



IncludeYOU

Round Table for Connecting EU with its Youth Local Youth Participation Event Spain

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www.includeyou.eu



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INTRODUCTION

The IncludeYOU Project is an Erasmus+ Youth Participation initiative that aims to empower young people to become active participants in democratic life and decision-making processes across Europe. Through debates, workshops, and round tables in different partner countries, the project provides a space where youth and decision-makers can meet, exchange perspectives, and co-create solutions for the future.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ROUND TABLE

The main objective of the Spanish Round Table was to strengthen the link between the EU and young people. It aimed to address the European Youth Goal #1 – Connecting the EU with Youth – by creating an interactive platform where young citizens could express their opinions, present their ideas, and take part in shaping policies that directly affect them. Another key objective was to foster inclusive democratic participation, ensuring that all voices, especially those from vulnerable groups, were represented.



CREATE A STRUCTURED DIALOGUE BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND EU/LOCAL POLICY-MAKERS

One of the core objectives of the Round Table was to establish a structured and meaningful dialogue between young people and decision-makers. Often, youth participation is limited to informal consultations or symbolic involvement, but this event aimed to go further by creating a setting where young voices could be taken seriously. The structured format allowed young participants to raise issues that directly affect their lives, while policy-makers had the opportunity to respond, explain policies, and listen to fresh perspectives. This reciprocal exchange helped reduce the gap that often exists between institutions and citizens.





ADDRESS THE EUROPEAN YOUTH GOAL #1: CONNECTING EU WITH YOUTH

The event was directly linked to the European Youth Goal #1: Connecting EU with Youth, which emphasizes the need to bring the European Union closer to young people. Many young citizens feel disconnected from EU institutions, often seeing them as distant or difficult to understand. By focusing on this Youth Goal, the Round Table created opportunities for young people to learn how EU policies influence their daily lives, while also showing them concrete ways to engage with European processes. It was an essential step in helping youth feel part of the European project and in fostering a shared sense of European identity.

ENCOURAGE INCLUSIVE DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

Another key objective was to encourage inclusive participation, ensuring that the event was accessible and representative of diverse groups of young people. This meant giving equal space to participants regardless of gender, background, social status, or ability. By making the discussions inclusive, the Round Table demonstrated that democracy thrives when everyone has a voice. It also encouraged young people who may not usually be involved in politics to recognize that their opinions are valuable and that they have the right to contribute to decision-making processes that shape their future.





EDUCATION AND SKILLS FOR ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Why it matters:

Education is not only about academic knowledge — it is also about preparing young people to be active citizens who understand their rights, responsibilities, and power in shaping society. Active citizenship skills include critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and knowledge of democratic institutions.

Key challenges:

- Traditional education often focuses too much on exams and too little on civic engagement.
- Many young people lack opportunities to learn how EU and local decision-making actually works.
- Digital literacy is increasingly important, yet access to technology and training is unequal.

YOUTH NETWORKING DIALOGUE WITH LOCAL POLICY-MAKERS

Examples & best practices:

- Including civic education and participatory projects in school curricula (student councils, debates, mock elections).
- Using non-formal education methods such as youth clubs, volunteering, and peer-to-peer learning.
- Promoting EU programs (like Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps) as real-life laboratories for citizenship.

Learning point:

To become active citizens, young people need both knowledge (how systems work) and skills (how to participate effectively).



EMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

Why it matters:

Employment is key to independence, dignity, and full participation in society. High youth unemployment and precarious jobs undermine young people's trust in politics and institutions.

Key challenges:

- High unemployment rates in many EU countries, especially for young graduates.
- Mismatch between what schools teach and the skills employers need.
- Precarious work: short-term contracts, unpaid internships, and unstable job conditions.

Examples & best practices:

- Supporting entrepreneurship and start-ups among youth, especially in digital and green sectors.
- Offering career guidance, internships, and mentoring at an early stage.
- EU initiatives such as the Youth Guarantee program, which aims to give every young person under 30 a job, training, or internship opportunity





ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Why it matters

Young people see the environment as one of the defining issues of their generation. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution threaten not only the planet but also the future health, jobs, and security of communities worldwide. For youth, this is not a distant or abstract problem, it is an urgent reality that shapes their prospects and everyday lives.

KEY CHALLENGES

Significant challenges remain. Climate change is progressing at a pace that far outstrips current political action, creating a growing sense of frustration and urgency among young citizens. Many environmental policies continue to lack meaningful youth participation, even though young people are among those most affected by ecological crises. Furthermore, the impact of environmental damage is not evenly distributed: vulnerable communities, particularly those with fewer resources, are often the ones who suffer most from climate-related risks and disasters.





EXAMPLES AND BEST PRACTICES

Despite these challenges, there are numerous examples that highlight both the power and the creativity of youth engagement in environmental action. Movements such as Fridays for Future have demonstrated how collective youth advocacy can capture global attention and push for systemic change. On the policy side, initiatives like the European Union's Green Deal and its long-term climate-neutrality goals represent ambitious steps toward building sustainable economies. At the local level, countless youth-led projects, from tree planting and clean-up campaigns to renewable energy initiatives, are already making tangible contributions to their communities.

INCLUSION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS

The importance of representation

For democracy to be meaningful, it must include everyone. When vulnerable groups of young people are left out, societies risk deepening inequality, generating frustration, and weakening the very foundations of civic life. True participation means that all voices, especially those often ignored, have a chance to be heard and respected.



BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

Many young people face obstacles that prevent them from fully engaging in education, employment, or public life. Migrants, minorities, rural youth, and young people with disabilities often encounter structural barriers that restrict their opportunities. On top of these challenges, stereotypes and discrimination can further limit their access to resources and decision-making spaces. Too often, policies that affect these groups are designed without directly consulting them, resulting in solutions that do not meet their real needs.



PATHWAYS TO INCLUSION

To overcome these barriers, societies need to create mechanisms that guarantee genuine participation. One example is the creation of inclusive youth councils that give space to representatives from diverse backgrounds. Another is the use of targeted training, mentorship, and scholarships that empower disadvantaged young people to build their skills and confidence. At the European level, funding tools within programs like Erasmus+ specifically support the participation of young people with fewer opportunities, ensuring that inclusion is not just a principle but a practical reality.



FROM CHARITY TO EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

A crucial lesson is that inclusion should never be viewed as charity. It is not about “helping the weak,” but about recognizing the equal rights and potential of every young person. By ensuring that vulnerable youth can access opportunities and contribute to decision-making, societies become more democratic, fairer, and stronger. Inclusion, therefore, is not only a moral responsibility but also an investment in a healthier and more resilient future for Europe.





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