy fields that importantly influence the lives of young people. Participation of young people in them nevertheless differs due to different factors. Some feel closer to young people than others as well as demonstrate long tradition of youth participation (e.g., environment, education), while others are more recent and relate to different crises and events young people got exposed to (e.g. COVID-19, increase of problems related to mental health).
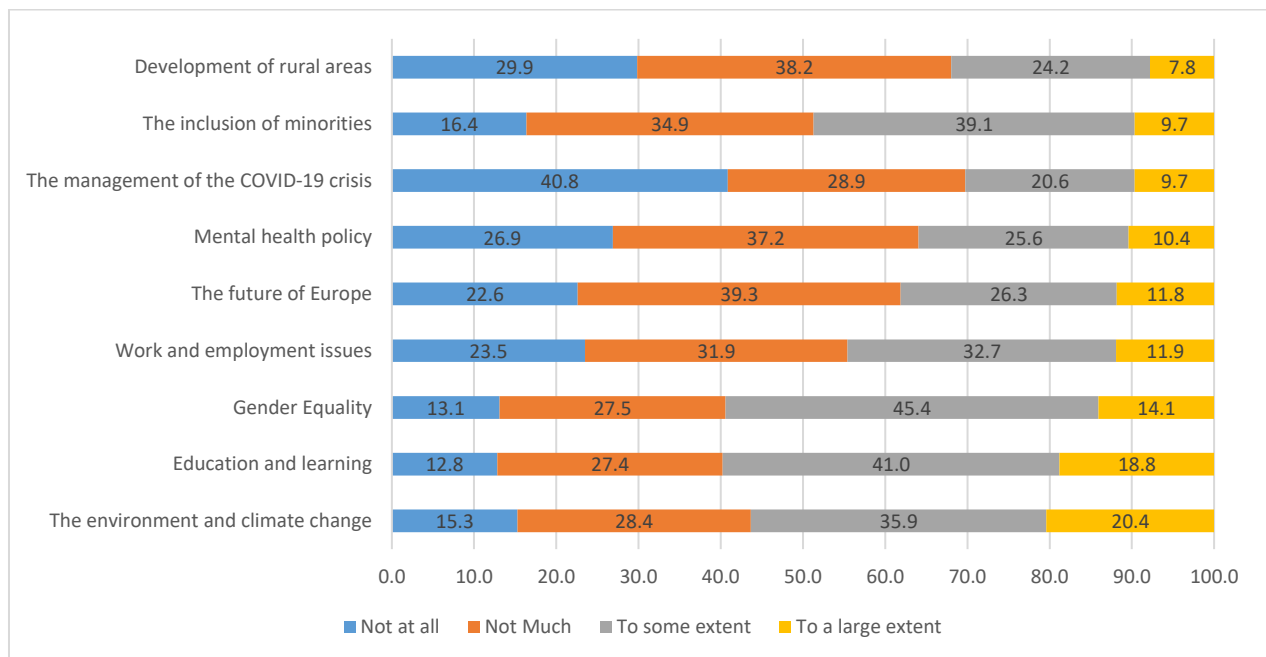
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The openness of the policy field therefore depends on the "agency side" and the willingness of young people to raise a voice on certain issues as well as on the "structural side" that reveals the openness of political institutions in the policy field, presence of competing interests and willingness of different stakeholders to engage in a dialogue with young people. The conducted survey examined to what degree young people have the possibility to have their voice heard on the following topics: the future of Europe, gender equality, inclusion of minorities, mental health policy, development of rural areas, work and employment issues, education and learning, the Environment and Climate change and the management of the COVID-19 crisis.

When it comes to the future of Europe, respondents feel they are able to have their voice heard to a relatively low extent. 22,6% of them reported no ability at all, 39,3% felt not much ability, 26,3% reported ability to make their voice heard to some degree and only 11,8% of respondents feel that their voice is heard to a large extent (see Figure 2). In case of gender equality, 27,5% of surveyed young people feel that their voice is not heard much and 13,1% that it is not heard at all. Conversely,

45,4% reported that their voice is heard to some extent and 14,1% to a large extent, which is noticeably higher than in the case of the future of Europe. Inclusion of minorities is again the topic that demonstrates reduced ability of young people to make their voices heard, particularly when it comes to the ability to be heard to a large extent (9,7%). Ability to be heard to some extent, on the other hand, is a bit more noticeable and was reported by 39,1% of respondents. Likewise, the ability of young people to be heard is comparatively low in case of mental health policy since only 10,4% of respondents report ability to make their voices heard to a large extent and additionally only 25,6% of participants report ability to have their voice heard to some extent. Surprisingly, this was revealed even more in the case of development of rural areas since only 7,8% of young people reported ability to make their voice heard to a large extent and 24,2% to some extent which translates to 68,1% of young people feeling they have not much or no ability of being heard on the topic of development of rural areas.

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Figure 2. How much do you feel able to have your voice heard on the following topics? (in%)

Only slightly more penetrable for youth voice is the topic of the management of the COVID-19 crisis. 68,7% of young people reported not much or no ability at all to make their voice heard while only 20,6% of surveyed young people feel they have the ability to make their voice heard to some extent and 9,7% to a large extent. A bit more open to youth voice is the area of work and employment issues with 32,7% of respondents feeling able to have their voice heard to some extent and 11,9% to a large extent. That being said, the education and learning and the environment and climate change, along with gender equality, proved to be the most open to youth voice. In case of education and learning almost two thirds (59,8%) of young people reported the ability to make their voice heard at least to some extent, with 18,8% reporting they are able to do this to a large extent. Even more open to youth voice is the field of the environment and climate change, which is traditionally considered to be the field of youth activism, at least for the last half century. This proved to be the case also in this survey as 56,3% of young people expressed they feel able to make their voice heard at least to some extent and particularly more than one fifth (20,4%) of surveyed individuals expressed ability to make their voice heard to a large extent.

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The initial assumptions regarding the openness of different policy fields expressed at the beginning of this section proved valid as topics "traditionally" perceived closer to youth also proved more open to their voice. This is particularly the case with education and learning, which is perceived as one of the key policy areas for youth, with young people also being one of two key target groups. Since student movements in the late 1960s, the environment and climate change likewise is perceived to be the area of most intense (progressive) youth activism as well as the policy field infused by institutional innovation and experimentation. The survey corroborates these expectations and also indicates that gender equality – a topic that paved the way for youth policy in many aspects and delivered many lessons to youth policy stakeholders – closely follows the two most open areas for youth voice. On the other hand, health- and development-related topics proved to be the most impenetrable for youth interest, which is somewhat difficult to comprehend since young people will be the main recipients of the outcomes of developmental policies and healthcare, particularly when it comes to mental health, is increasingly becoming the number one challenge of young people. In addition, even though COVID-19 directly struck the elderly the most, the evidence that young people are going to be among the target groups most affected by the pandemic is accumulating (e.g., OECD 2020; Leavey et al. 2020).

3.3 Drivers of meaningful participation and representation

There are many mechanisms that address barriers to youth participation in institutional politics and representation in representative democratic institutions (see Deželan 2015; 2017). To promote youth interest and amplify youth voices one can focus on measures improving the agency of individuals and groups or improvements of the structure in which young people engage in public life, including political institutions and processes. The survey provided respondents a set of most frequently discussed measures addressing the issue of youth participation ranging from (a) stronger role for youth organisations in politics; (ii) young people being able to be involved in meetings with politicians, when important decisions are taken; (iii) having quotas (reserved seats for young people) in various decision-making bodies; (iv) young people receiving better citizenship education in schools; (vi) more awareness among politicians of young people's concerns; (vii) having online platform on politics, written in simple language,

that allow young people to give fast feedback to politicians; (viii) having more physical spaces to meet young people and discuss politics; to (ix) voting right since 16 years of age.

Surprisingly, the least important measure in the eyes of respondents is the institutional change for young people to be able to vote at 16. Even though this measure empirically demonstrated its utility and improved youth participation in some environments (see Deželan 2015; Eichhorn 2014), the respondents do not see it as particularly important since only 19,8% of them believe it is very important and 17,2% that it is somewhat important (see Figure 3). On the other hand, 30,4% of respondents believe it is very unimportant with addition 15,1% that is somewhat unimportant. Much higher in terms of importance, but still comparatively low, respondents assessed the importance of having more physical spaces to meet young people and discuss politics. 42,5% percent of them believe this is very important with additional 5,3% of them being convinced that this is somewhat important. That being said, we have note that the definition of what politics is usually revolves around institutional politics and participation in political institutions whilst political engagement can be a more broader set of activities. Due to this fact, young people are in many circumstances politically active even though they do not perceive themselves that way. As a result, comparatively lesser attribution of importance to physical spaces to discuss politics was expected.

Figure 3. To help young people have more influence on public policy and political decision making, how important are the following things? (in%)
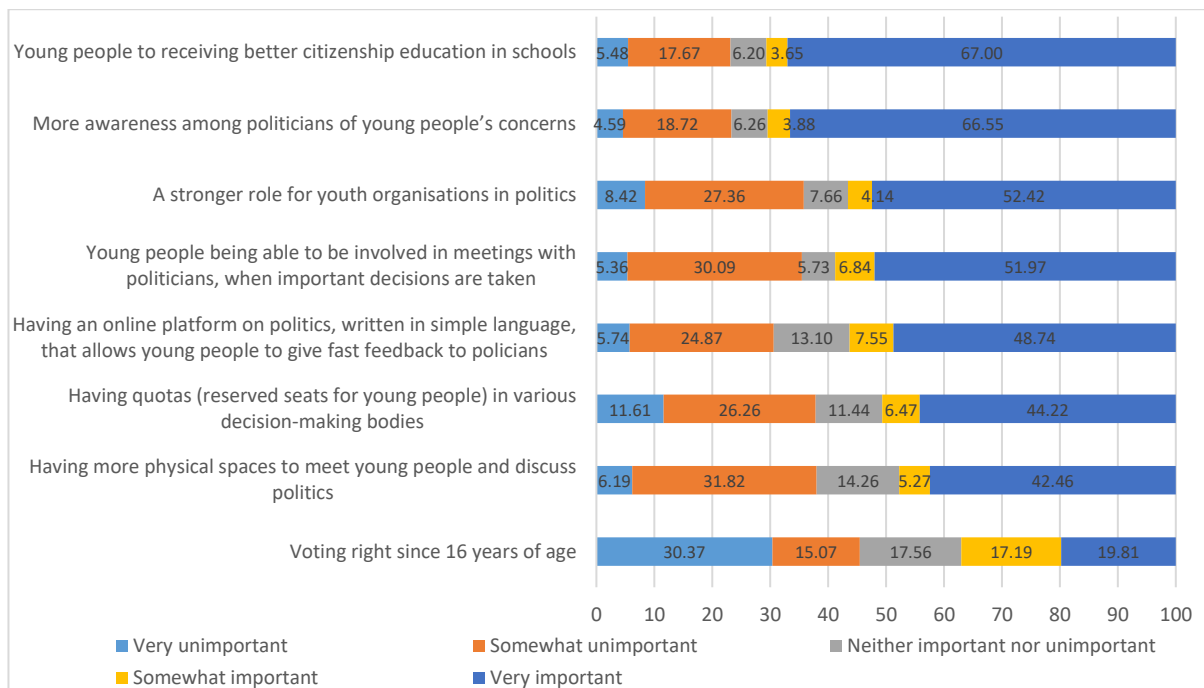
To a similar extent as having more physical spaces to discuss politics, respondents assessed the importance of having quotas (reserved seats for young people) in various decision-making bodies. Quotas are "fast-track" mechanisms that improve the position of a disadvantaged group in a political arena and in case of reserved seats – one of three broad quota mechanisms in addition to voluntary and legislated candidate quotas – this mechanism directly affects representation without the necessity to improve participation in the first place. As a result, youth voice as a result of reserved seats is amplified, however, the benefits of participation are not necessarily there. Therefore it is not a surprise that reserved seats are not the most prioritised measure in the eyes of young people as 44,2% of them believe it is very important and additional 6,5% that it is somewhat important.

Having an online platform on politics, written in simple language, that allows young people to give fast feedback to politicians is a measure also rated as important since 48,7% of respondents believe it is very important and additional 7,6% it is somewhat important. Again, it has to be

noted also in this case that the terminology used in this item revolves around institutional politics and that political activism of contemporary youth demonstrates other patterns of political engagement (e.g., consumer boycotting and boycotting). The first item which was perceived as very important by more than a half respondents (52%) is the ability of young people to be involved in meetings with politicians, when important decisions are taken. This item reflects the importance of consultation of young people when important decisions are taken as well as the importance of transparency in politics. As youth organizations perform an important roles, among others, in aggregating youth voices, in advocating for youth interest and represent youth in institutional politics, the importance of consulting youth matches the perceived importance of having a stronger role for youth organizations in politics. To be precise, 52,4% of respondents believe this is very important and additional 4,1% think this is somewhat important.

Despite the relative high level of importance of virtually all listed measures to amplify youth voice in politics, two of them have a prominent role in the eyes of young people. The first is a matter of structure and puts forward the necessity of higher level of awareness among politicians about young people's concerns and the second addresses the agency of young people and the need for them to receive better citizenship education in schools. Politicians' awareness of young people's concern is crucial for (external) political efficacy of young people since an important part of individual's commitment to engage in a political process rests on the fact that individual's voice is heard and vote counts. This is clearly put forward by respondents as one of the most important preconditions of a healthy polity since 66,6% of them think it is very important that politicians should be more aware of young people's concerns and additional 3,9% that this is somewhat important. Very similar results are indicated for citizenship education as 67% of respondents believe it is very important that young people receive better citizenship education in schools and additional 3,7% that this is somewhat important. As the link between citizenship education and higher levels of political participation has been proven in many seminal studies (see Niemi and Junn 2005; Galston 2004) the expressed concern of young people also has robust theoretical and empirical foundations.

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The importance of citizenship education for a healthy democracy, appropriate levels of political participation as well as functioning civic spaces for youth is therefore undoubtable. And it appears that the perception of relevance of adequate citizenship education is not a consequence of suboptimal citizenship education respondents attained as only 16% of them declared it as rather poor (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. How would you rate YOUR current level of citizenship education? (in%)
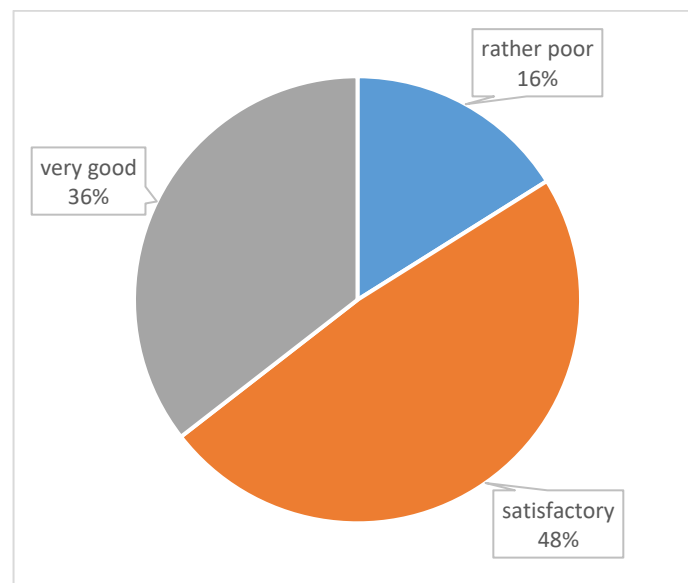
With 48% of respondents rating it as satisfactory and 36% as very good, it is clear that young people understand sustained investment into civic competence as one of the key competences for lifelong learning. This is linked to the fact that mastering the contemporary societal and political processes demands a lot of civic knowledge and skills as well as ability to obtain and process complex information from the political environment.

The challenging nature of information on public matters available to citizens is well indicated in the evaluation of this information by survey participants (see Figure 5). Young people see many challenges in information available to them. They do see relevance in these information as 59,2% of respondents perceive them at least to some degree relevant. However, 43,4% of participants sees these information as not much trustworthy or completely untrustworthy. 44,1% of young people also finds these information difficult to understand with not much are

no understanding about what the information is all about. But what may be the greatest challenge of this information is difficulty of obtaining them (a clear sign of shrinking civic spaces; see Deželan et al. 2020) as well as their completeness. 52,2% of young people find these information not much or not at all easy to find as well as 55% of young people believe these information are not much or not at all complete. In combination with the untrustworthiness of information, this creates a toxic mix young people across Europe face when trying to engage in a political process.

Figure 5. When you think of the types of information on public matters, such as news of debates available to you, do you consider it to be …? (in%)
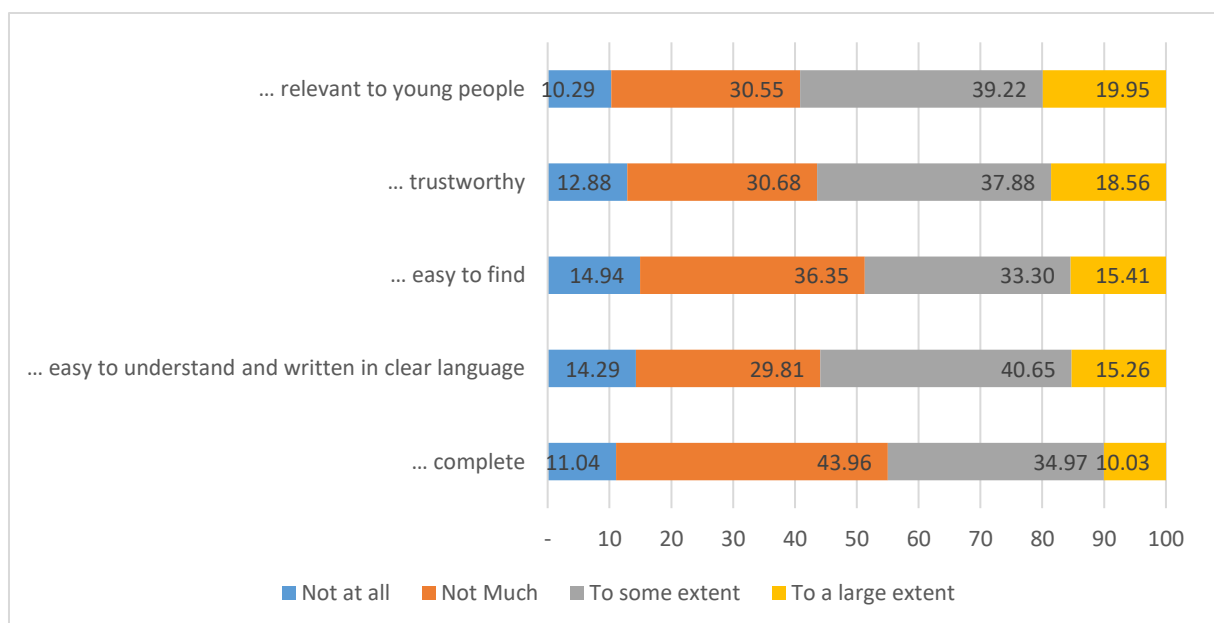
A hint into what could curb this challenge is provided in the survey as young people were asked about the utility of incorporation of critical thinking into school curricula, particularly from the angle of tackling fake news and disinformation. Surveyed young people demonstrated a very positive attitude to incorporation of critical thinking into school classes as 73% of them believe this approach is helpful to a large extent and additional 20,3% believe this is helpful to some extent (see Figure 6). They similarly support a bit more instructive idea that young people in schools should have one hour peer week devoted to the topics of critical thinking focussing primarily on recognising and fighting fake news as well as disinformation. More than 88% of

them see this as a helpful step forward, with 62,4% of them this would be helpful to a large extent.

Figure 6. How much would the following things be helpful to you? (in%)
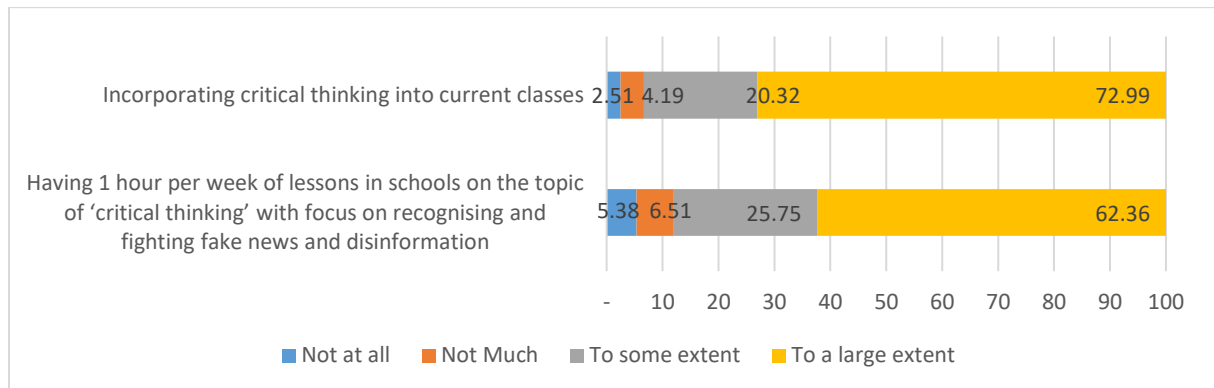
3.4 Promotion of young people with fewer opportunities' access to the political process

When it comes to young people with fewer opportunities, the barriers to participation in the political process are even higher and the need for them to be included even greater as their voice is comparatively weaker in all polities due to their numerical disadvantage and deprivation. There are actions and measures that are important in order to help young people with fewer opportunities to have access to decision making processes. When responding to the most frequently discussed measures addressing exclusion of young people with fewer opportunities from the political process, respondents were guided with the request to have in mind young people from an ethnic, religious or sexual minority, as well as young people with a disability or those living in rural areas.

Overall, all four measures to improve access to the political process for young people with fewer opportunities that were provided by the survey were acknowledged as important by respondents. At least about a half of them responded they perceive them important to a large extent in all four cases (see Figure 7) and at least four fifths of respondents perceive all of them at least important to some extent if not to a large extent. The most favoured measure by respondents is to make sure that political events are accessible to all, including young g people

with fewer opportunities which was perceived to a large extent important by 61,4% of respondents, with additional 24,8% believing this is to some extent important. Appreciated to a similar extent was the measure putting forward politicians' responsibility and accountability to the electorate since asking politicians to report regularly on the measures taken to remove the barriers to participation for young people with fewer opportunities creates pressure and forces politicians to demonstrate their track record. 84,5% of young people think this is at least to some extent important, 53,6% of them believe it is important to a large extent.

Figure 7. In order to help young people with fewer opportunities have access to decision making processes, to what extent are the actions/measures below important? (in%)
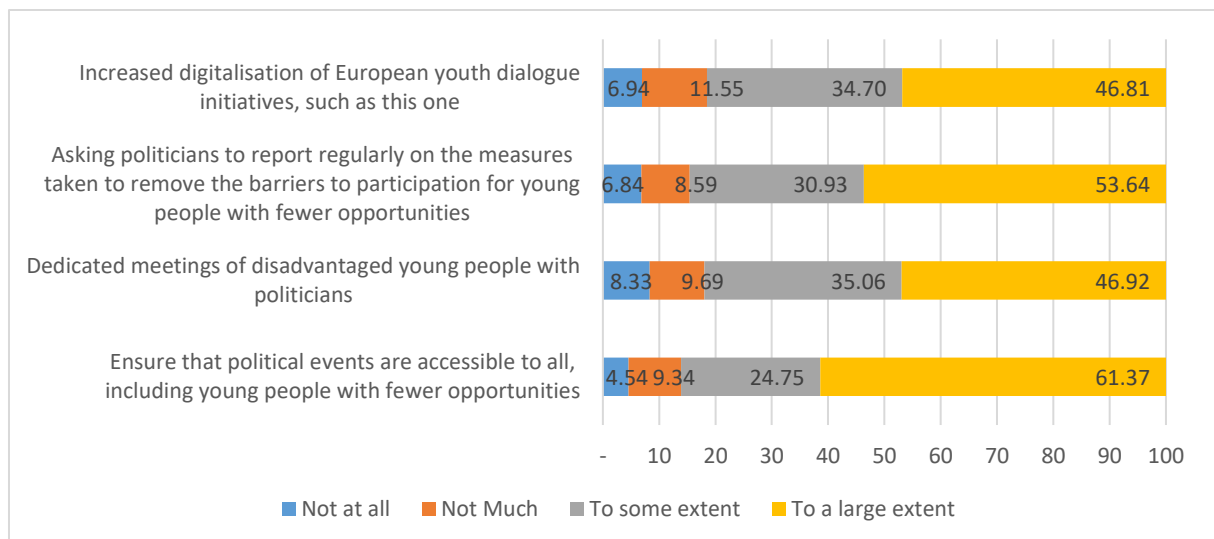
Just marginally lower is the rated importance of the measures oriented on the digital and analogue aspects of engaging in a dialogue with politicians. More than 80% of respondents believe dedicated meeting of disadvantaged youth with politicians are at least to some extent important, with 46,9% of young people involved believing this is important to a large extent. Increased digitalisation of European youth dialogue initiatives is perceived to be equally important, with 82% of respondents believing this is important at least to some extent and 46,8% of respondents indicating this is important to a large extent. Online and onsite venues that bring together politicians and young people with fewer opportunities should therefore be high on the priority list of initiatives aiming to improve the political landscape for young people.

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4. Youth (civic) spaces

An open civil society is one of the most important safeguards against tyranny and oppression as well as other anti-democratic tendencies and civil society organisations, including youth organisations, play a crucial role in provision of space to safeguard basic human and democratic rights (Deželan et al. 2020). Youth organizations engaging youth in civic life are particularly important as these organizations target youth-specific issues, place issues on the policy and political agenda as well as seek for innovative solutions in the field. As laboratories of democracy they are an important catalyst for various social innovations and engage politically in different, unconventional ways that are often not captured by the traditional political system (Lisney and Krylova 2018, 16).

Protecting and effectively guaranteeing a vibrant and open civic space for youth and in general is therefore a crucial component of a stable and flourishing democracy aiming to protect diversity, cultivate tolerance and guarantee respect of basic human rights for all members of a polity. According to the Civic Space Watch (2021), the civic space is the place, physical, virtual, and legal, where people exercise freedoms of association, expression, and peaceful assembly. By forming associations, by speaking out on issues of public concern, by gathering together in online and offline fora, and by participating in public decision-making, individuals use civic space to solve problems and improve lives. There are therefore public spaces which provide young people with a chance to take advantage of their civic rights and liberties, some of them reserved for young people (e.g. youth clubs), while others open to all ages. The survey addressed some key aspects related to youth (civic) spaces in Europe today.

That youth (civic) spaces are not something secured in contemporary Europe is clearly demonstrated by survey results. Young people reported quite a worrying message about the existence of online as well as offline civic spaces available for young people. When it comes to online spaces, as high as 57% of young people report some disagreement with the statement that he or she knows many virtual spaces and platforms where young people connect with each other in order to discuss politics and public decision making. 26,7% of them strongly disagree with this statement (see Figure 8). Situation is similar for physical spaces as 48,9% of

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respondents report disagreement with the statement that in their areas there are many youth spaces where they can meet and spend time with other young people. 18,6% of them strongly disagree with this statement.

Figure 8. How much do you agree with the following statement? (in%)

	Strongly disagree	2	3	4	Strongly agree
I know of many virtual spaces and platforms where young people usually connect with each other in order to discuss politics and public decision making.	26.88	30.09	25.01	11.39	6.63
In my area, there are many youth spaces where I can meet and spend time with other young people.	18.60	30.30	25.61	13.72	11.77
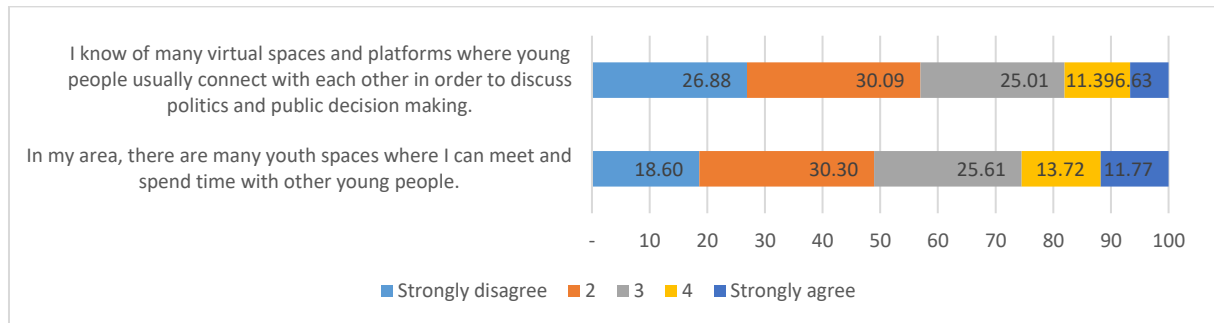
The message sent across by young people is clear. There is not enough physical spaces in their vicinity where they could meet with other young people and spend time together and likewise there is not enough virtual spaces and platforms where young people could connect and discuss public issues. The ones that do exist, on the other hand, reflect certain characteristics. In general, young people positively assessed youth civic spaces available to them even though there is still room for improvement. Surprisingly, the most positively assessed way the safety aspect of existing spaces as 29,8% of young people believe they are safe for young people to a large extent and additional 43,8% that they are safe to some extent (see Figure 9). They similarly perceive them as open and accessible to all young people, with 23,1% seeing them like that to a large extent and additional 45,2% to some extent.

Figure 9. If you think of spaces that you use to meet other young people, either in the real world or online, how much would you say they are? (in%)
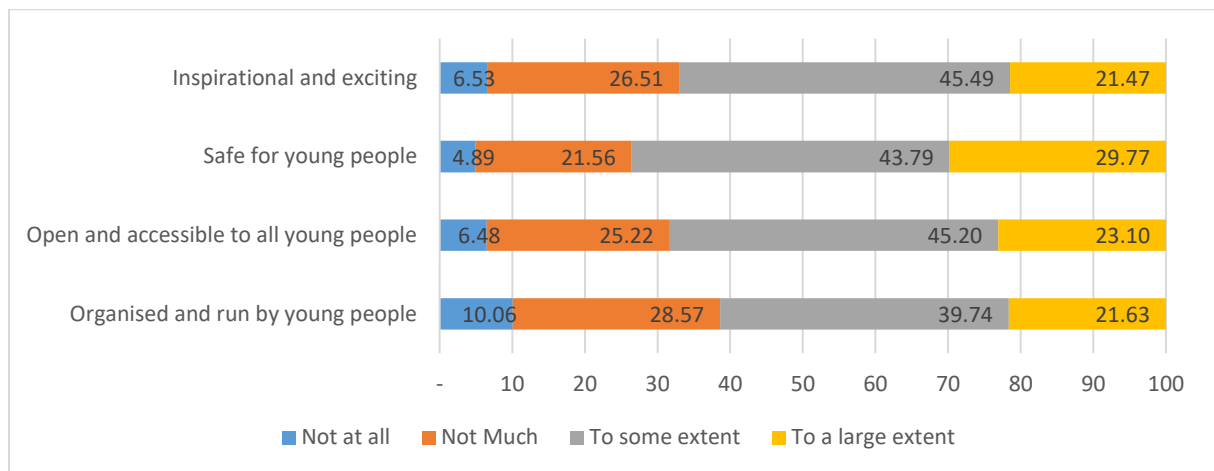
Youth (civic) spaces also have to be inspirational and exciting. And the ones available to them mostly are. To be precise, only one third (33%) of respondents see them as not much or not at all inspirational and exciting, while particularly 21,5% see them as inspirational and exciting to a large extent. Also a distinct feature of youth civic spaces – i.e., to be organised and run by young people – is present in the current offer of civic spaces available to young people. 21,6% of respondents believe the spaces that they use to meet other young people are to a large extent organised and run by young people and additional 39,8% believe this is the case to some extent.

When it comes to youth (civic) spaces, the trend of shrinkage or at least stagnation identified in some studies (e.g., Deželan et al. 2020; Deželan and Yurttagüler 2021) can be overturned with some measures performed either by public authorities, youth organizations and other organizations of civil society, or citizens themselves. The survey tested the relevance of some measures particularly from the angle of provision a better link to politics and revealed interesting but very telling results. What is clear to young people is that there are many digital platforms and applications and creation of new ones should not be a priority since only 17,7% of respondents chose this action as one of three most relevant ones (see Figure 10). This is in line with the reasoning that it is difficult to compete with commercial tools in terms of maintenance and investment in development as well as that there are many platforms out there. When physical youth places are concerned, the situation is quite different. Creation of physical

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youth spaces is very high on the priority list of respondents with 42,5% of respondents putting this on the list of top three measures addressing the problem of youth spaces, which is also in line with results related to the drivers that would improve political participation of young people (see Section 3.3).

Having more insights into what impact they have on youth (civic) spaces seems to be much more relevant. Quite low on the priority list is the idea that existing digital spaces should be made more attractive. This option was prioritised by one fifth (20,4%) of respondents, which is in line with the results presented in the previous section since it was clearly revealed that existing civic spaces do not suffer in terms of excitement, safety and accessibility. When we look at the attractiveness of physical youth spaces, the situation is a bit different since 36,6% of young people think these should be made more attractive in order for them to provide better links to politics. Providing management courses for young people to sustain youth (civic) spaces also does not to be the measure with the highest priority for young people (27,9%). The ability to influence topics of discussion, on the other hand, as the results in the section on agenda setting already revealed (see Sections 3.1 and 3.2), is a bit higher on the priority list as about one third (33,8%) of respondents prioritize it.

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Figure 10. It is important to have better links between youth spaces and politics. What sort of changes related to youth spaces would you like to see in your area? (in%)
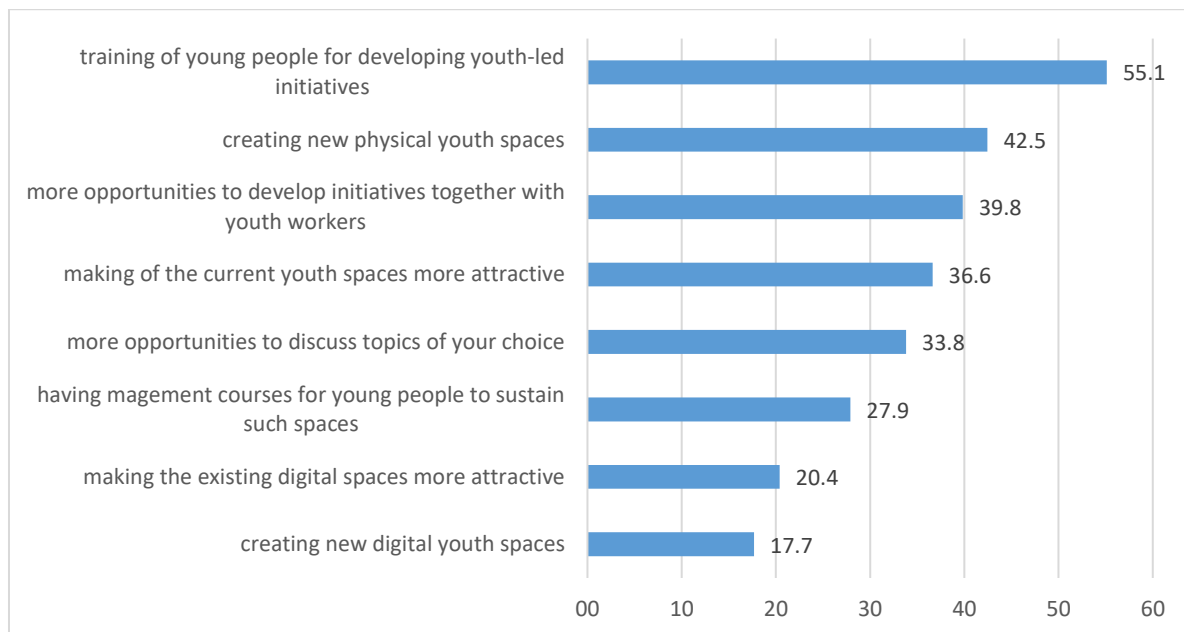

Young people also believe that more opportunities to develop initiatives together with youth workers should be provided as 39,8% of respondents prioritize this measure. This indicates also the relevance of youth work organizations and their premises for youth (civic) spaces as well as the need for professional assistance and support in provision of safe, inclusive and democratic spaces for young people. Linked to this is also the highest rated priority of the respondents who believe knowledge and competence is one of the most effective ways to create strong bridges between young people and politics. To be precise, 55,1% of young people believe training of young people for developing youth-led initiatives should be the most prioritised measure. Comparatively speaking we can conclude that young people prioritize knowledge and competence, assistance and new and improved physical spaces when it comes to key steps for improvement of youth (civic) spaces and their links to the political process.

When it comes to access to institutional politics online, respondents believe there are many actions that could be taken to connect young people to decision-making procedures and politicians. Rated as the most helpful is the better knowledge about websites and digital platforms that can be used to contribute to political decision-making as more than half (50,2%)

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of respondents finds that knowledge very helpful and another 27,4% as helpful (see Figure 11). The second most helpful action is perceived to be the improvement of access to a youth-friendly website about EU as 68% of respondents believe this is a helpful way top connect to politicians and political process, with 41% of them seeing this as very helpful. Having the opportunity to take part in regular online meetings with politicians is surprisingly not the most helpful perceived way to connect to institutional politics online, but it still is perceived to be helpful, with 60% of respondents answering with at least helpful, 35,7% of responded with very helpful.

Figure 11. How helpful would the following things be to connect you with politicians and political decision making, whilst online? (in%)
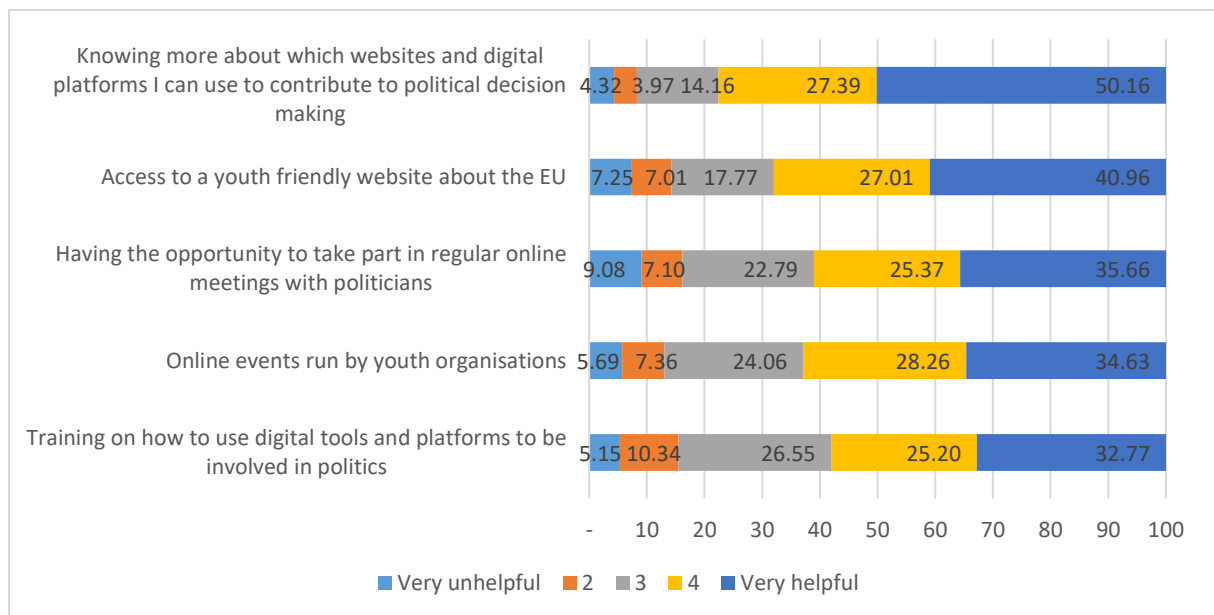
Online events run by youth organizations are also perceived by young people as helpful for them to connect to institutional politics. 34,6% of respondents believe this is a very helpful way of connecting young people to politicians and altogether 62,9% of respondents find this helpful in not very helpful. Likewise, even though it was perceived to be the least favoured of the ones listed, training on the use of digital tools and platforms to be involved in politics is also perceived as a helpful way of connecting young people to politicians and the political process. 58% of respondents think so, 32,8% even believe that this is very helpful thus indicating that digital competence is an important aspect of contemporary political engagement.

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5. Conclusion

The conducted survey on young people across Europe has provided many information about the way young people think about the political process, how they engage in, what spaces do they take advantage of and are in need of as well as what measures they perceive as the most effective in curbing problems related to youth participation and youth spaces. There are many messages actors engaged in the 8th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue should take forward, but the key ones should be (1) to invest into capacity and competences of young people rather than new digital infrastructures, (2) to improve civic competence of young people but also work on the credibility of political institutions and their transparency, (3) to primarily create and invest into existing physical youth (civic) spaces, including the ones provided by youth work organizations, (4) to invest into digital competence of young people, particularly when it comes to decrypting false and incomplete information, and (5) to establish effective mechanisms to enable young people with fewer opportunities to fully engage in the political process. More concretely, the following recommendations for action could be summarized from the survey:

- the policy-making process needs to provide more opportunities for youth to co-create agenda, influence decisions and provide feedback on the effectiveness of decisions taken;
- youth voice needs additional strengthening, particularly in the field of health policy (COVID-19 crisis, mental health) and development (of rural areas, of future Europe);
- formal and non-formal citizenship education deserves additional attention and investments into, particularly from the angles of critical thinking and ability to master false, incomplete and user-unfriendly information;
- the position of youth organizations as well as youth work organizations needs to be improved in terms of their position in the policy making process (advocacy and representative function) as well as support for their service-provision function;
- mechanisms that would make politicians more aware of young people's concerns have to be set up or reinforced;
- more effective online and offline mechanisms providing full access to young people with fewer opportunities to the political process have to be set up;

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- more physical youth (civic) spaces have to be created and the existing ones need to be additionally supported;
- young people should receive better and more complete information about the physical, but primarily online spaces available to them to engage in a political process;
- young people should receive training to engage in these youth (civic) spaces in a democratic and respectful manner.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Distribution of responses by country of residence and age groups prior to data weighing

			Age_rec			
			15-19	20-24	25+	Total
country	Austria	Count	70	65	39	174
		% within Age_rec	1,7%	6,6%	3,5%	2,8%
	Belgium	Count	24	32	49	105
		% within Age_rec	0,6%	3,2%	4,4%	1,7%
	Bulgaria	Count	72	149	309	530
		% within Age_rec	1,7%	15,1%	27,8%	8,5%
	Croatia	Count	544	9	28	581
		% within Age_rec	13,1%	0,9%	2,5%	9,3%
	Cyprus	Count	8	21	72	101
		% within Age_rec	0,2%	2,1%	6,5%	1,6%
	Czech Republic	Count	5	4	5	14
		% within Age_rec	0,1%	0,4%	0,5%	0,2%
	Denmark	Count	1	8	7	16
		% within Age_rec	0,0%	0,8%	0,6%	0,3%
	Estonia	Count	2	3	4	9
		% within Age_rec	0,0%	0,3%	0,4%	0,1%
	Finland	Count	187	6	10	203
		% within Age_rec	4,5%	0,6%	0,9%	3,3%
	France	Count	55	72	44	171
		% within Age_rec	1,3%	7,3%	4,0%	2,7%
	Germany	Count	68	61	59	188
		% within Age_rec	1,6%	6,2%	5,3%	3,0%
	Greece	Count	19	37	27	83
		% within Age_rec	0,5%	3,7%	2,4%	1,3%
	Hungary	Count	4	2	4	10
		% within Age_rec	0,1%	0,2%	0,4%	0,2%
	Ireland	Count	13	6	2	21
		% within Age_rec	0,3%	0,6%	0,2%	0,3%
	Italy	Count	23	109	88	220
		% within Age_rec	0,6%	11,0%	7,9%	3,5%
	Latvia	Count	45	15	32	92
		% within Age_rec	1,1%	1,5%	2,9%	1,5%
	Luxembourg	Count	4	1	1	6
		% within Age_rec	0,1%	0,1%	0,1%	0,1%
	Malta	Count	140	101	161	402
		% within Age_rec	3,4%	10,2%	14,5%	6,4%
	Netherlands	Count	5	21	4	30
		% within Age_rec	0,1%	2,1%	0,4%	0,5%
	Poland	Count	4	2	3	9
		% within Age_rec	0,1%	0,2%	0,3%	0,1%
	Portugal	Count	26	36	22	84
		% within Age_rec	0,6%	3,6%	2,0%	1,3%
	Republic of North Macedonia	Count	3	2	1	6
		% within Age_rec	0,1%	0,2%	0,1%	0,1%
	Romania	Count	28	25	11	64
		% within Age_rec	0,7%	2,5%	1,0%	1,0%
	Slovakia	Count	2683	146	29	2858
		% within Age_rec	64,7%	14,8%	2,6%	45,8%
	Slovenia	Count	88	21	46	155
		% within Age_rec	2,1%	2,1%	4,1%	2,5%
	Spain	Count	12	16	29	57
		% within Age_rec	0,3%	1,6%	2,6%	0,9%
	Sweden	Count	15	10	20	45

	% within Age_rec	0,4%	1,0%	1,8%	0,7%
Turkey	Count	1	7	4	12
	% within Age_rec	0,0%	0,7%	0,4%	0,2%
Total	Count	4149	987	1110	6246
	% within Age_rec	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%