



# **EURO-PARTICIPATION And EURO-ACTIVISM**

All about Europe, All about you(th)!

A guide developed by:

**eurodesk**

## ATTRIBUTIONS

Published by Eurodesk Brussels Link.

### Editors:

Audrey Frith  
Grazia Cannarsa  
Yurema Pallarés

### Designer:

Mónica Delgado

### Contributor:

Zsolt Marton

Copyright Eurodesk 2022.

## WHAT WILL YOU FIND IN THIS BROCHURE?

- 1 **About the publication - 4**
- 2 **About Eurodesk - 4**
- 3 **What's The EU all about - 5**
  - A bit of History - 5
  - Member States - 8
  - Map of Europe - 14
- 4 **What are EU goals and values? - 16**
  - EU goals - 16
  - EU values - 16
  - Sense of belonging - 18
  - Young people in Europe - 20
- 5 **How is the EU relevant to your daily life? - 22**
  - Easy travel in the EU - 22
  - Study, train and work anywhere in the EU - 23
  - Have your consumers rights protected - 24
  - Access safe digital services - 25
  - Benefit from youth rights - 26
- 6 **Who decides what in the EU? - 27**
  - Key EU institutions - 28
  - EU decision-making process - 30
  - How you can influence EU policies - 35
- 7 **Want to shape the future of Europe? - 36**
  - What's your dream? - 36
  - Be the change you want to see - 37
  - What's your circle of influence? - 39
  - Start planning - 40
  - Different forms of participation: pick your action cards! - 41

This publication will tell you how the European Union was built, what values it carries, who decides what and how all of this is relevant to your daily life. You will be able to grasp the opportunities Europe has to offer thanks to its various programmes and initiatives for young people. You will also discover concrete ways to influence the shape of Europe through civic and political participation. Enjoy!

## ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

If you are interested in finding out more about the European Union and how you can have a voice in it... then this publication is for you!

Being a citizen of an EU country means that you are also a European citizen. What does this mean in practice? What is the European Union doing for you?

We have been living in peace for the last 50 years, that's already a huge improvement. We also have the chance to travel, learn or work freely in all EU Member States, and much more as you will discover.



Photo: Canva Studio

## ABOUT EURODESK

Eurodesk is a European youth information network created in 1990. As a support organisation to Erasmus+, we make information on learning mobility comprehensive and accessible to young people and those who work with them.

With a network of 38 Eurodesk Centres connected to over 1600 local information providers in 36 European countries, Eurodesk raises awareness on European opportunities and encourages young people to become active citizens.

## EU AND ME

A lot of the content you will find in this publication comes from the EU and ME website. Make sure to visit it, it contains many more resources, links and activities for you.



Photos: Multimedia Centre, European Parliament

## WHAT'S THE EU ALL ABOUT?

### A BIT OF HISTORY...



After the Second World War (1939-1945), people were determined that nothing like this should ever happen again. Between 1945 and 1950, a few European politicians known as **EU pioneers** began the process of creating the European Union we live in today.

On 9 May 1950, Robert Schuman proposed that the production of coal and steel, the raw materials that were used to prepare for war, should be managed jointly in order to ensure that no one country could secretly arm itself against the others. At that time, coal played the role that oil and natural gas do today, in being the most important energy source available.

The **European Coal and Steel Community**, from which today's EU emerged, came into being in 1952. It was founded by six neighbouring countries: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.





## TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT EU PIONEERS

Visionary leaders inspired the creation of the European Union we live in today. Without their energy and motivation, we would not be living in the sphere of peace and stability that we take for granted. Can you match who did what?



PAUL-HENRI SPAAK

Founded the 'Action Committee for the United States of Europe' to revive the spirit of European integration, one of the main driving forces behind many of the developments in European integration.



LOUISE WEISS

Dedicated her life to peace. The European Parliament building in Strasbourg is named after her.



ROBERT SCHUMAN

Holocaust survivor and first female President of the European Parliament. Fought for women's causes.



JEAN MONNET

A European visionary and talented persuader, was a leading figure in formulating the content of the Treaty of Rome.



NICOLE FONTAINE

European Parliament President who oversaw the adoption of the euro. Reformed the Parliament's working methods to bring it closer to the citizens.



SIMONE VEIL

Published the Schuman Plan on 9 May 1950, the date now considered to be the birth of the European Union (Europe Day).

Want to learn more about EU's pioneers?



## EXTENDED COOPERATION

1957



A few years later, the six founding countries decided to extend their cooperation to other economic sectors. The **Treaty of Rome** was signed in 1957, establishing the **European Economic Community**. This cooperation was extremely successful in Europe's recovery and more and more countries have asked to join over the years.

1993



Photo: Christian Lue

What began as a purely economic union has evolved into an organisation spanning many different policy areas, from environment and health to external relations and security, justice and migration. This is how the European Economic Community became the European Union in 1993.

## HOUSE OF EUROPEAN HISTORY

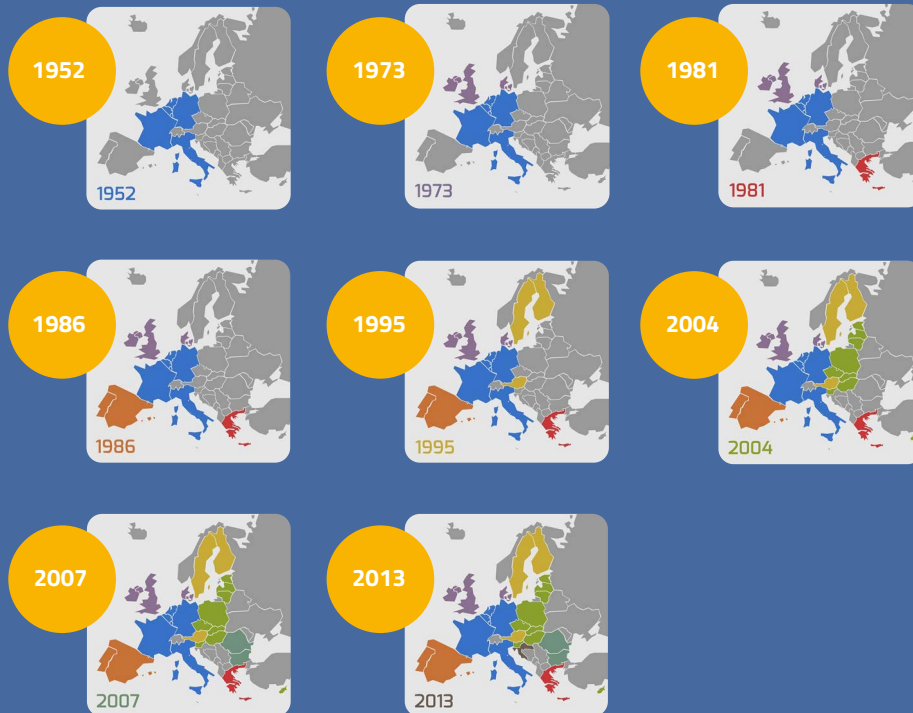
The House of European History is more than a museum, it is a forum for learning, reflection and debate, open to audiences from all generations and backgrounds. Its primary mission is to enhance understanding of European history in all its complexity, to encourage the exchange of ideas and to question assumptions.



## ENLARGEMENT

The EU enlargement has been an extraordinary opportunity to promote stability and prosperity and extend the area of democracy in Europe. Any new member must be prepared to sign up to the **treaties\*** and take on board the full body of EU law. It must respect the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law.

The enlarged EU of currently 27 members has a stronger weight in the international arena. As a global player, it is better equipped to respond to global challenges such as climate change, environmental protection, competitiveness, migration and financial market regulation.



Source: pyty / Fotolia

## EU TREATIES

Every action taken by the EU is founded on treaties that have been approved voluntarily and democratically by all EU countries. The treaties lay down the objectives of the European Union, set out the rules for how the EU institutions operate, how decisions are made and the relationship between the EU and its Member States.



## EUROPEAN UNION VERSUS EUROPEAN CONTINENT

The EU is a unique economic and political union between 27 European countries called the EU Member States. Together they cover much of the European continent but not all of it. Europe refers to the European Continent that officially counts 44 countries.



## THE EUROPEAN IDEA IS NOT NEW!

The "European idea" goes as far back as the Middle Ages and sometimes even to Antiquity. In Greek mythology, Europa was a beautiful princess who Zeus took a fancy to. In the shape of a white bull, he lured Europa away from her homeland.

This myth has inspired writers, historians, painters and European politicians throughout the centuries and gave its name to our continent. Did you notice that this myth is depicted in the 2 euro coin to pay tribute to that heritage?



## EUROPEANA

Are you passionate about history, culture and arts? With Europeana, you can visit thousands of libraries, galleries, archives and museums from all over Europe without having to leave your home.



# 10 HISTORIC STEPS



1951

The European Coal and Steel Community is set up by the six founding members



1957

The same six countries sign the Treaties of Rome, setting up the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom)

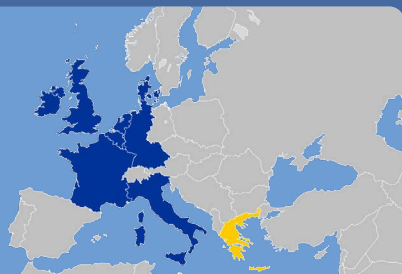
1973

The Communities expand to nine Member States (UK, Ireland, Denmark) and introduce more common policies



1979

The first direct elections to the European Parliament



1981

The first Mediterranean enlargement



The European Single Market becomes a reality

1992



1993

The Treaty of Maastricht establishes the European Union (EU)



2002

The euro comes into circulation



The EU has 27 Member States

2007



2009

The Lisbon Treaty comes into force, changing the way the EU works





## NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

Although there may sometimes be disagreements between EU countries, the basic principles behind the EU have remained unchanged over the last 70 years. In 2012, thanks to its tireless work for peace, democracy and human rights in Europe and around the world, the European Union was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The EU is the first group of countries in the world to have been accorded this honour.



## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU?

Not many young people nowadays still have living relatives to tell them about their experiences during the war. You were born at a time by which there had already been decades of peace and prosperity in Europe. As a young person, what do you think about this long-lasting peace in Europe? Do you take it for granted or do you sometimes worry about the future?

## EU MEMBER STATES

The European Union is not a state or federation, but a unique partnership between European countries, known as Member States. The EU is home to over 447 million people, which corresponds to around 6% of the world's population. Citizens of the EU Member States are also citizens of the European Union.

The unique feature of the EU is that, although the countries all remain sovereign and independent states, they have decided to pool some of their 'sovereignty' in areas where it makes sense to work together.

Photo: Jopwell / Pexels



Eurodesk is present in all EU Member States plus a few partner countries. Can you place the country's names and capitals?

Which ones have you already visited?



eurodesk.eu



## EU FLAG

The flag of Europe is made up of 12 golden stars on a blue background. It was adopted in **1984** and now flies above parliaments, municipal buildings, parks and monuments all over Europe.

The design symbolises the peoples of Europe, with the circle representing their union. The number of stars never changes, it is always 12, representing perfection and entirety.



Photo: Monstera / Pexels



## LEARNING CORNER

If you want to know what the EU does, how it all started and how it works, or if you want to debate EU policies in more detail, you'll find plenty of inspiration here.

The learning corner proposes various resources including games and videos for young people.



## WANT TO TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE EU?

The Council of the EU has developed games for you to test your knowledge about the EU through a quiz but also a simulation game.

Will you dare to try?





## WHAT ARE EU GOALS AND VALUES?



Photo: Cottonbro / Pexels

Have you ever heard the phrase 'United in diversity'? It is the EU's motto and it represents what the EU's values are all about. While each EU country has its own culture, language and traditions, they all share the same common values and must respect them if they want to be part of the European Union.

One fundamental value that unites all the Member States is democracy. This means that only democratic countries can be members of the EU. The other values of the EU that are common to all Member States are: human dignity, freedom, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of people belonging to minority groups.

These values form the basis of the EU and are laid out in the Lisbon Treaty and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

### GOALS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Promote peace, its values and the well-being of its citizens

Offer freedom, security and justice without internal borders

Sustainable development based on balanced economic growth, price stability, full employment, social progress, and environmental protection

Combat social exclusion and discrimination

Promote scientific and technological progress

Enhance economic, social and territorial cohesion and solidarity among member countries

Respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity

Establish an economic and monetary union whose currency is the euro

## EU VALUES



### HUMAN DIGNITY

Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected, protected and constitutes the real basis of fundamental rights.



### EQUALITY

Equality is about equal rights for all citizens before the law. The principle of equality between women and men underpins all European policies and is the basis for European integration. It applies in all areas. The principle of equal pay for equal work became part of the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Although inequalities still exist, the EU has made significant progress.



### HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are protected by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. These cover the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, the right to the protection of your personal data, and the right to get access to justice.



### FREEDOM

Freedom of movement gives citizens the right to move and reside freely within the Union. Individual freedoms such as respect for private life, freedom of thought, religion, assembly, expression and information are protected by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.



### DEMOCRACY

The functioning of the EU is founded on representative democracy. Being a European citizen also means enjoying political rights. Every adult EU citizen has the right to stand as a candidate and to vote in elections to the European Parliament. EU citizens have the right to stand as a candidate and to vote in their country of residence, or in their country of origin.



### RULE OF LAW

The EU is based on the rule of law. Everything the EU does is founded on treaties, voluntarily and democratically agreed by its EU countries. Law and justice are upheld by an independent judiciary. The EU countries gave final jurisdiction to the European Court of Justice which judgements have to be respected by all.

## SENSE OF BELONGING

The concept of citizenship has historically been very much linked to nationality. It is the Maastricht Treaty that created European citizenship, which is not a substitute for national citizenship, but an addition to it. The **European symbols** include the European flag, the European anthem (Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy'), the European motto and Europe Day on 9th May each year.

**Do you consider yourself a European citizen?** It's very difficult to feel that you "belong to" the European Union unless you are aware of what it is doing and how it works. In the next section, you will learn what the EU does in your daily life and how it functions.

A sense of belonging comes, above all, with feeling personally involved in EU decision-making. Every adult EU citizen has the right to vote in the European Parliament elections, and this is an important basis for the EU's democratic legitimacy. If you want to help shape the European agenda and influence EU policies, there are many ways to do so as you will discover in our last section.



Photo: Edmond Dantes

Photo: Media Centre EU Parliament



### EU YOUTH STRATEGY

Engaging, connecting and empowering youth are the three pillars of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, a strategic framework adopted by the European Council in 2018. The communication highlights that "for young people to reap the full benefits of EU actions, these need to reflect their aspirations"<sup>1</sup>.

EU youth cooperation aims to foster youth participation in democratic life. It can also support social engagement, as well as civic and socio-educational activities (youth work) that give young people life skills and act as a bridge to society, especially for disadvantaged youth.

<sup>1</sup>. European Union (2018). EU Youth Strategy

## YOUTH GOALS

The EU Youth Goals were adopted as part of the EU Youth Dialogue in 2019. They are annexed to the EU Youth Strategy and became a key policy reference for EU and national institutions in the youth field.



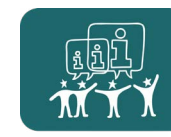
CONNECTING EU WITH YOUTH



EQUALITY OF ALL GENDERS



INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES



INFORMATION & CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE



MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING



MOVING RURAL YOUTH FORWARD



QUALITY EMPLOYMENT FOR ALL



QUALITY LEARNING



SPACE & PARTICIPATION FOR ALL



SUSTAINABLE GREEN EUROPE



YOUTH ORGANISATIONS & EUROPEAN PROGRAMMES

# YOUNG PEOPLE IN EUROPE



Photos: Media Centre  
EU Parliament



In the past 70 years, young people in Europe have gone from being a group to whom history happened, to a group that actually makes history. The European House of History proposes a unique exhibition that looks at four generations of such young people who came of age at key moments in the European story: the late 1940s, the 1960s, the 1980s and the 2000s.

It explores the key experiences of youth; from education and employment, to forging an identity and finding love.



2 Flash Eurobarometer European  
Parliament Youth Survey (September 2021)  
3 Ipsos MORI (2018). Ipsos Thinks: Beyond  
Binary: The lives and choices of Generation Z

Young people are generally more pro-European than their elders<sup>2</sup>. In June 2016, when an overwhelming majority of young British citizens voted to remain in the European Union, it became clear that young voters want a different kind of outcome than the older generations. It does not mean that young people do not want to improve the way the EU functions, however they may be more inclined to use other ways to participate such as protests.

Younger generations are not necessarily less politically active than previous generations, but have slightly different values and concerns than their elders<sup>3</sup>. They have entered the labour market during one of the worst recessions in living memory. They also face global challenges such as climate change or terrorism which makes them more aware of global actions.

## THE FUTURE OF EUROPE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Do you agree with this statement of the European Youth Forum on the future of Europe?



*Citizens lack control over their common future. When it comes to young people, we are not represented by the current political system and often excluded from decisions that affect us and future generations. Young people want to be part of Europe, though. We want a European Union that unleashes our potential, creates a promising future, and safeguards our fundamental human rights.*

*Currently, this is not the case. Young people are both systematically underrepresented in the political arena, and excluded from society, leading to lower levels of trust in the system and in institutions of representative democracy. Disengagement with the traditional political sphere can result in young people moving towards populist, anti-democratic and xenophobic movements as well as, in exceptional cases, violent extremism in Europe. This move undermines social cohesion and the European project itself.*

*Several ideas have been put forward to address the future of the EU as well as young people's place in Europe. Proposals such as the European Solidarity Corps, the extension of the Youth Guarantee and an Interrail ticket for all 18 year olds are welcome contributions to the discussion. But such an approach, consisting of ad-hoc, top-down proposals, is far from the bottom-up and participatory vision that the European Union should be implementing. Young people do not need short-term, tokenistic initiatives but long-term solutions, developed with our input, and based on a comprehensive strategy for the sustainable development of Europe.*





Photo: Jack Sparrow / Pexels

## HOW IS THE EU RELEVANT TO YOUR DAILY LIFE ?

The EU impacts our daily lives in many ways, from the food we eat to the products we buy. If you have ever wondered what exactly the EU does and has done for you, here are 5 areas in which it is impacting your daily life. You will also see that you can take advantage of your EU citizenship! Be aware that this is just a fraction of what the EU actually does for you.



Photo: Adrian Agawin

1

### EASY TRAVEL IN THE EU

Travelling in Europe is much easier than it used to be. Most EU countries, and some non-EU countries, have taken away border controls between their countries. This is what is called the Schengen Agreement. Free movement of persons enables every EU citizen to travel, work and live in an EU country without special formalities.

When travelling in Europe, all EU citizens in all EU countries are protected by a full set of passenger rights. In certain circumstances, they can, for instance, get compensation if their flight is cancelled. They are also able to ask for help at any other EU country's consulate or embassy when travelling to a country outside of the EU if their own home country is not represented there.

If you fall ill or have an accident during a visit to another EU country, as an EU citizen you have the right to receive the necessary public healthcare in any EU country under the same conditions as people in the host country. For this, you shall request your European Health Insurance Card before you go abroad.



TRAVEL DURING THE PANDEMIC



PASSENGER RIGHTS



EUROPEAN HEALTH INSURANCE CARD

2

### STUDY, TRAIN AND WORK ANYWHERE IN THE EU

As an EU citizen, you have the right to train and study anywhere in the EU under the same conditions as nationals and work anywhere in the EU and benefit from the opportunities offered by an EU-wide labour market. Different programmes can support you in those endeavours, here are a few of them.

#### EURES TARGETED MOBILITY SCHEME (TMS)



EURES TARGETED MOBILITY SCHEME

TMS is an EU programme that promotes professional mobility, offering a package of support services to those looking for a job, traineeship or apprenticeship in another EU Member State, Iceland or Norway. It can provide targeted financial support for example for language courses, recognition of qualifications and travel and subsistence expenses. You can start your job search by visiting the EURES Portal and contacting the national contact point in your country.

#### ERASMUS+

Erasmus+ is a very wide programme, covering a diverse range of actions for students, trainees, teachers, volunteers and more. This EU programme helps young people to spend a period of time abroad for studying. You might also opt for some on-the-job training abroad. Amongst the other actions, you can take part in a youth exchange programme. DiscoverEU is a new action that allows 18 years olds to travel around Europe solo or in groups.



ERASMUS+

#### THE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

This EU programme offers opportunities for young people who are willing to make a meaningful contribution to society and help show solidarity with their community. The European Solidarity Corps allows 18-30-year-old Europeans to participate in a wide range of solidarity activities by volunteering.



EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

#### TRAVELLING DURING COVID

Since July 2021, the EU Digital COVID Certificate facilitates the movement of citizens within the EU during the pandemic. EU citizens and residents are able to have their COVID Certificates issued and verified across the EU which facilitates free movement inside the EU.



EU DIGITAL COVID CERTIFICATE

3

## HAVE YOUR CONSUMERS' RIGHTS PROTECTED

The EU has removed barriers to free trade between its members, it's what is called the EU's Single Market. This means that you can produce, sell and buy goods wherever you want in the EU. It also means that consumers have a larger choice of products and lower prices.

When you go shopping in the EU, including online, you are protected by all sorts of laws.



### EURO

Euro banknotes and coins were introduced in 12 EU countries in 2002, and 19 have now replaced their national currencies with the euro. Consumers can compare prices more easily at home, abroad and online. Companies can calculate and charge customers in one currency and are not at risk of exchange rate fluctuations, and getting rid of transaction costs keeps prices stable.



THE EURO



CONSUMER RIGHTS AND COMPLAINTS

The EU has some of the highest food safety standards in the world. EU citizens therefore benefit from high-quality, appropriately labelled and safe food. It has put in place compulsory checks throughout the agri-food chain to ensure that plants and animals are healthy, that food and animal feed is safe, and that products are correctly labelled. Many more regulations exist to protect European consumers.



FOOD SAFETY



Photo: Uriel Mont

## DO YOU KNOW THE EU LABELS?



Do you recognise the labels below? Where can you find them? What do they mean? Connect them with their titles.



- A** EU Ecolabel
- B** EU organic
- C** Energy efficient
- D** CE marking
- E** Quality labels for agricultural products and foodstuffs

4

## ACCESS SAFE DIGITAL SERVICES

The protection of personal data and privacy are fundamental rights in the European Union. The EU has been applying high standards for data protection and privacy for decades. The law gives people rights as regards data protection and confidentiality of communications which must be respected by organisations that process their data. In response to the realities

of the internet age, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) gives individuals enforceable rights, including the right to be forgotten.



RIGHTS FOR CITIZENS

The European Commission is tackling the spread of online disinformation and misinformation to ensure the protection of European values and democratic systems. The EU's Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online aims to ensure that requests to remove racist and xenophobic content are dealt with speedily. Companies, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat, have committed to reviewing the majority of these requests in less than 24 hours and to removing

the content if necessary.

The safety of children online is paramount. The **European strategy for a better internet for children** has influenced national policies in most EU Member States and set a global benchmark for the protection and empowerment of children online.



CREATING A  
BETTER INTERNET  
FOR KIDS

5

#### BENEFIT FROM YOUTH RIGHTS

Specific EU policies and programmes are targeted specifically at young people. One example is the **Quality Framework for Traineeships** which urges EU countries to improve the quality of traineeships, in particular the learning content and working conditions, in order to ease the transition to work.

Another is the **EU Youth Guarantee** which strives to ensure that all young people under the age of 30 will receive a good quality offer of either employ-

ment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education. Young people signing up to the Youth Guarantee are entitled to receive an offer within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed.



EMPLOYMENT,  
SOCIAL AFFAIRS  
& INCLUSION

The EU also supports **young entrepreneurs** including through a dedicated programme. Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs is a cross-border exchange programme which gives new or aspiring entrepreneurs the chance to learn from experienced entrepreneurs running small businesses abroad.

#### EUROPEAN YOUTH PORTAL

The European Youth Portal offers European and country level information about opportunities and initiatives that are of interest to young people who are



living, learning and working in Europe. It's the entry point for young people on the many EU opportunities offered to them.



THE EUROPEAN  
EXCHANGE  
PROGRAMME FOR  
ENTREPRENEURS

#### EU FUNDING IN YOUR REGION

EU countries and regions are not just of different sizes; they also have different levels of wealth. Thousands of projects have received EU funding over the years, thousands of kilometres of strategic transport, energy and broadband links have been developed, research and innovation has been funded, cultural heritage and areas of natural beauty protected, and much, much more. Check out some examples of projects that have received EU funding in your country (#EUin-myregion). You will see just how much closer the EU is to your home than you might have thought. Want to learn more? What the EU does for me is a website that brings together information for you.

## WHO DECIDES WHAT IN THE EU ?

The EU institutions were created by national governments to help them achieve the goals that they set out in the founding treaties. They are at the heart of the EU system, but national institutions also play a key role.

The EU institutions are different from institutions that can be found at a national level as it reflects the unique nature of the European Union as a union of sovereign countries. This is why it can be hard to understand how they function. You will see, it's not that complicated!

What you have to understand is that the public servants and politicians working for the EU are nationals from the various EU Member States. They come from all over Europe, and quotas are usually established to ensure a balanced representation between the countries.

Let's take a look at the institutions where most of the decisions are made.



## CAN WE COMPARE NATIONAL & EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS?



We could compare the European Parliament to a national parliament, but the European Parliament does not have all of the powers normally given to a national parliament.

The European Commission could be compared to national bureaucracies, but it has additional leadership functions (it initiates laws). Its staff is mostly made of public servants, except for the Commissioners who are appointed and elected.

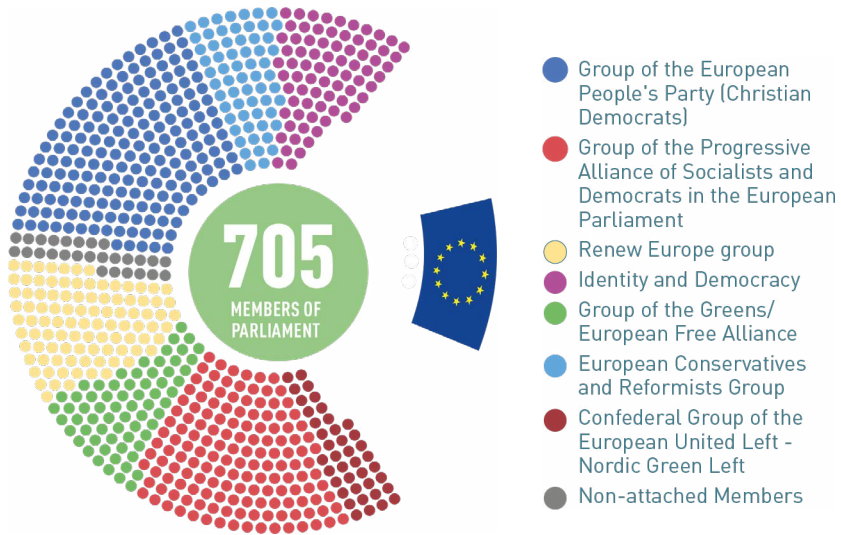
The European Council could be seen as an upper chamber of the legislature and the Council of Ministers could be compared to the lower one, but none of them is directly elected by the citizens.



## KEY EU INSTITUTIONS?

### EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The European Parliament is the voice of the citizens. Its members are directly elected by EU citizens every 5 years. The next European elections will be held in 2024. The Parliament takes decisions on European laws jointly with the Council.



The Parliament has 705 members from all EU countries. Based on their size, the large countries have more members than the small ones. Members with similar political views work together in political groups.

### SHOULD YOUNG PEOPLE BE ABLE TO VOTE AT 16?



The European Youth Forum calls for the lowering of the voting age to 16 with the provision of civic education being obligatory within the formal education system throughout Europe. The reality that young Europeans now live in has triggered the debate around lowering the voting age to the age of 16. Today, you have the right to vote at 18 in all EU countries except Austria and Malta, where you can vote at the age of 16, and Greece, where you can vote when you are 17. Want to join the discussion? #vote@16

### COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Council of the European Union represents the governments of the EU countries. In the Council, the ministers from all EU countries meet to discuss EU matters and take decisions on EU policies and laws. Which ministers meet depends on the topic under discussion. For example, if the meeting is about air pollution, then the Council gathers environment ministers.

The Council is one of the two decision-making bodies, with the European Parliament. In Council meetings, about 80 % of law proposals are decided by majority vote. Each minister casts one vote but the number of citizens represented varies according to the size of the country.

### EUROPEAN COUNCIL

The European Council brings together the Head of Governments of each EU Member State's leaders. They set the EU's main priorities and overall policy directions but do not adopt laws.

The work of the Council is led by each EU country

in turn for a period of 6 months. In 2021, Portugal and Slovenia held the presidency, followed by France and Czechia in 2022, Sweden and Spain in 2023 and Belgium and Hungary in 2024.

### EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The European Commission is responsible for ensuring that the EU treaties are respected and EU law is applied by all the Member States. The Commission also proposes new laws and programmes in the general interest of the EU. It also manages the EU budget and represents the EU on the world stage. Around 32,000 permanent and contract employees work in the Commission.

The European Commission is made up of 27 members (one per country), including one President and vice-presidents. The president is nominated by the European Council and is formally elected for 5 years by the European Parliament. Each Commissioner is responsible for a specific area, such as energy, economy or trade. Commissioners do not represent the views of their country of origin but rather the common interest of the EU.

### OTHER EU INSTITUTIONS AND BODIES

A full list of EU institutions and bodies, as well as EU agencies and other bodies, is available on the Europa website.



### FANCY WORKING FOR THE EU?

EU staff are mainly recruited via the European Personnel Selection Office. Officials are citizens of the EU countries, selected by means of competitions. If this sounds like a career you might be interested in, then you could start as a trainee in one of the EU institutions or agencies. Discover the various opportunities on the Eurodesk Opportunity Finder.



## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS?

National institutions play a key role in the main stages of EU policy making. In the decision phase, ministers and civil servants negotiate, amend and decide in the Council whether to accept proposals submitted by the Commission. National parliaments are influential at the decision stage. Finally, EU legislation is implemented by national administrations – ministries, departments of state, regulatory agencies, and regional and local authorities.

The same national bodies administer 90 per cent of the EU budget. National courts, meanwhile, monitor and enforce EU law in the Member States. They can also refer questions concerning the interpretation of EU law to the Court of Justice of the European Union.

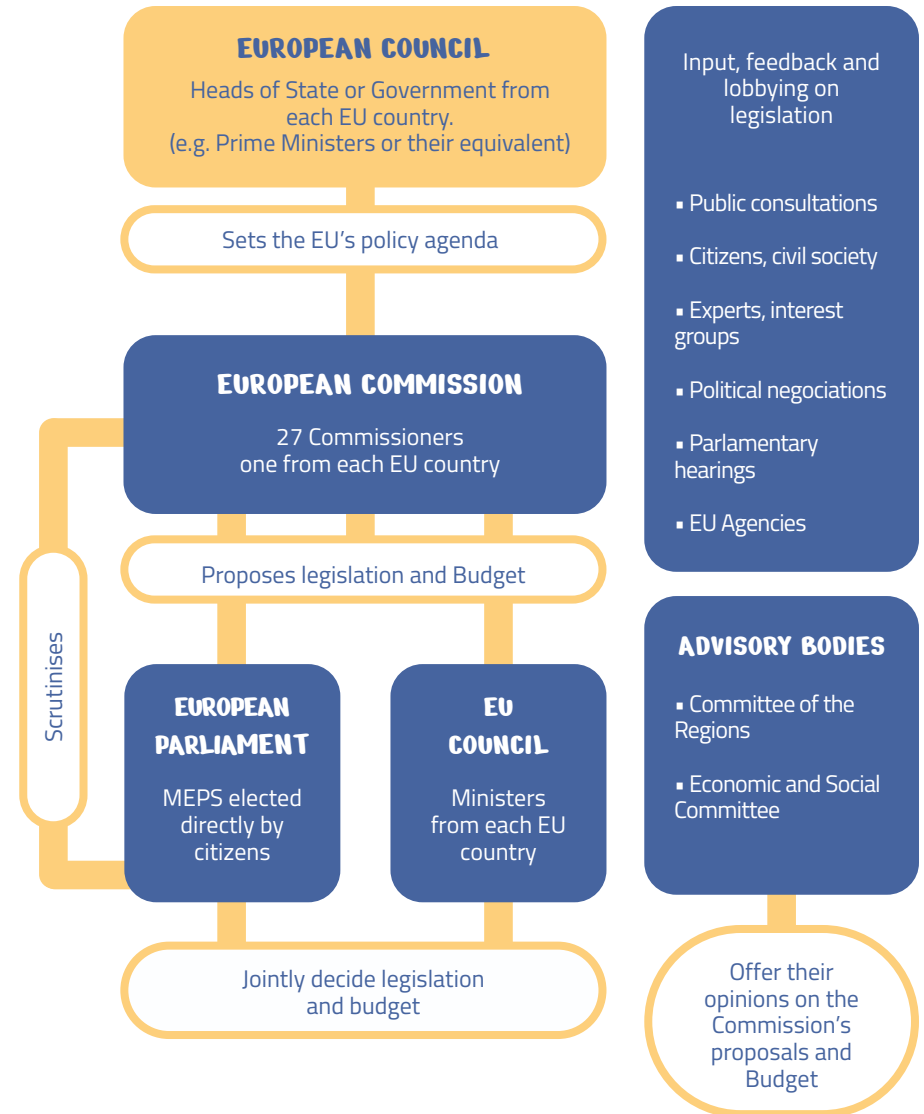
## EU DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The European Union was set up in the aftermath of World War II to promote peace throughout Europe. A central principle was that decisions would be taken through agreement and/or consensus. The structure of today's major EU institutions, and their legislative and decision-making processes, reflect this.

As we saw in the previous section, European legislation covers many areas, from the environment to food safety. The European Commission proposes legislation, and in most cases the European Parliament and the Council of the EU both have to agree for it to pass. The process for this joint decision-making is called the ordinary legislative procedure.



## HOW EU BODIES WORK TOGETHER



## WHO DOES WHAT IN THE EU?

Take the test below to see how much you remember.  
Put a cross in the box against the institution(s) that match(es)  
the description.

Who ...?	European Parliament	European Council	Council of the European Union	European Commission
1 Makes proposals for EU laws				
2 Approves EU laws				
3 Consists of (only) one representative/ member per EU country				
4 Is elected by EU citizens				
5 Executes the budget				
6 Represents the interests of citizens				
7 Represents the interests of EU countries/their governments				
8 Defines the general political direction of the EU				

## WHO IS WHO?

You now know a lot about the European institutions, but do you know the names and faces of the people leading them? For example, who is the current President of the European Commission? And who are the other people in the photos? Test yourself below. Put the right name under the picture and add the number that corresponds to their political role:

▪ Charles Michel ▪ Ursula von der Leyen ▪ Roberta Metsola ▪ Josep Borrell



And now see if you can match them to their jobs by putting the correct number in each box below.

1. President of the European Parliament (2022-2024)
2. High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission (2019-2024)
3. President of the European Council from (2019-2022)
4. President of the European Commission (2019-2024)



## EUROPEAN COUNCIL VERSUS COUNCIL OF EUROPE

The Council of Europe is an entirely separate body from the European Union. It promotes human rights through international conventions, such as the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. It includes 47 member states, of which 27 are EU members. The Council of Europe runs programmes for youth through the **European Youth Foundation**.

Cooperation between the European Union and the Council of Europe (CoE) has recently been reinforced, notably on culture, education and youth. One concrete example is the **EU-CoE Youth Partnership** which offers a platform for their cooperation and has a function of a “think tank” on youth policy, research and practice.



## EU YOUTH DIALOGUE

The EU Youth Dialogue is a dialogue mechanism between young people and decision makers taking place in the framework of the EU Youth Strategy. It ensures that the opinion, views and needs of young people and youth organisations are taken into account when defining EU youth policies.

In every Member State, the process is organised by national working groups that are in charge of conducting consultations and activities in their country with young people, youth organisations and policy makers.

Once national and European activities are over, the results are compiled, analysed and further discussed at the EU Youth Conferences. There, youth representatives and policy makers have the opportunity to work together and present a joint message to the EU. These conferences take place twice a year and are hosted by the country that holds the EU Presidency.

The conclusions are presented to the Council of the European Union. The Council might then adopt a policy document containing the views of young people. For instance, the last cycle saw the creation of 11 Youth Goals in 2018 that were then annexed to the EU Youth Strategy.

## MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD!

As a European citizen, you can influence EU policies in several ways:

1

By voting in your country's general election: as a rule, the winning party then forms your government. Ministers from this government represent your country in the Council of the European Union, which plays an important role in EU lawmaking



2

By voting in the European Parliament elections: your vote will help determine the European Parliament's position on proposed laws. The largest political group will normally decide who should be the President of the Commission, so your vote will help determine that as well.



3

By taking part in online public consultations. Before making proposals for new EU laws and throughout the whole decision-making process, the European Commission seeks the opinions of citizens and stakeholders. Check the have your say platform!



4



By joining citizens' dialogues that take place across the EU. These give you the chance to discuss European issues with Commissioners and other high-level representatives. Check whether a dialogue is coming up soon in your area or organise one thanks to Erasmus+ Youth Participation action!

5



By supporting or launching a European citizens' initiative. In practice this means that citizens may invite the European Commission to propose legislation on a specific issue for which the EU is responsible, such as the environment, agriculture or transport. One million people, or just 0.2 % of the EU population, from at least 7 EU countries are needed to launch a European citizens' initiative.



6

By influencing decision-makers and the general public through youth projects, protests, petitions and other initiatives (check the upcoming pages).

## WANT TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF EUROPE?



### YOUR HANDBOOK TO ACTIVISM A GUIDE TO CHANGE

Whatever you do to fight for a fairer society, this is your opportunity to create a future where we all live in dignity and equality. The 25% handbook will support you on how to decide what it is you want to campaign on and how to develop your vision for a better world.

You will discover how to inspire people to join your campaign, before discovering the skills you need to work collectively for change. You will also delve into practical exercises to plan your strategy and plot the steps you must take to reach your goal. Finally you will also find practical tips on how to attract attention for your campaign actions, including how to engage with the media.



There are different ways to influence your communities, at local, national or European level. You can decide to join political groups, protest or run petitions. Eurodesk has joined forces with the European Youth Forum on the 25%Project which aims to bring young people's voices to the Future of Europe Conference and beyond.

The following section is largely inspired by the handbook to activism. Now that you are an expert in European matters, discover tips on how to become a social change maker.

### WHAT'S YOUR DREAM?



We invite you to dream and imagine a better, fairer and more equal world. We then invite you to discover ways to take action and start transforming society. This is your invitation to turn your vision for our future into reality.

It doesn't matter where in Europe you live – we all experience and witness injustice – we also all have a chance to respond and change society for the better. That response could be launching a campaign for local community housing to tackle unfairness in your town or city. It might be a campaign for better global health, or for education opportunities for young people around the world. Whatever you do to fight for a fairer society, this is your opportunity to create a future where we all live in dignity and equality.

## LET'S IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT

### Visioning meditation

Find a comfortable, quiet place to sit or lie down. Close your eyes. Notice your breath, feel the ground underneath you, supporting you, and feel in your body. Relax.

Imagine you are looking through a portal 50 years into the future at what you would like to see. When you arrive, walk around and notice what this world is like. What has changed from the way things are today? What problems have been resolved? What feels good?

Slowly open your eyes and note down your ideas for a positive vision of the future. How was it? Could you see your vision for a fairer, more equal future?

### Anchoring your social change work in your vision

Your vision tells you where you hope to end up, your destination, so you don't get stuck worrying about how to get there. This starting point helps you to anchor your work for social change and gives you a goal to move towards. It can inspire and motivate you, as well as those around you.

## BE THE CHANGE YOU WANT TO SEE

"If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito." The Dalai Lama

We all have the potential to change the world for the better – beginning with making small changes to our daily lives. We can start by taking time to learn and reflect on our own actions and conditioning, and considering how we treat others. From that point of understanding, we can work out what we want to change about the world and take action to do it.

Just like the mosquito in the Dalai Lama's quote, each individual person has the potential to make a big impact. But when we come together with other people, the potential for change is even greater. That's when we can build movements and transform society. History is full of examples of collaboration and collective action, where groups fought for the rights we now take for granted – from voting to sick pay.



## SOME USEFUL DEFINITIONS

- **Activism** - means action taken to create social change, much of it involves collective action, including participation in local associations, volunteering or organising fundraising activities in your school/university, among others.
- **Social Change** - changes in human interactions and relationships that transform cultural and social institutions. These changes occur over time and often have profound and long-term consequences for society. Well known examples of such change have resulted from social movements in civil rights, women's rights, and LGBTQ rights, to name just a few.
- **Civic engagement** - refers to the ways in which citizens participate in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future.
- **Advocacy** - an activity by which an individual or a group aims to influence decisions. It also refers to the act of pleading or arguing in favour of something such as a cause, idea or policy. Lobbying is a form of advocacy where a direct approach is made to legislators on a specific issue or specific piece of legislation.
- **Active Citizenship** - means people getting involved in their local communities and democracy at all levels, from their neighbourhood to a more global level. Active citizenship can be as small as a campaign to clean up your street or as big as leading an international movement against biodiversity loss.
- **Democratic participation** - refers to acts that are intended to influence the behaviour of those empowered to make decisions. Traditional forms of participation are voting at elections but participation can also be about taking part in collective action, volunteering or being a member of an NGO.



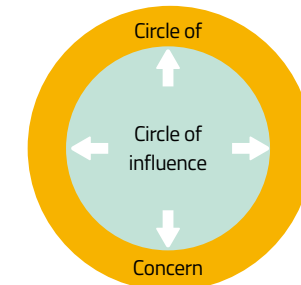
## WHAT'S YOUR CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE?

It's important to make strategic choices and alliances. The theory of the circle of influence can help you in that sense.

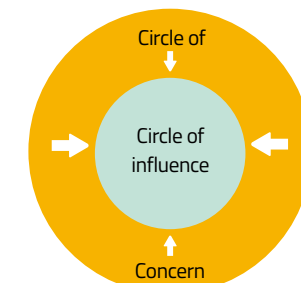
Coined by Stephen Covey in 1989, the two circles that reflect our worries in life are called the circle of concern and the circle of influence. The circle of concern includes a whole range of things concerning us – global warming, the state of the economy, attitudes in society, the university you attend, the way people drive their cars, etc. The important thing to understand is that there may be little you can do about many of these things as they may be outside your power of influence. Our circle of influence is much smaller. It includes the things you can do something about. The extent of this is obviously related to your power in society.

The key is to focus your energy on the things that you can influence – this will enable you to make effective changes. Forming partnerships and alliances is important, as you may not have any direct influence over something in your circle of concern, but you may know other people who do. A team can have a wider circle of influence than an individual.

Both are connected, being proactive means that you extend your circle of influence by focusing on what you can actually change. An example can be: you are concerned about global warming, in your circle of influence you can protest with other young people, act (recycling, biking, etc.), vote at the next elections, sign petitions, etc.



**Proactive Focus**  
Positive energy enlarges Circle of Influence

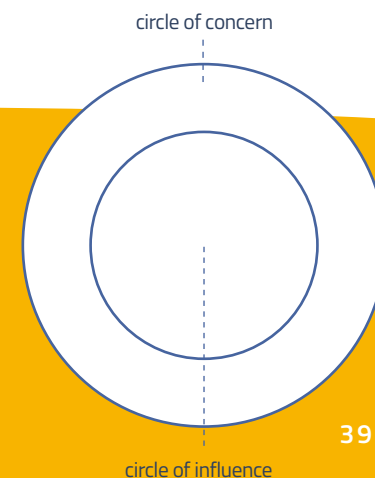


**Reactive Focus**  
Negative energy reduces Circle of Influence

## EXERCISE



Could you write down your concerns and what could be done about them in the following diagram? What actions could you take to affect the things you can influence? Does it help you reevaluate your priorities?





## START PLANNING

Now that you have a vision for the future and that you know where to focus your efforts, it's time to plan your action.

An action plan is a document that lists what steps must be taken in order to achieve a specific goal. The purpose of an action plan is to clarify what resources are required to reach the goal, formulate a timeline for when specific tasks need to be completed and determine what resources are required about the world and take action to do it.

Just like the mosquito in the Dalai Lama's quote, each individual person has the potential to make a big impact. But when we come together with other people, the potential for change is even greater. That's when we can build movements.

### THAT'S MY PLAN

Name your challenge.

What problem do you want to solve?

What are your objectives?

What stakeholders can you partner with in your community?

What resources will you need?

How will you communicate your project to the world?

Who should know about it first?

What channels will you use to reach them?

## DIFFERENT FORMS OF PARTICIPATION

### PICK YOUR ACTION

#### CARDS!

Here are some action cards or tools you can use to reach your goals. This material is partly based on "A 25% Guide to Change. Your Handbook on Activism".

#### Media Engagement

It means working with local and national press to get coverage of your issue. Your objective is to get your action mentioned by the journalists in order to make your issue more visible and reach more people.

- What media do you know around you?
- How will you contact journalists?
- How will you present them your issue in an interesting way to grab their attention?
- What will you present in your press release?

#### Boycott / Disinvestment

Disinvestment is the decision to stop investing in a certain business or a company in order to pressure a certain sector to change the policies or practices in the direction of your action.

- What companies work against your issue?
- What would you suggest they change?

#### Leafletting / Poster campaign

Spreading your message in the public space is very important and you can do that using leaflets or posters.

- What social media are used by the audience you want to target? How do you know that?
- What account will you use? your own or will you set up a separated one for your action?
- Will you focus on verbal or visual messages?
- What is your call for action: what do you want people to do?

#### Online Petition

An online petition is a tool to help you collect supporters for your case, to demonstrate the importance of your issue.

- Whom will the petition be addressed to?
- Where will you publish it?
- How will you spread the message to attract more signatories?

#### Social media action / online activism

Social media platforms can be used to share your messages, actions and ideas in a way that helps you to build a more powerful base. You can win attention and new supporters.

#### Email to elected representatives / get in touch with your MEP

You can get in touch with Members of the European Parliament because they are elected representatives by citizens to represent people's interest with regard to EU law-making and to make sure other EU institutions are working democratically.

### Media Stunt

Media Stunt is an activity designed to attract public attention to your cause by doing something novel and newsworthy. The best media stunts need to be captured in a memorable photo.

- How will you make sure that the media captures your action?
- What is the best moment for media stunt (e.g. political decision to be taken, etc)?
- What audience do you want to win?

### Flashmob

Flashmob is a people assembled in a public space that seems to be spontaneous but is in fact organised. The performed action should attract the attention of a wider audience to your issue.

- What scenario could you prepare?
- How will you find the participants? In what way will you inform them?
- How would you document your actions (video, social media)?

### Protest

Protests are public gatherings that show power and collective outrage, in case people are frustrated with decisions that have been made for them.

- Whom is the protest addressing? How will you organise it legally? (ask for permission, etc)
- Where do you want to hold the protest?
- How will you spread the message/with whom you can collaborate? (look at the stakeholders map that you have prepared before)

### Voting/ Electoral Campaigning

If you are already eligible to vote, you can use that right on a local, national or EU level. However you and your group can also support campaigns and encourage others to take part in elections.

- To whom can you talk about the importance of elections (family? friends?)
- Can you help them to understand the programmes of political parties?
- How can you initiate an important conversation with your peers about the connection between your issue and the programmes of politicians?

### Activism

In this action you can bring together activists and artists who fight for a common issue. Together they invent the action plan to craft a beautiful and powerful message towards the public.

- Who can be an interesting artist to work with you?
- What form of art would you like to choose (visual art, music, dance, performance)?
- Where could you perform and what audience would you like to win to your cause?

### European Citizens' Initiative

If you want the EU to legislate on an issue that matters to you, consider starting a European citizens' initiative, you will have to collect one million signatures from at least 7 different EU countries.

- Are there initiatives that tackle the same issue as you?
- If not, can you get inspired by other ECIs?
- How would you promote your initiative?
- Who is your ally (circle of influence)?

EUROPEAN  
CITIZENS  
INITIATIVE



### European Solidarity Corps: Solidarity Project

A Solidarity Project is a non-profit solidarity activity initiated, developed and implemented by young people themselves for a period from 2 to 12 months. It gives a group of minimum 5 young persons (between 18 and 30 years) the chance to express solidarity by taking responsibility and committing themselves to bring positive change in their local community, although some of them can also tackle regional or even national issues.



SOLIDARITY PROJECTS

- What will be the objective of your project?
- Are you ready to run a long term project to fight for your cause?
- What will be the main activities?

### Erasmus+: Youth Participation Activity

Erasmus+ supports youth-driven local, national and transnational participation projects run by informal groups of young people and/or youth organisations encouraging youth participation in Europe's democratic life. Youth Participation Activities can be actively used to conduct dialogues and discussions between young people and decision-makers to promote the active participation of young people in democratic life in Europe. All activities under this Action must follow the Erasmus Youth Quality Standards for organising high quality learning mobility activities

- Are you ready to make your voices heard through the formulation of positions, proposals and recommendations on how youth policies should be shaped and implemented in Europe?
- What concrete recommendations can you think of already now?



### Crowdfunding

Whether you're fundraising for yourself, someone else, a cause, a business, or a charity, you can set up a fundraiser and start raising money in a few, simple steps. What is your goal? How much money do you want to collect?

- How will the donations make a difference?
- Whom will you address? Can you ask your family and friends to share your campaign to a wider audience?
- How will you adapt your fundraising campaign to attract attention?

### Public consultations

Did you know that you can give your input on proposed EU actions on the EU public consultations? Your feedback might have an influence on EU decisions. Would you like to have your say on national or EU level?

- Can you find a case that relates to your issue? (e.g. education, sustainability, transport)
- Share your ideas:

THE 25%  
PERCENT



# NOTES



# EURO-PARTICIPATION And EURO-ACTIVISM

All about Europe, All about you(th)!

WHY DO WE HAVE A EUROPEAN UNION?

WHO DECIDES WHAT?

WHAT IS THE EU DOING FOR ME?

WHAT CAN I DO TO INFLUENCE DECISIONS?

This publication provides you with clear answers and information to go deeper. You will be able to grasp various youth opportunities and learn how to make your voice heard in Europe and beyond.

**eurodesk**



Funded by  
the European Union

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.