

Young people are in all over Europe

Throughout Europe strengthening youth participation is a work in progress. From Estonia to Portugal and from Slovenia to Ireland. In many places young people discuss and decide policies. And play their part in shaping their own environment and future. These experiences offer inspiration, ideas and leads for policy makers and youth professionals in the Netherlands.

All but a few European countries have installed youth councils. Usually there is one national youth council, often accompanied by several local (or regional) ones. In approximately half of these countries the foundation, role and composition of the national youth council are laid down in legislation. In addition many countries have youth parliaments, pupils and students unions, and political youth organisations. In most countries these formal youth organisations are financially supported by government.

In Flanders (Belgium) local youth councils are actively supported. [Bataljong](#) connects and inspires youth councils, civil servants and local councillors to work together in building local youth policy. Bataljong is a members organisation, representing nearly all three hundred Flemish cities and municipalities.

Youth perspectives and interests

All European countries offer young people opportunities to discuss issues they feel are important. Activities are organised, programmes are executed and structural agreements are made to encourage young people's participation. Sometimes these are unique activities, for instance the 'Coffee with politicians' in Lithuania. In other examples young people's perspectives are invited concerning specific themes, such as the various 'youth panels' in Denmark. A number of countries have introduced the interests of children and young people into a standard procedure in developing new legislation. For instance the 'Jugend Check' in Austria and Germany.

Young people as active citizens

Youth participation is all about active citizenship. Do young people feel they're part of their local community and of society at large? And do they actually get a chance to learn how to participate? Many European countries organise activities and establish projects to promote young people's active citizenship and political awareness. Denmark for instance has an annual 'Youth democracy festival'. This free event allows young people to discover what democratic involvement looks like.

Other initiatives focus on the active involvement of young people in their own neighbourhoods. The Irish Youth Climate Justice Fund offers young people financial opportunities to contribute to the fight against climate change. In Cyprus a programme was established that invites young people to design activities dealing with the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Usually these initiatives are local and temporary. In Slovenia however a number of youth centres joined forces in 2001 and started the [Youth Network MaMa](#). Nowadays it consists of 55 youth centres and youth organisations. The network cooperates with local and national governments and its ultimate goal is to improve the position of young people in society.

Strategy and policy for youth participation

The majority of European countries established national youth strategies. In most cases youth participation is an important element or theme of such a broad youth strategy. Only a few countries have a specific youth participation strategy in place. In 2015 Ireland was the first European country to establish a [national strategy](#) aimed at children's and young people's participation in decision making. This strategy allows children and young people to voice their views in several places and domains in their day-to-day life: in their local communities, in education, in their health and wellbeing and in the legal system.

Every organisation and department within Irish government plays a role in this strategy, including local governments. A permanent support structure has been established at national and local levels to shape children's and young people's participation in practice. It produced a manual to support professionals and organisations in strengthening child and youth participation in their daily work.

Youth participation and Europe

Usually youth participation takes place in practice at local level. But it also receives a lot of attention at European level. When making European decisions, young people structurally have a place at the table. And youth participation is also one of the pillars of the [European Youth Strategy](#) (2019-2027). The Member States of the European Union have agreed to increase and improve young people's involvement in politics and society.

It always helps to learn from each other's experiences. Therefore participation is one of the ten themes in the European Youth Wiki. This is an online platform containing information on youth policies in 33 European countries.

More information

- [Youth Wiki](#): information on youth policies in 33 countries in Europe