



## **8th Cycle of EU Youth Dialogue (2020-2021)**

### **Space and Participation For All: National Report on Consultations for Ireland**



## National Youth Council of Ireland

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) is the representative body for voluntary youth organisations in Ireland. We use our collective experience to act on issues that impact on young people.

This report details the finding of the EU Youth Dialogue process in Ireland 2020 - 2021. In Ireland, the EU Youth Dialogue is delivered by the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) through the Young Voices programme. The EU Youth Dialogue process is known as Young Voices in Ireland.

## Acknowledgements

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## Index



Section 1: Introduction.....	3
Section 2: Breakdown of Participants.....	6
Section 3: Findings of Consultations on Guiding Questions.....	10

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Gender of young people.....	6
Figure 2: Age of young people.....	6
Figure 3: Young people with a disability.....	7
Figure 4: Ethnicity of young people.....	7
Figure 5: Religion of young people.....	8
Figure 6: Sexuality of young people.....	8
Figure 7: Young people living in rural/urban areas.....	9
Figure 8: Young people in education and employment.....	9

## Section 1: Introduction

### About this report



This report details the finding of the EU Youth Dialogue process in Ireland 2020 - 2021. In Ireland, the EU Youth Dialogue is delivered by the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) through the Young Voices programme. The EU Youth Dialogue process is known as Young Voices in Ireland.

## Background

EU Youth Dialogue is the European participatory process which, through cycles of 18 months over a priority topic, supports the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy and ensures the involvement of young people in the decision-making process in the field of youth in Europe through an articulated dialogue between young people and decision-makers.

The 8th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue runs from the 1st of July 2020 to 31st December 2021 under the Trio Presidency of Germany - Portugal - Slovenia. Building on the experience of previous cycles and setting the path for the following ones, this cycle aimed to:

- Strengthen the EU Youth Dialogue as a space for meaningful participation of young people in decision-making processes, as well as in the monitoring and evaluation of youth-related policies;
- Contribute to the mainstreaming and multi-level and cross-sectoral implementation of the European Youth Goals which were developed by young people during the 6th cycle of the Structured Dialogue; increasing the visibility of the Youth Goals;
- Foster multi-level and multi-stakeholder cooperation from local to European level in order to make the process more inclusive, visible and sustainable so that its outcomes can encapsulate the expectations of all young people living in Europe.

## Topic and context

The topic of the 8th cycle was Youth Goal #9 “Space and Participation for All” under the title “Europe for YOUTH - YOUTH for Europe: Space for Democracy and Participation”. The aim of the process was to develop concrete recommendations on how to implement this Youth Goal at the European, national, regional and local levels. During the implementation phase of the cycle, these recommendations will be put into practice.

Democracy, pluralism and active citizenship are fundamental values of the European Union. They include the values of freedom of expression and tolerance and aim for the inclusion of all European citizens. But democracy is not to be taken for granted and needs to be preserved and fostered constantly, especially in challenging times such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Young people's active and critical citizenship, their sense of initiative and creative power are essential for a vibrant European democracy. Youth organisations, cultures and youth movements have a formative influence on political and societal developments as we can see, for example, through their demand for climate action.

In order to make this positive contribution, young people need spaces where they can practice day-to-day democratic principles (such as openness, acceptance of other people's opinions, critical thinking, recognition of diversity, negotiation of solution, reflection of own experiences), can develop a sense of self-efficacy, act on their own initiative and co-create all aspects of their life (i.e. family, leisure time, education, employment and entrepreneurship, environment, health, culture, mobility, digital sphere, politics, society).

At the same time, it is imperative to translate this engagement in alternative spaces into meaningful influence in decision and policy making since there are still barriers hindering young people from fully participating. Thus, and taking stock of the EU Youth Dialogue as a space for participation, it is believed that it should have a leading role in tackling these challenges and set the path for others to follow. Having the targets of the Youth Goal #9 as the guiding framework, this Cycle focuses on improving mechanisms for youth participation and creating (new) spaces for young people's participation in all areas of society.

### **National Working Group**

National Working Groups (NWGs) operate at a national level to organise and coordinate EU Youth Dialogue with young people. NWGs bring together decision makers in the field of youth and other policy fields, representatives of youth civil society, experts and practitioners, e.g. youth workers, researchers. NYCI has a lead role for Youth Dialogue in Ireland. Other NWG members include:

- 3 EU Youth Conference delegates (youth representatives)

- 1 government representative from the Department of Children
- 1 national agency representative from Léargas
- 1 EU Youth Dialogue lead Facilitator
- 1 Research representative
- 1 National Youth Council representative

### **Methodology**

The methodologies used in Youth Dialogue consultations in Ireland were:

#### **Training for youth workers:**

- An online training course was conducted by the NYCI with youth workers and youth leaders to engage the young people they work with in the Youth Dialogue process.

#### **Three online national Youth Dialogue events:**

- The online Youth Dialogue events were run using the Zoom video conferencing platform.
- Breakout rooms were used in Zoom with smaller groups of young people to discuss individual guiding questions.
- The Padlet app was used to gather information from young people on individual guiding questions.
- The Mentimeter app was also used to get immediate feedback from young people.

#### **In-depth qualitative interviews with young people:**

- In-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted by the NYCI on the theme of 'space and participation for all' with 23 young people who had participated in Youth Dialogue in Ireland in recent years.
- These interviews were also part of a wider evaluation of the EU Youth Dialogue process in Ireland conducted by the NYCI. For more information see:

<https://www.youth.ie/documents/space-and-participation-for-all-report-draft/>

#### **Participatory visual methods:**

- A film/photography competition called "Space & Participation for All" was run by NYCI as part of the participatory visual methods.

- Young people and youth organisations were asked to create a photograph or a film that portrays their experience of youth participation.
- Seven young people entered the film/photography competition.
- The main themes from the films/photographs were included as part of the responses to the guiding questions. See <https://www.youth.ie/programmes/projects-initiatives/young-voices/film-photography-competition/> for the two videos.

### Face-to-face Youth Dialogue events

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, no face-to-face Youth Dialogue events were held in this cycle.

## Section 2: Breakdown of Participants

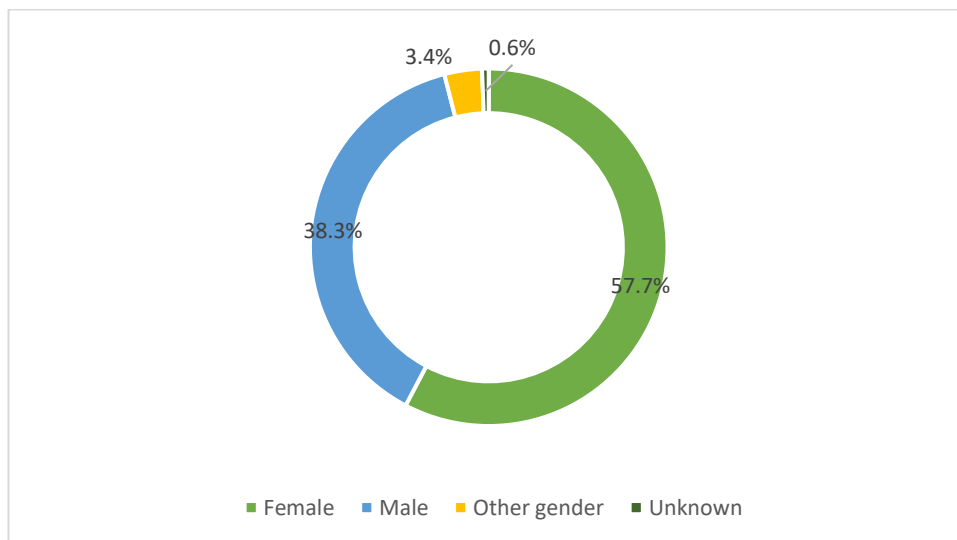
### Number of participants

A total of 175 young people participated in the 2020-2021 Youth Dialogue process in Ireland.

### Gender

In terms of gender, 101 (57.7%) participants were female, 67 (38.3%) were male, six (3.4%) participants identified as 'other gender' and one (0.6%) young person did not disclose their gender (see figure 1 below).

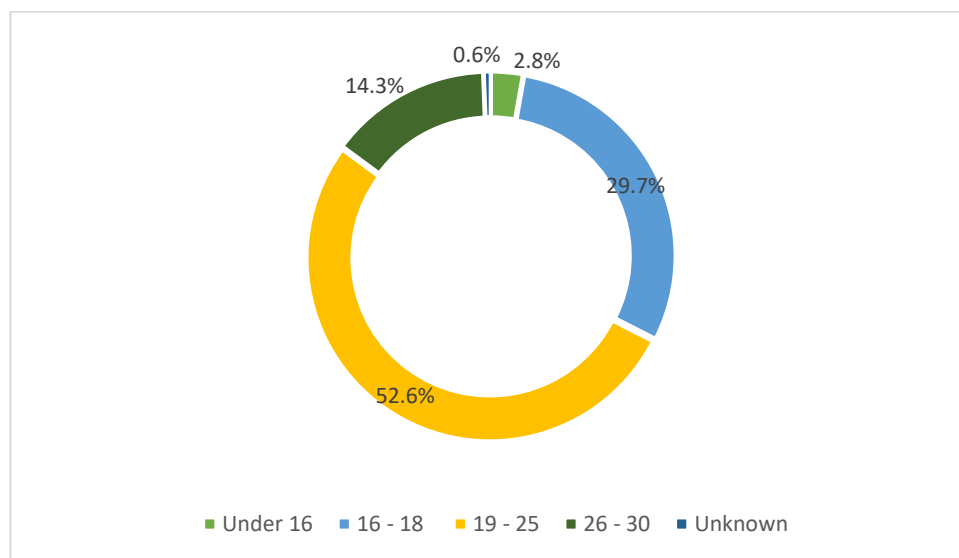
**Figure 1: Gender of young people**



### Age

As regards the age of young people who participated, five (2.8%) were aged under 16 years, 52 (29.7%) were aged 16-18 years, 92 (52.6%) were aged 19-25 years, 25 (14.3%) were aged 26 – 30 years and one (0.6%) young person did not disclose their age (see figure 2 below).

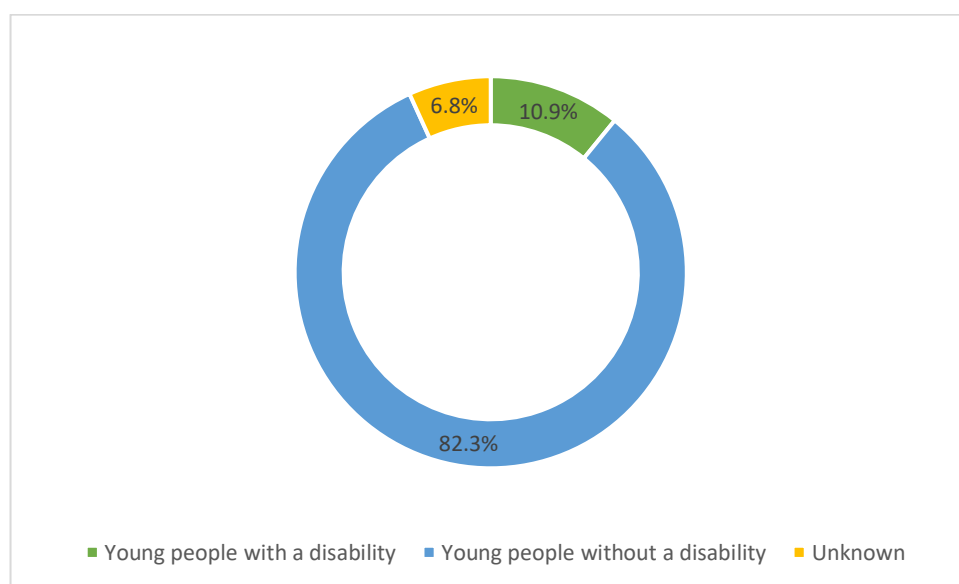
**Figure 2: Age of young people**



## Disability

Of the young people who participated, 19 (10.9%) identified as having a disability, 144 (82.3%) identified as not having a disability and 12 (6.8%) young people did not disclose this information (see figure 3 below).

**Figure 3: Young people with a disability**

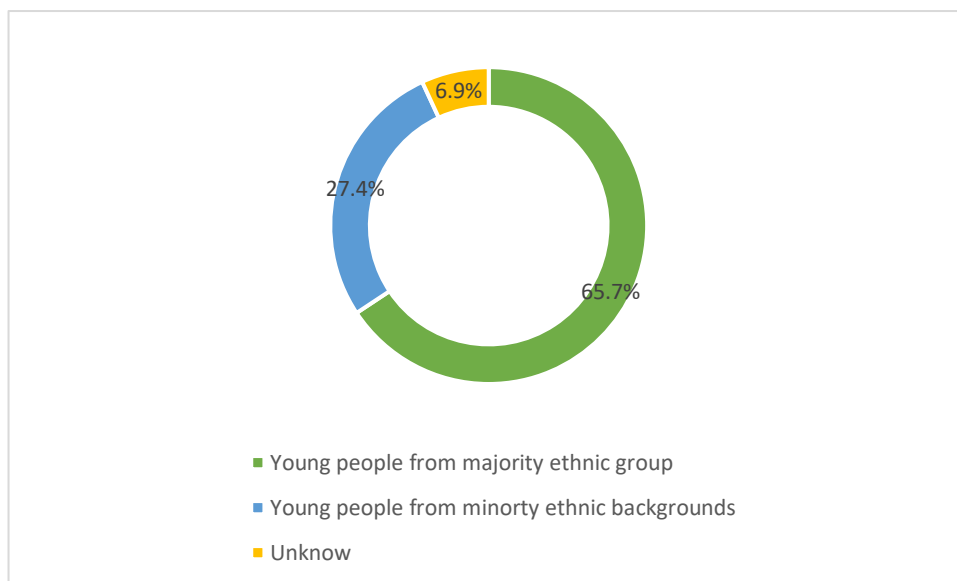




## Ethnicity

In relation to ethnicity, 115 (65.7%) young people were from the majority ethnic group, 48 (27.4%) were from minority ethnic backgrounds and 12 (6.9%) young people did not disclose their ethnicity (see figure 4 below).

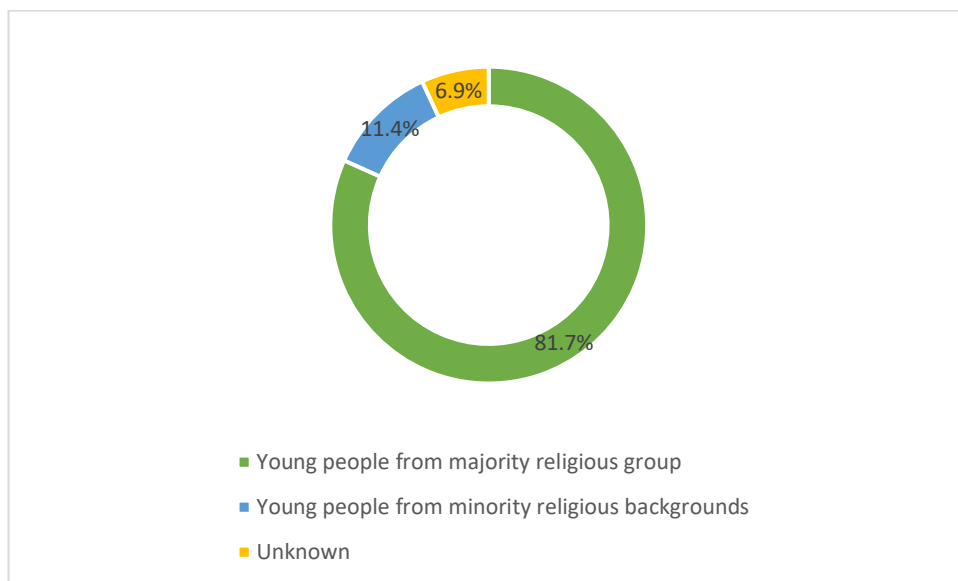
**Figure 4: Ethnicity of young people**



## Religion

In terms of religion, 143 (81.7%) young people were from the majority religious group, 20 (11.4%) young people were from minority religious backgrounds and 12 (6.9%) young people did not disclose their religious background (see figure 5 below).

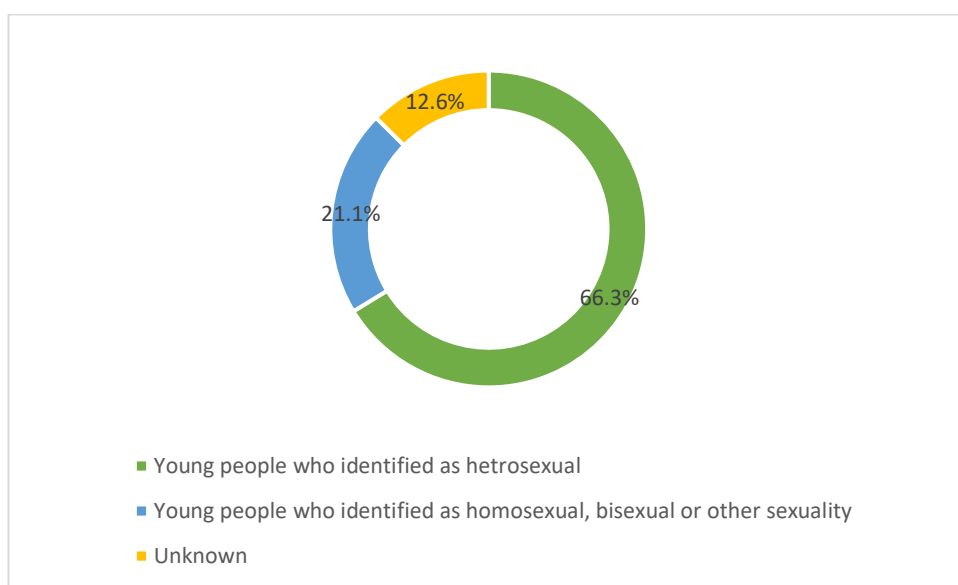
**Figure 5: Religion of young people**



## Sexuality

With regard to sexuality, 116 (66.3%) young people identified as heterosexual, 37 (21.1%) young people identified as homosexual, bisexual or other sexuality and 22 (12.6%) young people did not disclose their sexuality (see figure 6 below).

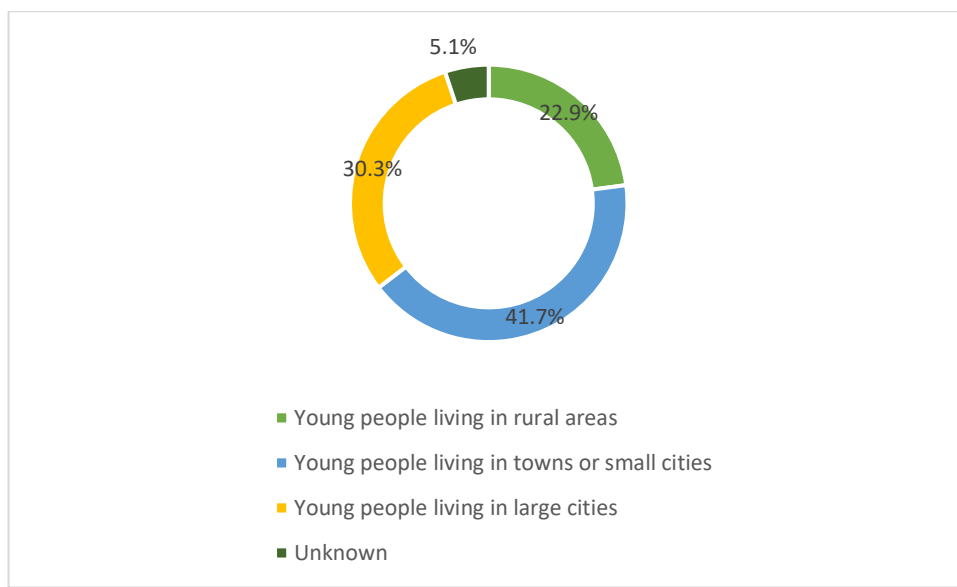
**Figure 6: Sexuality of young people**



## Young people living in rural/urban areas

As can be seen from figure 7 below, a total of 40 (22.9%) young people were living in rural areas, 73 (41.7%) young people were living in towns or small cities, 53 (30.3%) young people were living in large cities and nine (5.1%) young people did not disclose this information (see figure 7 below).

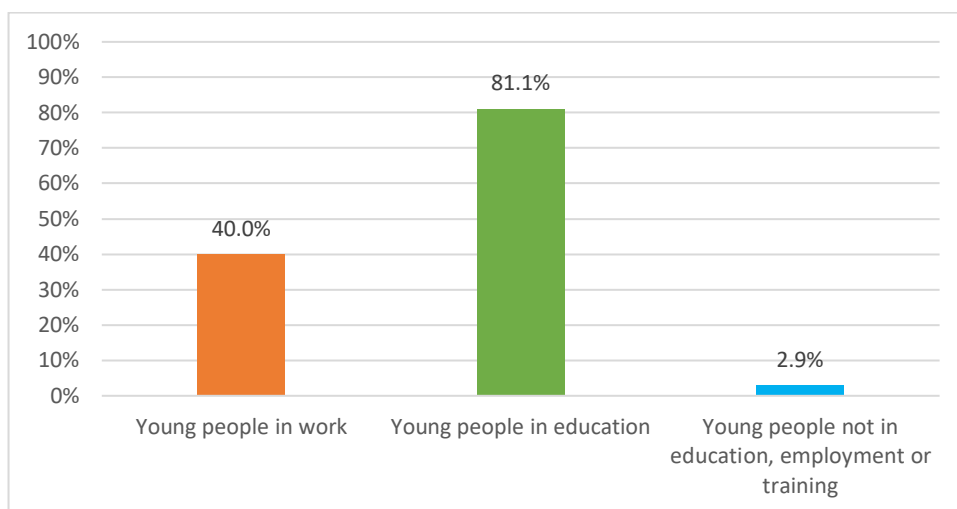
**Figure 7: Young people living in rural/urban areas**



### Education and employment

As regards education and employment, 70 (40%) young people stated they were in work, 142 (81.1%) young people were in education and five (2.9%) young people were not in education, employment or training. It should be noted, some young people state they were both in education and employment, therefore the totals are more than 100%.

**Figure 8: Young people in education and employment**



### Section 3: Findings of Consultations on Guiding Questions

#### Introduction

This section of the report details the findings of consultations on the guiding questions on the targets of the Youth Goal 9, Space and participation for All, and measures for their implementation that were discussed by young people in the EU Youth Dialogue in Ireland.

**Youth Goal 9 Target:** Ensure young people can adequately influence all areas of society and all parts of the decision-making processes, from agenda setting to implementation, monitoring and evaluation through youth-friendly and accessible mechanisms and structures, ensuring that policies respond to the needs of young people.

**Guiding question 1:** What measures/actions can be implemented to ensure young people influence policy and decision making at all levels?

#### Schools:

- Educate young people on politics at local, national and international level.
- Develop curriculums in schools on how to influence policy and decision making, e.g. modules in the Transition Year Programme, further develop Civics Social Political Education (CSPE) curriculum.
- Ensure young people have resources, tools and language that support them to influence policy and decision-making.

- Teachers should always treat young people with respect and ask their opinions.
- Young people should be consulted and included in decision-making processes about their education and the reopening of schools due to Covid-19.

➤ *“Education, equip young people with the tools and language to seek change.”*

#### Youth work:

- Ensure youth workers are well educated and trained so they can build up trust and relationships with young people to help them find their voice.
  - Ensure youth work is valued as a career and is adequately resourced.
  - Youth workers should always listen to the voice of young people, treat young people with respect and ask young people their opinions.
  - Ensure youth work services are equally accessible to all young people in rural and urban areas.
- *“Teachers and youth workers, they need to treat young people with respect and always ask young people for their opinions.”*

#### Local and national level:

- Give young people a platform to have a voice.
- Encourage all young people to get involved in participation processes and activist groups and reassure them they “don’t need to know it all”.
- Young people should be supported to take campaigns/online petitions through to the level of decision-makers.
- Enable young people to have dialogues with policy makers.
- Consult with young people and ensure they have an input into the development of policies.
- Young people’s opinions should be sought from the outset of a policy and decision-making process and not just at the end.
- Issues should be brought from a local to a national level in relation to policy and decision-making.
- Young people should be provided with feedback on issues they have engaged with.
- Help young people to track the journey of policy ideas, e.g. see where ideas start and end up.
- Present politics to young people as an opportunity to make a change.

- Decision-makers should view young people as important cohorts to consult with even if they are not current voters.
  - Young people from all areas, e.g. rural and urban areas, should have equal opportunities to influence policy and decision-making.
  - Young people should be supported by older generations to have confidence to participate in debates.
  - Present policy makers and politicians as being equal to young people so they have the confidence to interact with them and empower young people to get involved in politics.
  - Invite young people to the Dáil.
  - Ensure politicians are accountable to the public, e.g. recording and documenting values etc.
- *“It's good to track the journey of an idea. Seeing that an idea started somewhere and ended up in another place is cool.”*

#### **Voting:**

- Encourage young people to register to vote before elections.
- Make voting as accessible as possible for young people.

#### **Social media:**

- Political events such as local council meetings should be easy for young people to access e.g. through social media.
- Target young people through social media with messages on how to have their voices heard and influence policy and decision-making.
- Recognise young people's capacity to use social media, engage online, organise events/campaigns etc. online.
- Recognise that young people can use their power in a positive manner online, e.g. campaigns like Fridays for Future, Black Lives Matter.
- Support young people to mobilise behind online campaigns.

- *“Campaigns like Friday for Future, Education funding, Black Lives Matter are good examples of young people claiming their power. Getting young people to mobilise behind online campaigns.”*

## EU Youth Dialogue

- Facilitated spaces such as Youth Dialogue create opportunities for young people to negotiate and connect with others.
- Spaces such as Youth Dialogue help young people to develop specific skills, knowledge and confidence.
- Spaces such as Youth Dialogue allow young people to see themselves as political constituents.
- Youth Dialogue highlights the importance of democratising political participation, having tools and fora of participation that facilitate empowerment and feel relevant to the lives of young people.
- Processes such as Youth Dialogue which run over prolonged periods of time work well in terms of long-term meaningful engagement of young people in participation processes.
- Long-term engagement and witnessing of outcomes as a result of participation processes can be very powerful for young people.
- Youth Dialogue provides opportunities for young people from all backgrounds to connect with other young people from Europe and build their social and political capital.
- The Youth Dialogue process can act as a model for engagement in other participative processes, e.g. it has supported young people to transfer some participative practices into other fora and impacted other democratic spaces.
- The Youth Dialogue process supports the emergence of a youth voice in other issues such as climate change.
- For youth participation to be effective, meaningful, and sustainable, it needs to be accepted as a process that requires time to support the development of personal and collective empowerment processes.
- There must be explicit recognition that identifies young people as essential and necessary voices in decision making processes. The Youth Dialogue model provides meaningful and varied opportunities for young people to develop their skills and confidence as they make their own decisions and choices to participate in decision making processes.

### Diverse voices:

- Youth Dialogue can create a space for young people from ethnic minorities to address issues such as racism and to take action on these issues.
  - Processes such as Youth Dialogue are empowering for young people with disabilities as they provide the opportunity to influence policy directly.
- *“The big factor for me was the discussions that we would have, have an impact on a governmental level. And that’s huge. I suppose, from my point of view and in the situation as somebody who has a disability, I suppose, I feel like this has grown from my involvement with Young Voices and I’ve become aware that I am in a position that I can speak up for those that can’t speak up for themselves.”*

**Youth Goal 9 Target:** Ensure equal access to everyday decision making for all young people from different backgrounds.

**Guiding question 2:** What actions/measures should be implemented to ensure young people from different backgrounds have access to decision making processes?

Implementations of the following actions/measures were suggested to ensure young people from different backgrounds have access to decision making processes:

### Active participation



- Ensure the active participation of young people from diverse backgrounds in decision-making processes, e.g. make sure young people from different backgrounds are in the same room as decision-makers.
  - Actively include young people living in different spaces in decision-making processes, e.g. young people from ethnic minority backgrounds living in Direct Provision.
  - Use social media to target young people from different backgrounds to get involved in participation.
- *“Actively include groups (of young people) that represent groups from each background.”*

### **Seldom-heard young people**

- Ensure young people from backgrounds such as the Traveller community, refugees, socio-economically disadvantaged young people are included in decision-making in Ireland.
  - Consider what specific groups of young people from different backgrounds are currently not represented in decision-making processes.
- *Consider what minorities are not represented in Ireland.”*

### **Spaces**

- Ensure young people from different backgrounds have safe and appropriate spaces to participate in decision-making processes.
  - Young people from socio-economically disadvantaged areas need spaces in their communities to engage in participation.
  - Politicians need to meet young people from socio-economically disadvantaged areas half way, e.g. in their spaces.
- *“Ensuring spaces are safe so young people can express their opinions.”*

### **Engagement in schools**

- Engage with young people from different backgrounds in schools to encourage participation in decision-making processes.

- Promote voting in the education curriculum.

### Online engagement

- Use creative online tools to ensure they are accessible to young people from all backgrounds, e.g. Zoom is not accessible for deaf people.

### Language

- Use language that is accessible and easy to understand for young people from different backgrounds, without diluting topics.
- Use inclusive language in documentation and consultations with young people.
- Develop documentation in different languages, e.g. Irish language.

➤ *“Make language accessible. Don't make it sound difficult. This makes language easy to understand.”*

### Ability/disability

- Acknowledge young people from different backgrounds have different abilities.
- Respond to and support young people who face obstacles to participate in decision-making, e.g. young people with disabilities.

### Community role models

- Encourage role models in communities to work with and provide additional support to young people from different backgrounds.
- *“Additional supports from positive role models from within their own community (can't see it, can't be it).”*

### Role of politicians and decision-makers

- Encourage politicians and decision-makers to work closely with people from diverse communities, particularly young people.
- Ensure policies are 'equality proofed'.

## Voting

- Promote voting to young people from different backgrounds

## Participation networks

- Encourage young people from different backgrounds to engage in local participation networks, e.g. Public Participation Networks (PPN), local council disability forums.

## Promote diversity

- Promote diversity across all of society to ensure young people from different backgrounds are included in decision-making processes.

## Covid-19 issues

- Consider how young people from different backgrounds are impacted differently by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Ensure young people from different backgrounds have equal access to technology particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, e.g. computers, devices, Wi-fi.

➤ *“Consider people's backgrounds, especially in the pandemic.”*

## Youth Dialogue

- Processes such as Youth Dialogue provide a safe space for young people from different backgrounds to discuss issues from different perspectives to benefit society.
- Supporting young people from minority identities to influence decision making spaces is critical to participative democracy and requires inclusive and innovative models of participation. This includes bespoke and targeted training and skills development.
- Where the Youth Dialogue process has supported the emergence of youth as a political constituency, this needs ongoing support to ensure that it continues to grow and to enable involvement of children and young people with fewer opportunities, including those who are vulnerable or affected by discrimination, including multiple discrimination.

## Diverse voices:

- Youth Dialogue can help bring forward minority voices as it provides a place where young people from all backgrounds feel welcome and confident to contribute.
  - A young person from a minority ethnic background highlighted how having access to spaces with youth decision makers helped him to understand his own capacity to contribute to spaces of negotiation.
  - Involvement and participation processes such as Youth Dialogue can act as an awakening to politics for young people from different backgrounds, e.g. young people from ethnic minority groups, young people with disabilities, young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
  - Long-term engagement in participation processes such as Youth Dialogue can increase the confidence and voice of young people from different backgrounds.
  - Youth Dialogue has helped young people from minority ethnic backgrounds to feel a sense of belonging and identity through the process.
  - Processes such as EU Dialogue can provide safe spaces for young people from ethnic minority backgrounds to have their voices heard and voice their opinions on political issues.
  - A young person with a disability who was supported to participate in the Youth Dialogue process reported that it helped improve their personal development and sense of independence.
- *“I had just come out as an LGBT person and I was kind of looking at getting more involved in kind of youth voice issues. You know, it was absolutely brilliant making my voice heard. No one was putting words in my mouth. And it just felt like a very kind of professional, essentially, it didn’t feel like ‘welcome young people’, it was like, ‘you are people, you are people now and we will listen to you now.’ So, it was brilliant.”*
- *“When I came in, I saw my age group. So fellow girls. I saw afro hair. I saw black skin. So, it was like, I came in, I didn’t feel like I was with older people. It didn’t feel like I was younger people. I just saw my age. And I saw my gender so that made me feel comfortable and I wanted to be part of it.”*

### Youth Goal 9 Target:

Increase youth participation and thus equal representation in the electoral process as well as in elected bodies and other decision-making organs at all levels of society.

**Guiding question 3:** What measures/actions can be implemented to increase young people's representation in electoral bodies?

### Education

- Educate young people in schools on citizenship, voting, electoral bodies, representatives and politicians etc.
  - Improve the current Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) curriculum.
  - Increase young people's interest in social and economic issues.
- *"Ongoing cycle - young people don't vote then have no representation and cycle goes on. Having education around these issues- e.g. how voting works, who are our representatives beyond CSPE in Secondary School."*

### Creative methods of participation

- Engage young people in new and creative ways to discuss topics relevant to increasing their participation in electoral bodies, e.g. the arts, film making activities.
  - Make videos to start conversations with young people on various topics around participation in electoral bodies.
- *"Deliver it through a practical/hands on approach such as arts/ film-making and steam as hard to engage young people (not mainstream/ targeted)."*

### Voting

- Address barriers to voting for young people, e.g. earlier voter age.
- Lower the voting age in Ireland to 16 years of age.

- Ensure voting is accessible to young people from all backgrounds.
- While many young people have become more politically active, e.g. through campaigns such as Black Lives Matter, they may not vote as they don't feel represented by current politicians.
- Break the cycle of young people not engaging in voting, not being represented on electoral bodies.
- Parents should help motivate young people to vote.

➤ *"The legal age to vote has to be lowered for a start."*

### Participation spaces

- Create more informal spaces for young people to engage in participation.

### Support young politicians

- Increase the number of young politicians in Ireland.
- Ensure young people who run for office are protected, e.g. from online abuse.

➤ *"Have to look at ways to protect young people who run for office, huge turn off is online attacks."*

### Participation at a local level

- Promote engagement of young people in their local communities.
- Encourage better engagement between county councils and young people at local level.
- Tackle barriers to participation for young people in local electoral bodies.

➤ *"Lack of engagement with young people in local county councils."*

### Representation of young people on electoral bodies

- Ensure young people are represented at higher levels in electoral bodies, institutions etc.
- Ensure young people's representation on electoral bodies is not tokenistic.
- Ensure electoral bodies and spaces are ethical, e.g. no nepotism.
- Ensure young people on electoral bodies are representative of all young people in a society.

- Young people who don't have connections/opportunities to engage in electoral bodies need additional support.
  - The Covid-19 pandemic has increased accessibility to electoral bodies through young people engaging in online platforms etc. for young people who have access to technology and the internet.
- *"'Tick box' process rather than genuine desire for young people to involved."*

### Practical examples

- Provide young people with practical experience of politics.
  - Show young people examples of practical projects by other young people to inspire them.
- *"Seeing it to believe it - Practical projects and seeing other young people inspiring others."*

### Participation of young people in rural areas

- Young people in rural areas should be able to access facilities, transport and be able to identify electoral boundaries to engage in electoral bodies.
  - Public transport for young people in rural areas is essential for them to engage in electoral bodies, attend political events etc.
  - Engaging in electoral bodies in large rural areas/constituencies can be difficult so using online platforms could be easier to engage with.
- *"For example, in Kerry, the county is one constituency so engagement with politicians can be more difficult. Online platforms make that easier."*

### Online participation

- Politicians and decision-makers should approach young people in their spaces, e.g. online.

### Role models

- Young people from different backgrounds, e.g. LGBTI+ young people, young people from ethnic minorities, young people with disabilities, should have role models in public life that they can relate to.
- *“For the LGBTQ community it is important to see role models in public life. I am sure that is the same for young people of colour and disability, etc.”*

### Role of politicians, policy and decision-makers

- Political parties, policy and decision-makers at all levels needs to reach out to young people, going beyond the obvious groups, places and representatives to hear directly from young people, e.g. young people in rural areas.
  - Policy and decision-makers should utilise youth organisations to lift young people’s voices.
  - Policy and decision-makers need to think and seek views beyond the youth wings of political parties and try and open up wider channels for engaging and hearing from more diverse young people.
  - Politicians should listen to young people and ensure engagement is not tokenistic.
  - Ensure young people are not talked down to by politicians to encourage higher voting rates.
  - Young people should be polled to find out their needs and interests and formulate information/statistics that politicians can understand and take notice of.
  - There should be a platform that displays the views of candidates running for election so young people who are voting know who they are voting for, what party they are from and what their options are, e.g. similar to the platform ‘A Starting Point’ in the US ([www.astartingpoint.com](http://www.astartingpoint.com)).
- *“The internet makes things a bit more accessible but politicians, policy and decision-makers should be coming to us - the young people.”*

### Youth Dialogue

- Structures such as Young Voices and Comhairle na nÓg (child and youth councils) are needed to provide spaces for young people to engage and ‘see the bigger picture’.



- Youth Dialogue as a model of youth participation needs to be linked to existing and emerging platforms of representation. For example, the establishment of Youth Assemblies called for in the programme for government in Ireland.

### **Diverse voices**

- A young person with a disability suggested young people with disabilities should be supported to participate in decision-making processes, e.g. practical supports such as transport.

### **Youth Goal 9 Target:**

Provide youth-led physical facilities and infrastructures called youth spaces defined by being autonomous, open and safe, accessible to all, offering professional support for development and ensuring opportunities for youth participation.

**Guiding question 4:** What kind of physical facilities and infrastructures should be available to young people and what actions/measures should be taken to ensure that they are autonomous, open, safe and accessible?

### **Physical facilities and infrastructures**

The following physical facilities and infrastructures were identified that should be available to young people:

- Multipurpose youth facilities for all young people.
- Spaces for young people just to hang out.

- Shared spaces for young people in the community, e.g. dual purpose facility programme where schools and community co-share spaces.
- *“We have a dual purpose facility programme in operation at present where the community and school co-share some spaces.”*

### **Actions and measures**

The following actions/measures were suggested to ensure that physical facilities/infrastructures are autonomous, open, safe and accessible:

- Youth facilities and youth clubs should be youth-led, e.g. run by young people.
- Youth facilities and youth clubs should be designed by young people for young people.
- Run events that are developed, led and promoted by young people to engage young people and encourage them to attend facilities.
- Empower young people so they can help design, run and promote youth facilities and infrastructures, e.g. youth workers supporting young people.
- Ensure young people are able to access facilities that are available.
- Ensure there is adequate funding for youth facilities and youth clubs.
- Ensure youth facilities and youth clubs are properly promoted to young people so they are aware of their existence.
- Ensure youth facilities and youth clubs are promoted as a positive resource for young people.
- Ensure youth leaders are representative of all young people, e.g. ethnic minority groups.
- Ensure facilities don't have a cost associated with them so as not to exclude certain groups of young people.
- Ensure there is autonomy in terms of how young people operate within youth spaces.
- Youth work services should not be privatised or run by for profit providers to ensure the needs of young people are placed above profits etc.
- While virtual spaces have certain benefits, physical spaces created by processes such as EU Youth Dialogue are very important for young people to engage with each other and channel their voices.

- *“Led/run via young people – Empowerment, empower the young people to believe in themselves that they can do this. If they believe in themselves they will be able to take action.”*
- *“Youth clubs may be in your area but you may not know, there is sometimes a lack of presentation/promotion of the youth clubs etc.”*

### **Youth Goal 9 Target:**

Ensure safe virtual youth spaces are accessible to every young person which provide access to information and services as well as ensure opportunities for youth participation.

**Guiding question 5:** How can virtual spaces and tools be used to increase young people's participation?

The following suggestions were made in terms of how virtual spaces and tools can be used to increase young people's participation:

#### Online access/digital divide

- Ensure all young people have good access to the internet.
  - The government should create digital access for all citizens.
  - Ensure those with additional needs are able to access online spaces.
  - Be aware of the technological divide which exists between young people who have access to technology and the internet and those who do not.
  - Some young people from minority backgrounds may not have the same opportunities to engage in online participation, e.g. young people from the Traveller Community.
  - Some young people are disengaged from online spaces and youth work services.
- *“Guarantee better access to the internet, make sure it is accessible to people with a variety of needs and different needs.”*

#### Creative and engaging online spaces

- Create engaging online spaces for young people to come together to share ideas.
  - Use a variety of virtual spaces and tools for young people to increase participation, e.g. Google meet, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Slack.
  - Social media, apps and online gaming can be used to engage young people in virtual spaces for youth participation.
  - Use a combination of face to face and online participation to engage with young people.
- *“Virtual space can increase the inclusion, if they can't engage face to face. Instagram and Facebook or engage through games/apps/gaming.”*

#### Online safety education

- Ensure young people are educated in relation to online safety and security.
- Organise events that are of high standards in terms of online safety.

- Online spaces are similar to real life spaces, therefore there should be a focus on communication and codes of conduct, e.g. perspectives and opinions are welcome but there is an understanding that hate speech/verbal abuse is not acceptable.
- *“Make sure it is safe for them (young people) to use by teaching them how to be safe in a virtual space, e.g. FB TIK TOK, Insta etc.”*

### Online/technology training

- Provide fun training for young people who are not skilled in using technology to help them use it in relevant and meaningful ways.
- Personal development opportunities and spaces should be made accessible to young people to learn how to get to the core of issues.
- *“I think that fun training could help with those who are not skilled in technology, and using technology in relevant and meaningful ways.”*

### Positive benefits of online participation

- Virtual spaces can increase inclusion among young people in participation if they cannot engage face to face.
- Promote the positive aspects of virtual participation, e.g. young people from all geographical locations can engage, low cost, no transport needed etc.
- The unstructured nature of the virtual world can be a positive environment for young people.
- Online spaces and tools should be used to address important issues such as mental health and climate change.
- *“Virtual space can increase the inclusion of young people, if they can't engage face to face.”*

### Negative impacts of online engagement

- Technology can cause anxiety and unease for some young people.
- Youth workers should engage in outreach to encourage young people from different backgrounds to engage in online spaces and tools.

- Youth workers should educate and encourage young people to engage in online spaces and tools for youth participation
- Ensure online spaces for youth participation are not just ‘talking shops’ but are forums for clear actions, policy changes etc.

➤ *“Some young people might find the tech anxious.”*

### **Role of policy and decision-makers**

- National and international policy makers should engage more with young people in virtual spaces using virtual tools.

### **Funding**

- More funding should be provided for online spaces and tools to engage young people in participation in decision-making.

### Youth Goal 9 Target:

Ensure sustainable funding, common recognition and development of quality youth work in order to strengthen youth organisations and their role in inclusion, participation and non-formal education.

**Guiding question 6:** What measures/actions should be taken to smart youth work so it appropriately supports young people's participation?

### Digital divide

- There is a digital divide in terms of young people's access to technology and the internet to access services/resources online, e.g. young people living in rural areas, young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
  - Young people with disabilities face barriers to access online consultations, e.g. young people who are deaf or blind may not have resources such as an interpreter.
- *"There is a gap for young people to be involved online at the moment, e.g. if they don't have internet or data plans. If they have disabilities, e.g. deaf or blind they may not have the resources to be part of an online consultation, e.g. to have a interpreter."*

### Training

- Be aware that not all young people have the same tech skills.
  - Fun training would help young people who are not skilled to use technology.
- *"Bring awareness that everyone tech skills are not the same even if people are the same age."*

### Engagement with young people

- It is very important to ensure young people are engaged from the beginning to the end of a programme/process, e.g. early engagement to final outcomes so they feel their voice is being heard and their suggestions are valued and followed through.

### Opportunities for participation

- Young people want to be active citizens but the current systems don't allow for this to happen.
- There is a need for different actions and actors to talk and communicate together to support participation.
- There should be more opportunities for e-participation among young people.
- Young people's expertise and knowledge should be recognised by society.
- Young people should get involved in political parties or youth political groups.

### Online safety and education

- Online safety is very important in the context of smart youth work.
- Youth workers should be trained in terms of online safety, online training, up to date on social media etc.
- Ensure youth workers are trained in online and digital wellbeing.
- Young people should be educated/supported about how to discuss controversial topics, how to mainstream points etc.

➤ *"Teaching young people how to stay safe on the internet."*

### Smart youth work

- The interpersonal relationship between young people and youth workers is very important and at the core of supporting participation.
- Youth workers can play an important role as a mediator in young people's lives.
- Listening to young people is very important in terms of smart youth work.
- Youth workers should support young people to lead with regard to youth work, youth issues etc.
- Youth workers should be understanding and non-judgemental of young people.
- Youth workers should have good communication skills, soft skills such as empathy and vulnerability as well as digital communication skills.
- Give youth workers online toolkits and resources to conduct smart youth work.



- Ensure youth workers and teachers have good Wi-Fi connections.
  - Smart youth work can be more challenging for youth workers, e.g. more tiring running sessions on Zoom.
  - Smart youth work can be different and more challenging than face-to-face interactions between youth workers and young people, e.g. youth workers may have to try harder to keep interactions with young people going.
  - Youth workers could get burnt out from smart youth work.
- *“Youth workers need to improve general communication skills, and soft skills such as empathy and vulnerability, and be skilled in any digital communication tools that exist.”*

### Youth spaces

- Looking at the spaces where young people are currently at is vital for smart youth work.
  - There should be more youth only and youth-led spaces so young people feel comfortable discussing controversial topics.
  - Youth work services should create safe spaces for debating all aspects of topics.
- *“More youth only and youth led spaces. So young people can be comfortable to discuss controversial topics.”*

### Youth forums

- Creating a youth forum where young people can explore and discuss ideas among themselves could work well.
- *“Via having a youth forum they (young people) can bounce ideas off of themselves.”*

### Promotion of youth work services

- Young people should be made more aware of youth services they can access, especially due to isolation related to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Use of social media campaigns to engage young people in smart youth work.
- Highlight areas in youth work that are less known.

- Run media campaigns in mainstream media to highlight smart youth work.

➤ *“I think a press/media campaign for mainstream media would be great.”*

### Funding/resources

- More funding is needed of smart youth work, e.g. policies can be developed but they need to be implemented better through more funding.
  - Ensure youth workers and teachers have funding for adequate information technology and how to use it.
  - Youth groups should contact, connect, talk, campaign politicians to get support to fund smart youth work etc.
  - Ensure initiatives that are funded are relevant to young people to secure the best impacts.
  - Youth work grants should be accessible and easy to apply for.
  - Youth work is a critical consciousness builder that supports engagement with democratic processes. This requires ongoing resource support.
  - Youth participation models need ongoing commitment in terms of time and resources in order to explicitly recognise the evolving capacities of young people and their right to influence matters affecting them.
  - Time and resources are required to build specific capacities and skills to support developing organisational knowledge and insight on how to influence decision making structures.
- *“Pushing for Funding. We can make policies, but we need to implement them better. This can be done by more funding.”*

### Social media

- Meet young people where they are at in terms of social media before they move onto the next platform.
- Be aware that youth organisations are constantly ‘playing catch up’ in terms of young people’s social media use.
- Youth organisations should ensure all their social media is up to date.

- All young people know how to use social media but not all young people know how to engage with social media, e.g. content on social media.
- *“Equip youth workers with training and being update on social media.”*

### **Youth Goal 9 Target:**

Provide youth-friendly, relevant, comprehensive information, also developed by and with young people, in order to enable youth participation.

**Guiding question 7:** What actions/measures can be implemented to ensure young people have access to youth-friendly, relevant and comprehensive information to participate in decision making processes and society at large?

### **Youth-friendly and inclusive language/information**

- Ensure information and messaging is aimed at a wide range of young people.
- Information and content aimed at young people should be visually appealing and ‘snackable’.
- Use language that is accessible and easy to understand for young people from different backgrounds, without diluting topics.
- Use inclusive language in documentation and consultations with young people.
- Develop documentation in different languages, e.g. Irish language.

- Be aware that some young people may need additional support to access information, e.g. young people who are deaf/blind.
- Simplify political consultations/high level debates to ensure they are accessible to all young people.
- There can be stigma related to talking about politics, e.g. upcoming laws, therefore accurate information about the passing of new laws etc. should be provided to young people by youth work organisations.

➤ *“Bright, visual and 'snackable' content.”*

### **Support young people**

- Youth workers should support young people in advance of online participation events, e.g. registration forms, consent forms, expectations, preparations.
- Ensure young people are provided with youth-friendly information prior to participation events, meetings etc.

### **Young people who are not engaged**

- Be conscious of young people who are not engaged in decision-making spaces.

### **Young people with opposing views**

- Be aware young people may have opposing ideologies.

### **Connect representative groups**

- Connect groups and organisations working with young people from different backgrounds to share information on decision-making and promote participation.

### **Youth participation methods**

- The tools and methods of youth participation must be relevant to the lives of young people. These tools and methods should be informed and shaped directly by young people.
- Youth participation models require an ongoing flexibility and adaptability to stay relevant and informed to the lives of young people.

### Diverse voices:

- Youth Dialogue provides young people with disabilities to become educated on a wide range of issues and information.
- *“I think it’s important because it allows you to formulate opinions – and I mean there have definitely been issues that I’ve been educated on because I was there – and mightn’t necessarily otherwise have been exposed to, and it does it at an early age. So, you’re then more informed as you go forward, and I think the earlier we engage -and as I said earlier, like we’re the generation that has to take over! And so, if we can influence it in any way, what is being implemented now... or at least understand it, then that’s more beneficial to society as a whole.”*

For More information on the EU Youth Dialogue process and the Young Voices programme in Ireland see: <https://www.youth.ie/programmes/projects-initiatives/young-voices/>

Young People can continue to engage in this consultation until June 15<sup>th</sup> 2021 through EUYD Central survey was launched on the Youth Portal: [https://europa.eu/youth/news/space-and-participation-all-help-us-make-it-happen\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/news/space-and-participation-all-help-us-make-it-happen_en)