HOW CAN YOUNG PEOPLE BE MORE INVOLVED IN SHAPING SOCIETY?
EU STRUCTURED DIALOGUE CYCLE FOUR
Youth empowerment for political participation

IN THIS DOCUMENT YOU WILL FIND DATA COLLECTED FROM YOUNG PEOPLE AND DECISION MAKERS THROUGHOUT THE THREE PHASES OF THE 2014/15 CYCLE OF EU STRUCTURED DIALOGUE.

Rome Oct 2014
In September 2014 we selected three young Irish people to represent us at the EU Youth Conference in Rome in October. While there they met with their counterparts from across the EU along with Policy Makers. They did an important piece of work, they decided “what questions do we actually need to ask young people if we want to support “empowerment for political participation”?

Red C Poll
Between November and December we did a Red C Poll which asked 400 young people throughout Ireland what their views were on empowerment and political participation. This was important because it gave us a fantastic insight into the variety of views and perceptions in this moment in time.

Focus Groups
We combined the feedback from the Opinion Poll with the key questions from the EU Youth Conference in Rome and we hit the road in Ireland, visiting young people, students and youth projects to hold Focus Groups. We asked the questions, and they gave the answers! We asked about Education, increasing trust with decision makers, joint policy making, youth work, inclusion & diversity, creativity.... What did we do with the answers? We shared them with Irish Policy makers and then created a report which we handed over to the next three Youth Delegates who would represent Ireland at the EU Youth Conference in Riga in March 2015.

Riga March 2015
Our delegates returned from Riga after some hard work with a set of Recommendations! A total of seven recommendations, with two parts for each!! This was indeed the combined thinking of all of the young people who had been involved in all of the conversations across all of the EU! So, a set of European Recommendations to help us promote Youth Empowerment for Political Participation! What would the youth of Ireland think of these? There was only one way to find out. Ask them!

Ideas to Action 1 & 2
We held two meetings in Dublin and invited young people to travel from anywhere in Ireland and rejoin the journey or join the journey. The first meeting in April was quite important because we wanted to “unpack Riga” but we were also invited to support the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs who was heading to a High Level Ministerial Debate in May and wanted us to share our feedback from the Riga Recommendations. An intense day in Dublin gave us a brilliant insight into young people’s thinking on the proposed recommendations and how they might work in the Irish context. At that meeting we agreed to meet again so that we could prioritise a number of recommendations for Ireland. We met again in July where we used the Edward De Bono Thinking Hats to support our work throughout the day and ultimately the young people took the informed decision of choosing four priority areas which they believe will support Youth Empowerment for Political Participation in Ireland.

Luxembourg September 2015
We finally sent our three new delegates to the final EU Youth Conference in Luxembourg in September with the priorities chosen by young people in Ireland and they returned home with a final set of Joint Recommendations and a Toolbox to support implementation. In the first six months of 2016 these young delegates will invite other Irish young people to participate in a National Implementation Project funded through Erasmus+ that will work on concrete actions from the identified priority recommendations.
VOTING & PROTEST

Voting in elections and participating in a protest have the highest perceived impact on bringing about change. Young people felt strongly that increased authenticity, accountability and transparency in politics would help young people trust politicians more. Focus Group

There is no diversity in Government - young people can’t identify with them. Focus Group

Level of interest in politics

Very interested: 34%
Quite interested: 29%
Neither: 14%
Slightly interested: 12%
Very disinterested: 11%
Quite disinterested: 12%
Don't know: 4%

Among this age group, media such as print and broadcast has the greatest degree of influence on social and political issues, with government and politicians also having a strong degree of influence. (Q16)

Trust in institutions

Always: Government 17% Politicians 15% Local councillor 27% Gardaí 11% Media (print) 28% Charities 40% Business/ private 41%
Mostly: Government 39% Politicians 39% Local councillor 35% Gardaí 11% Media (print) 46% Charities 40% Business/ private 40% Public sector 40%
Some times: Government 30% Politicians 15% Local councillor 24% Gardaí 15% Media (print) 20% Charities 10% Business/ private 9% Public sector 7%
Never: Government 40% Politicians 41% Local councillor 24% Gardaí 15% Media (print) 20% Charities 10% Business/ private 9% Public sector 7%
Don't know: Government 4% Politicians 4% Local councillor 4% Gardaí 2% Media (print) 3% Charities 8% Business/ private 8% Public sector 7%

Although having highest perceived level of influence, the government and politicians report the lowest level of trust, with over 4 in 10 claiming they can never be trusted. (Q18)

Social media is the primary means of keeping up to date with current affairs with 1 in 3 citing this is their main method. Red C Poll
PRIORITY 1: INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING

In order to further involve young people in democratic life, Member States and local authorities are invited to implement pilot programmes starting at local level, where voting age is lowered to 16, accompanied by the adequate preparation, including quality civic education.

By implementing transparent, sustainable and collaborative structures and providing financial support, authorities on the local, regional and national levels should ensure full participation of youth in decision processes of the policies that affect young people.

There was a unanimous decision by the group to support this idea and to endorse the proposal that if young people are adequately educated they would be more than capable of participating in elections.

Enhancing the current CSPE provision on the curriculum and extending it to all year groups in second level education (as above) is a critical element if we are to improve the levels of involvement of young people in decision making.

In terms of youth sector involvement in decision making, Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF) is a worthy example of how the National Youth Council and other actors in the youth field can collaborate with the DCYA to produce a youth policy framework.

In Ireland we undertook a comprehensive consultation process to develop a National Youth Strategy by involving all stakeholders and including young people as key stakeholders.

POSITIVE POTENTIAL

- “Nothing about us without us”
- Covers all areas, not just politics
- Positive effect for the future
- More opinions = More ideas = More change
- More information for young people
- Increases confidence and well-being
- Increased interest in politics and social issues
- Makes young people feel more important/accepted

POSSIBLE NEGATIVES

- Might not impact on this generation
- Disempowerment because of tokenism
- It needs to be more equal, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, ageism
- Apathy of certain young people
- Tick box “youth consulted” attitude
- Those who do engage are the exception?
- Geographical discrimination
- Not enough information available currently
- Financial costs sometimes dictate who can attend meetings

KEY PLAYERS

NYCI
DCYA
Young Voices
Vote@16
Youth organisations
Sports organisations
Services
Student councils
Schools
Youth wings of political parties
Youth dept of trade unions
Government

Relevant policies

- Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF)
- National Youth Strategy

In order to involve young people in decision making we must have our voice heard by decision makers and be offered the opportunity to be part of making the change we want to see. #makeachange #wearethefuture
PRIORITY 2: DEVELOPING YOUTH-FRIENDLY TOOLS FOR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Private and public organisations should involve young people in the development, implementation and monitoring of online tools for youth political participation. To ensure recognition of young people’s participation and sustain their involvement in political processes, online tools should be complemented by offline methods and have a follow-up phase in which decision-makers reflect on how young people’s contributions were taken into account.

There are many groups and organisations with an online presence attempting to connect with young people but the only guarantee is that if young people are not involved the efforts are futile and doomed to failure.

In Ireland we have spunout.ie. This is a model of positive youth involvement and youth engagement and it can be used as a good practice example for any “youth friendly” online tools.

There is a serious deficit in terms of “youth friendly” and “youth accessible” online tools for political participation. Young people feel that this is a direct result of the absence of any youth involvement in design.

There is added value in terms of consultation events and face to face meetings.

In order to develop youth friendly tools for political participation we must include young people as co-designers in making the tools.

#makingchanges
**PRIORITY 3: INCREASING SYNERGIES AND COOPERATION BETWEEN DIFFERENT ACTORS**

In order to involve young people in political processes and to enable easy and sustainable collaboration between all relevant stakeholders, the EU institutions and Member States should develop or improve coordinated cross-sectoral communication at all levels.

**BETTER OUTCOMES : BRIGHTER FUTURES**

The national policy framework for children and young people 2014-2020

**TRANSFORMATIONAL GOALS**

- Support parents
- Earlier intervention & prevention
- Listen to, involve children & young people
- Ensure quality services
- Strengthens transitions
- Cross government & interagency collaboration & coordination

**BETTER OUTCOMES**

- Active & healthy
- Achieving in all areas of learning & development
- Safe & protected from harm
- Economic security & opportunity
- Connected, respected & contributing

**CROSS CUTTING**

**ACTIVE & HEALTHY**

- Strengthens the support system around the child and young person

**BRIGHTER FUTURES**

- Active & healthy
- Achieving in all areas of learning & development
- Safe & protected from harm
- Economic security & opportunity
- Connected, respected & contributing

**POSITIVE POTENTIAL**

- The potential for getting expert advice by listening to the concerns of those affected by proposed policies
- More awareness, info and research available
- Potential for more funding to support the chance to work in partnerships
- Grass roots connection will benefit policy making
- Team work which means more diverse perspectives and better outcomes

**POSSIBLE NEGATIVES**

- Who gets to decide who should be included?
- Conflict of interests affecting cooperation and communication
- Language barriers
- Difficulties and unwillingness when it comes to compromises
- Possibility for commitment issues
- Relative size of orgs, one could overpower the other
- Why would they want to work with each other?

**KEY PLAYERS**

- Govt Depts
- Politicians
- Prominent influential Irish people
- Social media providers
- NYCI
- NSE
- Charities
- Social enterprise
- International Organisations
- Philanthropy

**Relevant policies**

- Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF)
- National Youth Strategy
- National strategy for children and young people’s participation in decision making

In order to increase synergy and cooperation between different actors, we must empower lives by engaging young minds for a brighter future.

#worktogetherthinktogether #cooperation4thenation
PRIORITY 4 : STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF YOUTH WORK FOR POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF ALL YOUNG PEOPLE

The crucial role of youth work for fostering a political participation which is based on the values of diversity, human rights, democracy and on critical thinking, should be strengthened and socially and politically recognised by the European Commission and Member States. Therefore, youth work should be provided with the necessary resources, support structures and formal recognition. EU institutions and Member States are encouraged to set up cross-sectoral initiatives and long-term partnerships at all levels with youth workers and non-governmental organisations, with the aim of transferring knowledge and developing political participation competencies of all young people, especially those with fewer opportunities.

Youth Work empowers young people while supporting them to develop as an individual and also to see their place in the community and wider society. The role of youth work in this arena should be recognised.

Youth work does support political engagement. It supports young people to develop the confidence to use critical thinking and to take opportunities when presented to engage with decision makers.

Ireland has a good track record for this but could strengthen the role of youth work in this regard by supporting and encouraging all youth projects to place a value on supporting youth engagement in these external decision making structures.

Youth work providers can be enablers of young people by supporting their access to decision making structures like local Youth Councils or Structured Dialogue events or National consultations.

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POSITIVE POTENTIAL

| Youth workers having a negative influence | Organisations might not be trustworthy | Parents might not want youth workers doing this stuff with their children | The challenge of differentiating between neutrality and bias |
| Are youth workers educated properly to do this? | Lack of resources to do it well | Relevant policies | Relevant policies |
| --- | --- | Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF) | National strategy for children and young people’s participation in decision making |
| Young people making their own decisions | Good politically engaged groups of young people | National Youth Strategy | National Youth Strategy |
| Youth Workers are often the best people to do this because of their relationships with young people | It gives confidence to young people | Youth work NGOs | Youth work NGOs |
| It brings the issue of political participation to the grassroots where real concerns can be met | Youth wings of political parties | National Youth Council | Young Work Councils |

In order to strengthen the role of Youth Work for political empowerment of all young people, we must adequately support the youth work sector with the tools to politically empower the young people who are members of our youth work orgs.
Create a culture of participation at school
Involving young people in political decision-making
Enhance policy makers’ engagement and commitment with young people
Strengthen the role of youth work for political empowerment of all young people
Develop youth friendly tools for political participation
Develop local and direct democracy
Develop alternative forms of participation
Increase synergies and cooperation between different actors

Quotes from EU Structured Dialogue Cycle 5
Youth Empowerment for Political Participation

I will take these recommendations and submit them to the Council of Youth Ministers that I will convene later this year. I also think that improving young people’s participation in Europe is a shared responsibility. All of the participants of this conference can and should add their contribution to the process. But beyond them, we also need to make participation a reality for all young people in Europe.

Claude Meisch, Minister of Education, Children and Youth of Luxembourg

Far from being apathetic or disinterested, young people are simply rejecting outdated political structures which do not respond to our needs and do not deliver what we want. We need new structures that include young people and their representatives in order to create a politics that prioritises young people’s rights and helps them to be fully included in their society. Political leaders must listen to the voice of young people that has been expressed here in Luxembourg and through the Structured Dialogue.

Johanna Nyman, President of the European Youth Forum

EU Structured Dialogue and indeed the National Youth Strategy is, whether directly or indirectly, about building trust and it is about giving young people a platform for their voices to be heard. The value lies not only in creating policies that truly focus on youth needs and concerns but makes way for wiser policy making through cooperation between different stakeholders.

Joseph Munnelly, Irish Delegate at the EU Youth Conference in Luxembourg