

Comparative review of the field of action of Youth Participation on the implementation of the First cooperation cycle of the EU Youth Strategy 2010-2012

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1. Executive summary:

The aim of this document is to analyse the results of the National Youth Reports 2012 relating to the field of action of participation. In 2009, the Council endorsed the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018), known in short as the EU Youth Strategy. The EU Youth Strategy is action-based and it focuses on eight policy areas or fields of action, with participation being one of the fields of action. The aim is to support and foster young people's participation in representative democracy and civil society at all levels and in society at large (Council Resolution of 27 November 2009).

Specifically, this report evaluates the progress made towards the overall objectives of the EU Youth Strategy in the field of youth participation. To assess the state of youth participation, seven questions (Q24-Q25 of the National Youth Reports) were chosen following a perspective of evidence-based policy making. The answers are given in the National Youth Reports for 27 Member States (plus Croatia, Montenegro, Norway and Switzerland).

Participation is a key area of the youth policies of all Member States and many activities have been carried out, yet there exists a high level of variation. Activities include: the development of structures for involving young people in decision making, learning how to participate in both the formal and informal educational spheres, improving the transmission of information through websites and social media, giving political support to youth councils and youth groups that work in youth issues, increasing the opportunities for e-democracy and consultation procedures through the Internet, and applying innovative methods to promote the profile of young people who participate and so forth. In sum, the overall picture of the analysis identifies an increasing effort to introduce participation to the youth policies among Member States. The National Youth Reports also show the existence of different contextual situations and traditions on youth policies among Member States.

The following paragraphs will provide a summary of the initiatives pertaining to the seven indicators:

Concerning the development of mechanisms for dialogue with young people and youth participation on national youth policies, Member States are active in promoting dialogue with young people and have been since before 2010. More than two-thirds of the countries said they had developed mechanisms before the EU Youth Strategy came into force. There are many different initiatives with the most popular being the support to national (regional and local) youth councils. Other initiatives are; the creation and driving of National Working Groups in the framework of the Structured Dialogue;

developing National Policy Plans in which youth councils and youth organisations actively participate; promoting regular consultation with young people through Young Parliaments; and organising round tables and other projects. Furthermore, many Member States have Youth Acts and some Member States have initiated actions to legislate on youth involvement.

The next field of policy measures refers to the encouragement of the use of already existing, or development of, guidelines on youth participation, information and consultation, in order to ensure the quality of these activities. Many Member States were already actively pursuing activities in this area prior to 2010 and continued to do so after the EU Youth Strategy became active. The initiatives vary among Member States although there are common strategies worth highlighting. These include: a definition of quality standards for participation; research and systematisation of practices; consultation and experiences of participatory evaluation; the publication of guidelines, manuals and other documents; and the improvement and implementation of Information Systems and Youth Information Centres.

Political and financial support to youth organisations or councils and to promote recognition of their important role in democracy was given by all states, .With most of them being active before June 2010. Basically two dimensions are considered: the economic support to youth councils through different mechanisms and the processes of dialogue, cooperation and consultation between institutions and youth councils. In this area, there are more similarities than differences among policies.

The National Youth Reports emphasise a lot of expertise in promoting the participation of more, and a greater diversity of, young people in representative democracy, in youth organisations and other civil society organisations. The activities are in their scope more specific than generalised and encompass many different initiatives. There are ambitious changes planned such as lowering the voting age, whereas others are more specific such as the promotion of the Youth in Action programme. In addition, there are creative campaigns and support to specific minor groups; educational programmes, both at a formal and non-formal level, and support to educational and empowering projects headed by non-governmental organisations.

Concerning the effective use of information and communication technologies to broaden and deepen the participation of young people, most of the National Youth Reports focus on support for the use of ICTs. The actions however, are numerous and diverse, such as the promotion of Youth Information Centres through ICTs and the use of EU information networks; Other methods used are; to offer free Internet to young people and groups and the creation of youth portals; experiences of e-democracy, consultative and participatory processes using the Internet and social media; and the use of ICTs as a tool of information for youth workers and their expansion into educational spheres.

Under the theme of “learning to participate” from an early age through formal education and non-formal learning, the initiatives taken by Member States can be divided into three categories: firstly, educational experiences of participation supported by public institutions and youth councils; secondly, the presence of citizenship education in the curriculum and the experiences of youth involvement and representation in the school structures in the formal educational system; and thirdly, to a lesser extent, those

experiences that took place in non-formal educational spaces. Many Member States share initiatives of the three types (and often there are mixed experiences).

Finally, there are different initiatives to foster opportunities for debate among institutions and young people, apart from the traditional mechanisms that are mentioned in many reports concerning the dialogue of young people with policy makers. The actions can be divided between those conducted within the framework of the EU Structured Dialogue and Youth in Action and the following; the realisation of debates and meetings with youth councils and the initiative of the latter to promote debates themselves; the promotion of debates with young people in general; and initiatives of involvement of young people in policy-making and Youth Plans.

Subsequently, after the analysis of the seven themes, various good practices on youth participation were identified and are described briefly in the paper. The document finishes with a concluding section that encourages the need for cross-sectoral policies and the promotion of universality. In addition, it gives different suggestions for future evaluations on the field of action of participation in order to increase their quality.

Firstly, the voice and evaluation of young people should be reported in the Youth Reports and be differentiated from the official view that came from national youth institutions. This type of measure implies the need for careful planning from the outset of the evaluation and it also means being able to visualize criticism which is not always an accepted consideration at the administrative and political level.

Secondly, a contextual overview is needed, with specific information considering the priorities in terms of the policies on youth participation among Member States. We are facing a period of austerity measures with limited public resources and it is worth distinguishing priorities in order to understand how participation of young people is addressed.

Finally, an in-depth evaluation of relevant experiences and the creation of indicators to evaluate the quality of participation policies should be encouraged. In some questions, quantitative indicators might give us a complementary approximation of the actions taken.

2. Introduction

Youth participation is about young people's initiatives, individually or as a group, to engage in societal and political activities, to freely express their views and to contribute to decision-making on matters affecting them. Youth participation has figured prominently on the EU youth policy agenda in recent years. The Treaty of Lisbon states that the Union shall have competence to carry out actions to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States in the area of youth, and participation is among the areas of action. To foster youth involvement, there are initiatives by Member States and the Commission within their respective spheres of competence.

In 2009, the Council endorsed the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018), known in short as the EU Youth Strategy. The EU Youth Strategy is action-based and it focuses on eight policy areas or fields of action, with participation being one of the fields of action. The aim is to support and foster young people's participation in representative democracy and civil society at all levels and in society at large (Council Resolution of 27 November 2009). Participation was a priority of the European Cooperation during the first half of 2011 through two dimensions: firstly, citizenship and participation of young people, with an emphasis on social, economic, cultural and political participation and human rights; and secondly, through voluntary activities of young people that contribute to the development of local communities. Moreover, the Council confirmed its dedication to the field of participation by making 'youth participation in democratic life', with youth unemployment, the overall priority of the second Trio Presidency in the youth field (mid 2011-2012), in line with Article 165 TFEU.

There are different instruments to support the action in the youth field, some of them involving the promotion of participation in itself. As is mentioned later, the EU Structured Dialogue with young people and young organisations has become an increasingly influential instrument for involving young people in decision-making. All Member States have set up National Working Groups to organise consultations with young people in their countries and to feed into EU-level debates in different issues that might affect young people's lives.

In order to evaluate progress in the different areas of action, European Union Youth Reports are drawn up by the Commission. They are also meant to serve as a basis for establishing a set of priorities for the following work cycle. The EU Youth Report 2012 summarises the results of the first cycle of the EU Youth Strategy (2010-2012) and proposes priorities for the next three years. This report evaluates the progress made towards the overall objectives of the EU Youth Strategy in the field of youth participation.

The EU Youth Strategy applies several instruments to pursue activities in its field of action. To evaluate the state of youth participation, seven indicators (questions related to different areas and initiatives) were chosen following a perspective of evidence-based policy making.

Methodologically, the analytical report presented here combines two different perspectives. The first approach is quantitative and presents a descriptive analysis of measures taken from each of the seven indicators/areas on youth participation in comparative terms. The data collected is based on the answers given in each report. The author collected all the answers of the National Youth Report in order to have aggregate data for the comparison.

However, it is worth mentioning that, in some cases, there exists a certain degree of discretionary nature by Member States when they have evaluated that a measure has been taken before or after the Youth Strategy came into force in January 2010. It is important to highlight that the responses may vary due to the different criteria applied by each country surveyed. An example is the case of Sweden. The Swedish National Youth Report identified that two measures have not been taken yet. Nevertheless, it is broadly recognised that Sweden is a country with a long tradition on youth policies and that the level of youth involvement in groups and democratic life is relatively high. On the other hand, Finland presents a report with a very critical perspective of its own youth policies and opportunities to move forward. Germany mentioned on several occasions the relevance of a transition to work on the evaluation and quality of the measures taken. Therefore, it might be that some reports are more critical of their internal situation on youth participation depending on their own understanding of the goal to fulfil high levels of youth participation in democratic life. In short, it is worth mentioning here that some Member States with long traditions in youth policies, and with relatively high levels of youth involvement in the definition and implementation of them, are among the societies with more critical perspectives of their own situation in the National Youth Reports.

The other methodological perspective is qualitative. It is based on the elaboration of the questions and its interpretation depends more on the subjectivity of the author. In order to have a good understanding of the situation in each theme (Q24-Q30 of National Youth Reports) the explanation of each question has been analysed for each indicator and Member State. In this sense, in three National Youth Reports, no explanations were given for any of the questions (Ireland, Norway and the Netherlands) and Romania's report only gave information for one of the questions. As a consequence, we have not been able to mention specific measures or initiatives for these countries.

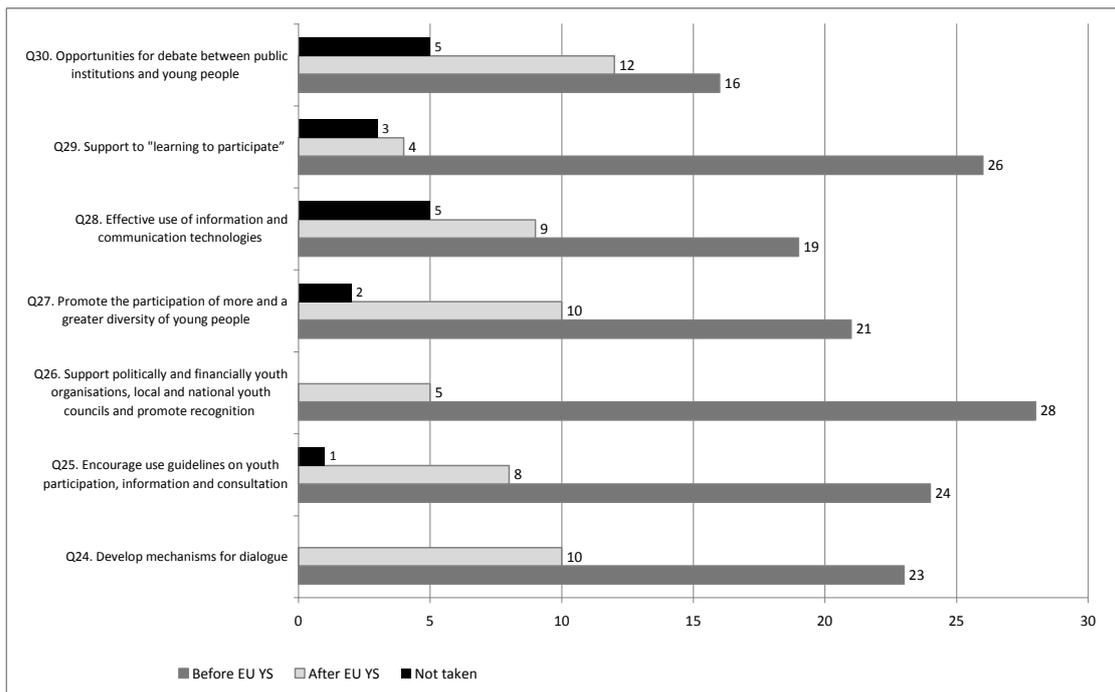
A last aspect worth mentioning is that it is broadly known that youth policies are decentralised at different levels of governance in many Member States, with the distribution of youth competences among public administrations at national, regional and local levels. For instance, Spain and the United Kingdom are classical examples of decentralisation of competences on youth issues. Hence, in the National Youth Reports the national point of view prevails, although some Member States have pointed out specific measures or policies at local or regional levels. And Belgium presented three reports, one for each language Community. Even so, we should bear in mind that there are regional or local nuances of youth policies within European countries not mentioned.

3. Comparative analysis

3.1. General overview

This section gives a general overview of the data presented in the National Youth Reports. As can be seen in Graph 1, there is variation on the evolution of the different initiatives. When measures have not been taken yet, the two options (planning to take concrete measures or not having any current plans) were collapsed as there were insufficient cases.

Graph 1. Summary of the responses contained in the National Youth Reports in the field of action of Youth Participation in the framework of the first cycle of the EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018



Notes: "Not taken measures" is a collapsed category that includes having plans in 2012 or without plans

To develop mechanisms for dialogue, and to give political and financial support to youth organisations and councils are measures taken by all Member States (and Croatia, Montenegro, Switzerland and Norway). In particular, in 28 out of 33 National Youth Reports it is stated that support for youth groups and councils, both financially and politically, existed before the EU Youth Strategy came into force in June 2010. In 23 out of 33 cases it is said that the development of instruments for dialogue was encouraged before June 2010. In addition, the encouragement of use guidelines on youth participation, information and consultation and support for "learning to participate" was undertaken before 2010 in 24 and 26 National Youth Reports, respectively. In 3 reports, initiatives of "Learning to participate" had not been taken whereas only in one of these cases was there an encouragement in the use of guidelines. The promotion of the participation of larger numbers with a greater diversity of young people is mentioned in 10 reports after June 2010 and in two cases, measures still have not been taken (and in 21 reports, initiatives were taken before the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy). The effective use of information and communication

technologies took place before June 2010 in 19 reports, in 9 cases after June 2010 with 5 reports still showing they have not taken any measures. Finally, the opportunities for debate between public institutions and young people is the area in which more reports mentioned having created activities after the EU Youth Strategy became active (12 cases) and in 5 cases measures have not taken place yet.

3.2. Comparative analysis of answers to each question in the questionnaire under this category

3.2.1. Mechanism for dialogue with youth and national youth polices

Question 24 is about developing mechanisms for dialogue with youth and youth participation on national youth policies. Member States are active in promoting dialogue with young people and have been since before 2010. More than two thirds of the countries said they had developed mechanisms before the EU Youth Strategy came into force. There are many different initiatives with the most popular being the support to national youth councils (in many cases at regional and local levels as well). Other initiatives are; the creation and driving of National Working Groups in the framework of the Structured Dialogue; or developing National Policy Plans in which youth councils and youth organisations participate actively; and promoting regular consultation with young people through young Parliaments, organising round tables and other projects. Furthermore, many Member States have Youth Acts and some Member States have initiated legal actions.

In relation to the Youth Councils, Member States have a long tradition of dialogue with them. Youth Councils are the main youth actors for dialogue and involvement in policy making. They have different functions: they are active in policy making, they are present when distributing financial subsidies for programmes promoting youth work, and they coordinate the youth associational sector and so forth. Many countries have specifically mentioned this institutionalised way of dialogue in their reports, for instance, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Italy, Finland, Greece, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Montenegro, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Moreover, the promotion of dialogue through regional and local councils is often mentioned. Some Member States have been promoting the creation of local youth councils as a particular action after 2010.

Reports that have mentioned the formation of National Working Groups (NWG's) for Structured Dialogue as a distinguishing initiative are from Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Poland, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden. Some Member States have implemented particular strategies to accomplish the goals of the Structured Dialogue process involving young people, in particular, empowering them through specific roles or positions in the structure of the NWG. For instance, in Spain the NWG is chaired by the Youth Council of Spain (YCS) and is composed of representatives of Spanish youth associations from all areas and levels (local, regional and national) and of the Spanish Institute for Youth (INJUVE). In Sweden, the NWG on the Structured Dialogue is lead by the National Youth Council. In Denmark, the Danish Youth Council holds the presidency and secretariat of the NWG.

Another possibility of promoting dialogue with young people is the organisation of particular participatory processes in the elaboration of Youth Plans at the local or national level. In Germany, an online participation process for young people at local level was organised following the goals of the structured dialogue. This boosted ways of participation in national youth policies and were tested and evaluated (quality standards), and looked for ways of answering the substantive questions of youth participation in a democratic Europe. In Cyprus, there took place a public consultation in 2010 for the Renewed Framework of EU cooperation 2010-18. Also, in Finland, there were organised forums and Montenegro hosted annual conferences to discuss national youth plans.

Several Member States, such as Luxemburg, Malta, United Kingdom and Croatia, organised Youth Parliaments as a place of consultation for youth policies. In the Slovak Republic, a regional series of round tables was organised, where extensive consultation with young people and stakeholders took place, whereas in Sweden, regular consultation with young people and youth organisations is normal in youth policy. In the German community of Belgium, they established a youth policy with a multi-disciplinary approach through the project 'Youth are the future', in which young people are responsible for the organisation and management of youth workers. In Flanders (Belgium) young people participate in the Flemish Youth Policy Plan. After 2010, a project called "Young Ambassadors for..." let young representatives express opinions on their issues.

A last mechanism mentioned to promote dialogue with young people is to institutionalise it through a legal basis. Member States that mentioned the existence or creation of Youth Acts or Youth Laws are Austria, Estonia, Finland, Montenegro, Slovenia and Bulgaria. A common strategy of action is that the draft of youth laws is done with consultation and meetings with young people. This has been done, for example, in Bulgaria.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that some reports offered critical suggestions or views of young people. The Finnish report highlighted the lack of data to evaluate the quality of the dialogue mechanisms, evidence that can be generalised to other Member States. In Luxemburg, a consultation process showed that young people want more participation, consideration and debate with political elites. Young people in Croatia criticised the existing governmental policy to promote dialogue.

3.2.2. Guidelines on youth participation, information and consultation

Question 25 refers to the encouragement of the use of already existing, or development of, guidelines on youth participation, information and consultation in order to ensure the quality of these activities. Many Member States were already actively pursuing activities in this area prior to 2010 and continued to do so after the EU Youth Strategy became active.

The initiatives vary among Member States although there are common strategies to highlight: definition of quality standards for participation; research and systematisation of practices; consultation and experiences of participatory evaluation; the publication of

guidelines, manuals and other documents; and the improvement and implementation of Information Systems and Youth Information Centres.

Concerning the establishment of quality standards, in Austria, a youth institution in charge of participation issues of the provincial youth departments (ARGE participation) defines the quality standards for participation. Guidelines for participation are established at general levels, and for sustainable participation in urban and rural areas. Germany has established quality standards for the participation of children and young people, and focuses on finding and examining new ways of effective participation. Finland evaluates the quality of youth participation structures regularly (basically through a questionnaire). It has already pointed out the need for more participation of children and young people and the need for a 'bottom-up' approach.

Other activities are the evaluation of different initiatives and to research the situation of youth participation. In Denmark, the Ministry of Children and Education produced a survey of existing initiatives on active citizenship in primary and secondary education. The Flemish community of Belgium, with the support of non-profit organisations, formulated a study on youth policy participation, publishing the practical outcomes in 2012. Latvia has started an evaluation process of existing mechanisms. One of its national youth priorities in 2012 is the development of youth participation, to improve information, and to promote possibilities to get involved in the decision-making process. Lithuania has developed a plan of measures for the implementation of the National Youth Policy Development Program for 2011-19, that includes an analysis of the situation, and the creation of information and consultancy structures to make youth affairs more visible.

There are experiences and actions taken that combine consultation procedures with a participatory evaluation. To begin with, Croatia has developed a 'consultation code' that is obligatory for all public administration, and is extended to cover aspects of youth information and consultation. Other reports combined consultation with an inclusive approach of the assessment of the situation. Portugal developed some actions and projects in cooperation with youth organisations to create and spread the use of manuals and other materials concerning youth information, youth rights and other issues related with youth. Sweden has established consultations with organisations of civil society to give information, anchor decisions and stimulate and facilitate public debate. In 2010, 300 larger meetings for dialogue and consultation were organised. One of the outcomes was a division for youth policy and for NGOs to produce guidelines for consultation to improve future meetings. In Montenegro they created a project called "Youth Social Revitalization", with a campaign on youth participation, the creation of websites platforms, tables and conferences. They also undertook research on youth participation, and with the results elaborated in two manuals on youth participation.

Guidance, documents and manuals about participation and other youth issues have been published in several Member States. Estonia published a manual on the topic, aimed at both young people and officers, with guidance on practical issues. In Luxemburg, different institutions have developed political and pedagogical documents for engagement with youth to participate (for example, "Dialogue avec les jeunes", "Le Plan Communal Jeunesse"). Italy supported the publication on the web of the youth national agency of a specific guide to enhance the quality of the project aiming to encourage structured dialogue between policy-makers and young people. In the Slovak

Republic, a special document on youth participation and counseling was prepared and adopted in 2008. In Wales, guidance has been issued for local authorities on consulting with and involving young people in decision-making since 2007. In 2012 this action became statutory.

Finally, some initiatives are related to implementing Youth Information Systems, opening Youth Information Centres (for instance, in Greece) or improving the quality of those that already exist (as in the Czech Republic). In Cyprus, the Youth Board Council has implemented the Euro Youth Information Charter and created Youth Information Centres. Greece has supported the institutionalisation of local Youth Councils, and Information Centres have been opened. The Spanish Institute for Youth Information Service promotes activities and, every 2 years, has meetings with the Youth Information Centres. In Montenegro, there are youth national information conferences, with ERYICA support (including financial support) and training in youth information.

3.2.3. Governmental support of youth organisations and Local/National Youth Councils

A traditional mechanism of youth policies is to support youth organisations both politically and financially, as well as local and national youth councils. Youth organisations often need external support and other resources, in order to develop and survive, so governmental support to them –and to youth councils– is a significant aspect of youth policies. Obviously, the discussion remains opened as to how economic and other types of institutional support might influence the autonomy of youth organisations and councils, in relation to the power of institutional structures and negotiations that take place with them.

Question 26 deals with the degree of political and financial support to youth organisations or councils and to promote recognition of their important role in democracy. As was mentioned previously, this initiative has been taking place in all states, with most of them occurring before June 2010. Basically two dimensions are considered: the economic support to youth councils through different mechanisms and the processes of dialogue, cooperation and consultation between institutions and youth councils. In this area, there are more similarities than differences among policies.

Public support and funding to Youth Councils (national, regional and, to a lesser extent, local councils) is a common practice in many countries, obviously with variation in the funding schemes. Giving resources through open calls for co-financing and grants to youth organisations and projects on youth issues is a widespread practice as well.

Apart from the economic support, examples of cooperation, dialogue and partnership among the relevant ministries and national youth councils are mentioned in several cases – as well as the consultative function of youth councils. At the political level, there are cases of participation of youth councils or youth organisations in the implementation of youth policy plans. Strategies and priorities are sometimes defined or supported by youth and civic organisations. In Sweden, where a large number of decisions are taken at local level, almost 300 influential forums of different types to engage young people took place.

In some reports it is mentioned that financial support to youth councils or groups is too low and more projects to establish and develop policies at local level are needed. It is recognised that the Youth Councils tend to have more of an advisory function than a political one. Another challenge mentioned is the cooperation with non-formal youth groups.

3.2.4. Promote the greater participation of young people

Question 27 deals with the goal of promoting the participation of more, and a greater diversity of, young people in representative democracy, in youth organisations and other civil society organisations. The challenge to the processes fostered by public institutions is to encourage the involvement of young people, when only a few young individuals are interested in participating in most societies. The different motivations of young people and the increasing levels of political disaffection and distrust in public institutions means that often, those who participate have more resources and are better organised. As it is difficult to get young people involved, a priority is to increase the number of participants. Furthermore, if there is a particular profile of young people who participate (for instance, more individuals from the middle-classes and/or with higher levels of education), then other groups may be underrepresented in decision-making procedures. Consequently, their voice and needs may have less impact on youth policy. Therefore, actions should be taken to encourage young people from ethnic and socio-demographic minorities to take part in economic and public life.

The National Youth Reports have a lot of expertise in this area, with their scope being more specific than generalised and encompassing many different initiatives. There are ambitious changes planned such as lowering the voting age, whereas others are more specific such as the promotion of the Youth in Action programme; creative campaigns and support to specific minor groups; educational programmes, both at formal and non-formal level, and support to educational and empowering projects headed by non-governmental organisations.

Austria took a path-breaking decision in 2007 to lower the voting age from 18 to 16 - a measure that has been defended by Youth Councils and youth organisations from different European countries, and the European Youth Forum (YVJ). Although the right to vote is a political activity whose initiative depends on institutions and with few costs, the fact that younger people can participate in the political system has positive effects. Party campaigns need to address this age range (16-18) and it might also have an effect on increasing the levels of political socialisation at an earlier stage.

The Youth in Action programme appears as an important instrument in developing youth policy at national/local levels and trying to involve non-organised young people in their activities. It is mentioned in several reports. For instance, the "Youth in Action program" of Bulgaria tries to reach young people from small towns and villages and promote their active involvement in public life. Another strategy using EU initiatives is that the national consultations of Structured Dialogue take place in different locations in order to cover a wider spectrum of young people.

The use of creative ways for getting diverse young groups involved is also a common strategy. In Estonia, there are various organised campaigns directed towards young

people with a variety of events to promote participation, such as the Estonian Youth forum, conferences, trainings, seminars, study visits, brainstorming or cafe's sessions. Germany organises intercultural gatherings, gives support to the self-organisation of immigrant youth, and tries new formats to attract migrant young people. In addition they have fostered work on gender issues and attempted to reach out to disabled groups, and lesbian and gay young people. In Belgium (Flemish community) there is also specific support for diverse minorities such as the disabled, immigrants, young in poverty, homosexuals, and the promotion of "Youth Ambassadors diverse" program. Other Member States such as Italy and Latvia mentioned the organisation of information and training days.

In Wales, the issue of diversity is taken into account in the development of the National Standards and by also drafting guidance at local level. In France, they lowered the age for creating an association (now 16 years old), and applied a programme of civic services addressed specifically to young people and supported economic subsidies. In Luxemburg, campaigns to increase awareness on youth inclusivity by promoting voluntarism and the participation of non-national young people took place.

Other initiatives have focused on educational programmes. For instance, in Malta, the Youth Agency launched programmes to promote participation and greater diversity of young people involved. One is "Empower", a non-formal education program for young people that focuses on releasing young people's potential (skills, leadership, health activities, change at local level), and another project, "Voltour", with school activities about non-formal learning on anti-discrimination, tolerance and respect organised by youth representatives and associations. Poland offers civic education in the curriculum using interactive methods (elections, debates, solving a real problem). In Montenegro there exists the Democracy Workshops project, targeted at schoolchildren in the 8-14 age group, which focuses on teaching democratic aspects, with a final product of a newspaper that summarises the learning process and understanding of democracy.

Other informal and non-formal learning takes place in non-governmental organisations. In Sweden, a substantial share of its budget goes to NGOs of ethnic minorities, LGBT, gender equality and social inclusion. At the same time, there are opportunities for participatory training in high schools. Since 2010, funds have been given to youth groups to stimulate the involvement of 'non-organised' young people. In fact, financing the projects of youth welfare organisations that target group diversity is mentioned in some reports. For example, Finland, a state that reported that it hadn't previously taken measures in this area, is promoting the support of information and resources guidance to children from minority groups.

3.2.5. Use of ICT to broaden and deepen participation of young people

In the 21st Century there has been a generalisation of the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) both at a private level and in public spheres in Europe. Young people have a friendly relationship with the ICTs as they have been growing up surrounded by them. The multiple applications of the ICTs offer a lot of opportunities for the contributions of youth participation in public issues and policy-making. The challenges are to evaluate their impact and foster the participation through ICTs among a diversity of young people (not only the traditional off-line participants).

Question 28 is concerned with making the effective use of information and communication technologies to broaden and deepen the participation of young people.

Support for the use of ICTs is mentioned in most of the National Youth Reports. The actions however, are different: promotion of Youth Information Centres through ICTs and use of EU information networks; to offer free Internet to young people and groups and the creation of youth portals; experiences of e-democracy, consultative and participatory processes using the Internet and social media; the use of ICTs as a tool of information for youth workers and their expansion into educational spheres.

However, the impact of the initiatives on the number of young people involved is less clear. There is relatively scarce information regarding the profile of young people who use the ICT facilities and infrastructures for youth participation. A goal that is sometimes mentioned is to fight against the digital divide among young people.

A first group of initiatives is related to the promotion of Youth Information Centres (also experiences of creation of regional or local YICs) through ICTs, improving the contents, providing information, educating how to search, training safety mechanisms, counselling and so forth. Some reports mention the existence of services provided through the EU information network EURODESK and the membership of ERYICA.

Another strategy is to offer free Internet to young groups, youth councils or young people in general. In fact, in most Youth Information Centres, there exist free Internet facilities. The creation of portals in which young people can collect different information is cited. There are opportunities for youth organisations to get involved in the websites' functioning and design and so on. In Estonia, the Youth Council project "participation metro" created a portal that presents issues/opportunities for participation and information on youth councils. In Greece there exists a portal with new social media and radio and TV spots on the promotion of local youth councils.

Many initiatives are related to experiences of e-democracy, consultative processes and participatory mechanisms through the Internet and social media. The Structured Dialogue was sometimes carried out via social networks and the Internet. In Denmark, they organised a pilot project of e-voting at schools and other institutions. Montenegro is currently working to implement a platform called "Citizens voice", which will enable citizens to create online petitions. In Finland, there is a youth initiative on channel and hearing systems. Young people can suggest initiatives concerning their living environment to the municipality and central government. The Finnish children's parliament exists on line. Luxemburg has an electronic mechanism used by the "Youth Parliament" and the National Youth Council for electronic voting (150 people might give their opinion on an issue at the same time). It is used to capture voices from thousands of young people (for instance, at school). Young Scotland promotes electronic voting and provides opportunities to choose projects to fund through the Internet. In Belgium, the Flemish Youth Council consults young people through surveys, Facebook and Twitter. In Portugal, they have launched "The White Paper on Youth", giving the opportunity for young people and associations to contribute to the development of a Global Strategy and Plan of Action for Youth, using new technologies and social media. In Italy, different institutions promote Internet pages and social networks to discuss different topics with young people. In Sweden, a large number of municipalities work with different kinds of consultations through the Internet to contact

citizens, in particular, reaching young people. They created a project called “Dialogue” with citizens to increase confidence with politicians and parties. Germany developed the project "Dialog Internet" in three dimensions: tools of Internet protection, youth participation, and the creation of state youth services offering online information. In Montenegro, in the framework of the project "Youth Social Revitalizations", they launched a website aiming to inform of activities for/and by young people, as well as youth policy mechanisms and structures. In Malta, the Youth Agency launched a web portal "Youth Information Malta" in 2011. The need emerged during the consultation process with young people that preceded the Maltese National Youth Policy 2010-13. The web is also a meeting platform for young people, institutions, organisations and youth workers.

In this sense, the use of new ICTs has been used as a tool of sharing information and experience among youth workers and institutions. In Finland, the traditional youth work has expanded with online youth work. Municipal youth workers are trained to work in the social media favoured by young people to provide information and counselling. The Youth Spanish Council, with the Spanish Institute for Youth, organised the First National Forum of Politicians for Participation, promoting the exchange of innovative experiences developed by professionals of the youth field to help foster young people’s participation by focusing on new ITs. In Montenegro, a website/Internet platform was created for youth workers and municipalities.

Different activities have been made to improve the effective use of new ITCs in formal and non-formal education. In Spain, a project called "school 2.0", took place giving lap tops for primary school students, and creating a forum on education and ICT. Wales has an advisory and information project to make informed choices about life. The CLIC project in Wales tries to develop local websites and gives opportunities to young people to lead editorial boards. The goal is to provide opportunities to gain skills, competences and experience for future employment opportunities.

3.2.6. Supporting ‘learning to participate’

In order to participate, young people need to obtain certain skills and motivations to do so. You need to have confidence in your own ability to participate. The formal and non-formal experiences, where young people learn different aspects of participation, have an important effect in terms of knowledge and experience for future engagement. Question 29 deals with supporting “learning to participate” from an early age through formal education and non-formal learning.

The initiatives taken by Member States in learning to participate or getting involved in the educational institutions can be divided in three: firstly, educational experiences of participation supported by public institutions and youth councils; secondly, the presence of citizenship education in the curriculum and the experiences of youth involvement and representation in the school structures in the formal educational system - which, in fact, are the most popular; and thirdly, to a lesser extent, those experiences that took place in non-formal educational spaces. Many Member States share initiatives of the three types (and often there are mixed experiences), for instance, organising Young Parliaments through schools that finish the process, and in meeting at the national or regional Parliaments (as happens in Portugal).

Experiences of support of “learning to participate” fostered by public institutions take different forms. There are experiences of open forums, Young Parliaments, and children’s town councils. In Finland, all municipalities have to implement participation and hearing systems for the 5-17 age group. In Austria, there exists an ombudsperson for children and young people. In Belgium (French Community) and Spain, there exists observatories of the right to participate and on the well-being of children and young people. In the Czech Republic, there exists a National Children and Youth Parliament. Slovenia organised citizen forums, lead by the information office of the European Parliament in Slovenia, for the discussion of policy by several stakeholders and citizens. Finally, in Estonia, they have organised training about participation for youth councils, school-students councils, and for different youth associations.

The formal educational system is a place of learning participation in many countries and in different degrees. In some reports, it is mentioned as a practice rooted in the educational system - for instance, in some Northern European Member States and Italy, whereas in other cases, it seems to be more of a recent initiative. However, there is a lack of evaluation of the real impact of student involvement. Structures of representation, self-governance and participation in schools, such as students’ councils, School Parliaments, Children’s Parliament, pupil assemblies, elections of representatives or schools executive boards, exist in Belgium (Flemish community), Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Montenegro and Luxemburg.

In Denmark, national legislation makes it obligatory for all schools to establish a pupils' board with a central board of students from all local student boards, annual meetings, and financing projects in local schools. In Sweden, the Swedish Education Act states that "school activities shall be structured in accordance with fundamental democratic values". Children and students can influence national curricula and students should be able to exercise real influence over education. Participation is mainly thought of as part of other subjects, not only as a specific subject.

At university level, reports that mentioned examples of student involvement in structures of governance and representation are Belgium (Flemish community), Italy, France and Montenegro. However, there is room for improvement if you compare the efforts made in learning to participate and student involvement in primary and, in particular, secondary education with the university level.

Furthermore, some countries that have a goal of promoting a culture of participation, highlight the implementation of citizenship (or civic) education into the curricula or the official educational programmes -for instance in Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro, Belgium (German community), Greece, Italy, Hungary and Luxemburg. The trend is to teach these subjects in secondary schools but there are experiences in primary schools as well.

The Luxemburg report said that the participation concept still has to be reinforced in the formal education system. It is needed to give more information about the participation rights and to get cooperation from teachers. Obviously, this challenge can be applied in many other Member States.

Finally, non-formal educational actions have often been related to the cooperation of youth groups and associations. In the Flemish community of Belgium there are programs to participate "by doing", which are applied in youth work, sports, culture and leisure-time. Youth organisations might be active for leading information and participation. Germany focuses its tasks on youth association work and out-of-school political youth education. Italy has a lot of projects promoting participation in non-formal education, and a training interchange via a pool of trainers to improve quality levels. Malta, (with the "Empower" program), Hungary, (through non-governmental youth organisations), Poland and the Slovak Republic, all share experiences through non-formal education. In Bulgaria, there exists the National Centre of "European Youth Programmes and Initiatives" that offers non-formal education, funding projects, and training administrative skills and personal teaching. Some Member States, such as Cyprus, Germany and Lithuania, mentioned the need to improve initiatives in non-formal learning and the necessity for new formats. In Bulgaria, young people recommended more "Learning to learn" in the formal educational system.

3.2.7. Developing opportunities to debate with young people

Question 30 examines further development opportunities for debate between public institutions and young people. There are different initiatives to foster opportunities for debate among institutions and young people, apart from the traditional mechanisms that were mentioned in many reports in section 3.2.1. The actions can be divided between those conducted within the framework of the EU Structured Dialogue and Youth in Action; the realisation of debates and meetings with youth councils and the initiative of the latter to promote debates themselves; the promotion of debates with young people in general; and initiatives of involvement of young people in policy-making and Youth Plans.

Firstly, there are often described actions, organised in the framework of the EU Structured Dialogue and Youth in Action program, for driving consultations and debates. Moreover, it is said that the creation of National Working groups has given an opportunity to discuss the priorities and the issues related to the topics that were discussed during the consultation periods of the Structured Dialogue. Within this framework, there are different initiatives, such as European Youth Weeks or the Youth Day in the Parliament in Hungary, debates among youth local organisations, the Council of Youth and a network of youth centres in Slovenia, evaluation of the process in Luxemburg, national youth conferences in Croatia, support for projects at local and regional level in Austria, and opportunities for debate through the programme "Youth Ambassadors for" in Belgium (Flemish community).

On the other hand, debates and meetings with youth councils are cited in the reports of Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Spain, Lithuania, Slovenia, Portugal and Montenegro. Sometimes, youth councils have a very active role promoting forums, agoras, the caucus for young people (the French community of Belgium) and extended meetings in different topics (Lithuania). Trying to go further, the Austrian National Youth Council is legally granted the same rights as other social partners, emphasising the high cooperation with the Parliament. In the German community of Belgium, the National Youth Council is included as a partner in some Ministries. In Finland, local youth councils are contacted for evaluation relating to the quality of local

opportunities for participation. In addition, they have discussion days to evaluate municipal services in 70 municipalities as part of the organisation of an annual discussion. In Denmark, the Youth Council annually visits all schools and higher learning institutions presenting issues and hearing new issues.

Moreover, there are many examples of promoting debate among institutions and young people in general (not only youth councils), although it is common that those young people who are more active, participate more than people who are not organised. In many countries, Youth Agencies or relevant Ministries are the actors who promote the initiatives. Estonia organises the Participation Café, bringing together decision-makers and young people to discuss various topics affecting young people, such as the right to vote at age 16 or youth unemployment. In Greece, online live debates with the Prime Minister and/or the General Secretary for Youth are promoted. In Cyprus, a "Youth initiatives" program provides funding for non-governmental groups to participate in debates.

Initiatives of dialogue with young people for policy-making and the elaboration of Youth Plans are initiatives that are increasingly used. In Belgium (German and Flemish communities) there are debates on involving young people, the Youth Strategy and Youth Pacts in the long-term perspective. Portugal has taken actions to ensure the presence of youth and public institutions in its debate in the process of the White Paper. In the United Kingdom, at national level, the government has worked closely with young people on the development of a new statement on youth policy. In Germany, the relevant Ministry has worked on the development of an "Independent Youth Policy" for 2011, with experts and young people and using an online participation process. The Czech Republic supports the involvement of young people in community planning. There, young people are active in solving problems that concern them directly (building sports grounds and skate parts, arranging school surroundings, etc.). In Bulgaria, there are different programmes to support youth initiatives for active involvement in decision-making processes, as in Montenegro, with the promotion of debates at local level, through cooperation with municipalities such as the Local Action Plans for Youth. In Denmark, many local municipalities are very active with the purpose of increasing the engagement of young people. In Finland, NGOs are consulted for youth policy programs, the Ombudsman for children takes part in the advisory youth group for dialogue and local youth councils are contacted for evaluation of the quality of local opportunities for participation.

Sweden advised that they do not have any current plan to carry out further measures. Its government continuously works on different methods and strategies to support the debate between institutions, young people and organisations. There was a pilot project of a school election process in 2010, similar to real elections, involving 440.000 young citizens.

In the reports which specifically highlight the youth's view –for instance in Slovenia, the need to develop new opportunities for debate between public institutions and young people is mentioned - however, the positive initiative of the Structured Dialogue is recognised. In Austria, where the Youth Council is involved in some Ministries in their daily work, they do not have equal access to all Ministries.

3.3. Identification of good practices on youth participation

Mutual learning is a key element in the framework of European cooperation. It provides the opportunity to discover and identify good practices in different Member States. In this section, a group of initiatives are mentioned that can be used as examples for other countries. The actions presented have been divided into two. Firstly, what I define as ‘structural’ initiatives, which are good practices both for the scope of young people involved and also for the impact on policy-making, political representation or educational learning to participate, but they need a high level of consent among actors and institutional changes. Hence, they may be much more difficult to apply by other Member States. And secondly, ‘good practices’ that, although ambitious in resources, people involved and levels of planning required, are more easily applied by other Member States. Table 1 summaries the practices and initiatives considered as useful examples of ‘good practices’ in the field of youth participation:

Table 1. Example of good practices in the field of youth participation

<i>Structural initiatives</i>		
	Initiatives	Description
<i>To promote the participation of more and a greater diversity of young people in representative democracy, in youth groups and other civil-society organisations</i>	Austria Lowering the voting age from 18-16	The decision was approved in 2007 for all types of elections. This is a measure that has been defended by young groups from different European countries, and the European Youth Forum. This action has an important effect on the extension of political rights for a high number of young people. Moreover, political institutions and actors will need to address this age range (16-18) by improving political discussion for younger age ranges.
<i>To support various forms of learning to participate from early age through formal education and non-formal learning</i>	Sweden Swedish Education Act and student influence over education	Swedish Education Act states that "school activities shall be structured in accordance with fundamental democratic values". Children and students can influence national curricula. Participation is mainly taught as part of other subjects.
	Denmark The schools and the pupils' board	National legislation makes it obligatory for all schools to establish a pupils' board and to form a central board of students from all local student boards. An annual meeting is organised and there is financing different projects in local schools
	Finland Fostering participation and sounding board system for early ages (5-17)	Finland approved the first Child and Youth Policy Programme (2007–2011) on 13 December 2007. One of the focus areas of the Programme has been the promotion of citizenship, leisure pursuits and participation for children and youth. This includes the development of systems enabling children and young people to exert an influence and be heard, as well as e-democracy functions and student body activities and a reorganisation of the electoral system and democracy education. One aim is that by the end of 2010, all municipalities will have implemented a participation and reciprocal listening system for the 5–17 age group that respects the requirements and prerequisites of children of different ages.
<i>To further develop opportunities for debate between public institutions and young people</i>	Czech Republic Involving young people in community planning	One of the successful forms of youth participation in the Czech Republic is the involvement of young people in community planning. Community planning is based on the principle of open communication between different groups of people (municipal authorities, civil society organisations, school

		teachers, library staff, etc.). Young people take an active part especially in solving problems that concern them directly (building sports grounds and skate parks, arranging school surroundings etc.)
Good practices		
	Initiatives	Description
<i>To develop mechanisms for dialogue with the youth and youth participation on national youth policies</i>	Belgium (Flemish Community) “Youth Ambassadors for...”	After the EU Youth Strategy: The Flemish Youth Council has started the project ‘Youth Ambassadors for...’ in which youth representatives express their opinions on the topic of the EU Youth Strategy that was chosen as a priority by the trio of presidencies at that time. The discussions in the ‘Youth Ambassador Groups’ are based on preceding, broader youth consultations.
	Denmark / Sweden Empowering the National Youth Councils in the NWG	Danish Youth Council holds the presidency and secretariat of the National Working Group The Swedish Youth Council leads the National Working Group for Structural Dialogue
<i>To encourage use of guidelines on youth participation information and consultation in order to ensure the quality of these activities</i>	Austria ARGE participation	A number of working groups exist with the mandate of expanding youth programmes and policies. For example, the study group on participation (ARGE Partizipation) works with the national government and federal states on measures for youth participation
<i>To promote the participation of more and a greater diversity of young people in representative democracy, in youth groups and other civil-society organisations</i>	Belgium (Flemish Community) “Youth Ambassadors diverse” program	The Flemish Youth Council has tried to reach a larger and more diverse group of young people in its project ‘Youth Ambassadors for...’. The Flemish Youth Council is also (by Parliament Act) obliged to promote the diversity of young people in its own structures.
	Malta Empower and Voltour programmes	Aġenzija Żgħażaġh has launched a number of programmes to promote the participation of more and a greater diversity of young people. Empower is a informal education programme for young people from 16 years of age and upwards. The programme is aimed at releasing young people’s potential; developing their leadership skills; engaging them in healthy activities; enhancing their creative and thinking skills; furthering their study skills and encouraging them to bring about change in their locality. Another initiative is Voltour. It aims to provide young prospective volunteers with the opportunity to meet with young active volunteers to share and discuss their experiences. Furthermore, it provides young people with the opportunity to better understand how youth organisations function and operate and provide them with a taste of what volunteering is all about.
<i>To make effective use of information and communication technologies to broaden and deepen participation of young people</i>	Luxemburg Electronic vote mechanism	Electronic mechanism used by "Youth Parliament" and National Youth Councils for electronic vote (150 people might give their opinion on an issue at the same time). It is used to capture voices from thousands of young people (at school, for instance)
	United Kingdom (Scotland, Wales) <i>The Young Scot NEC</i> <i>Wales CLIC</i> project	Young Scot, working in partnership with local authorities and the Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP), has developed an online platform to enable young people to vote electronically (or supporting a participatory budgeting process in Shetland) using Scotland’s Youth Smart Card (the Young Scot NEC). In March 2010, young people aged 12 to 25 in nine local authority areas had the opportunity to cast their vote online and elect a representative to the SYP (21,000 votes).

		Wales CLIC is the Welsh Government's national information and advice project for young people aged 11-25. The project provides high quality information and advice to young people across Wales which is essential in helping them to be in a position to make informed choices about their lives (education, employment training and the lives of their communities). Moreover, the CLIC project is working with young people and Children and Young People's Partnerships (CYPP's) to develop local websites and local and national young people-led editorial boards. The project provides young people with a range of opportunities to gain skills (literacy, numeracy, utilising new technology, reporting, interviewing etc) and experiences which make a valuable contribution to enhancing future employment opportunities.
<i>To support various forms of learning to participate from early age through formal education and non-formal learning</i>	Slovenia Children's Parliaments and Pupil's Communities	In almost every elementary school in Slovenia there are Children's Parliaments ("otroski parlamenti") and are part of a national educational programme for the promotion of democracy. They take the form of debates and discussions on issues regarding children and young people and they encourage children and adolescents to express their own views on issues in the democratic decision-making process. In high-schools there exist Pupil's Communities ("dijaske skupnosti") which are a connection between schools and pupils and represent pupils' rights. They cooperate with schools' management with the purpose of exchanging opinions and improving the conditions of school activities and extracurricular activities.
<i>To further develop opportunities for debate between public institutions and young people</i>	Sweden Real simulation of campaign and election in 2010 at schools	In the run-up to the national general elections in 2010, a so-called school election 2010 was arranged. The National Board for Youth Affairs, supported by the Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality in cooperation with the Election Authority, conducted a democracy campaign targeted at students and teachers. School elections were organised in all institutions of higher education and upper-secondary schools, in which over 440 000 young people had the possibility to take part. As in the real elections (that took place concurrently) students and pupils "voted" for existing political parties. Turnout was 76%.

4. Conclusion

Participation is a key area of the youth policies of all Member States and many activities have been carried out. These include: the development of structures for involving young people in decision making, learning how to participate in both the formal and informal educational spheres, improving the transmission of information through websites and social media, giving political support to youth councils and youth groups that work in youth issues, increasing the opportunities for e-democracy and consultation procedures through the Internet, and applying innovative methods to promote the profile of young people who participate and so forth. In sum, the overall picture of the analysis identifies an increasing effort to introduce participation to the youth policies among Member States. The National Youth Reports also show the existence of different contextual situations and traditions on youth policies among Member States.

Even so, there is much to do as many actions of the Member States are characterised by efforts that are limited to a specific period of time or are in their initial phase. Other

actions, such as the initiatives in the educational sphere on learning to participate, are on-going processes and the impact of the measures need time to be observed. In addition, the encouragement of youth participation is often connected to other challenges, such as the creation of youth employment and educational opportunities. To empower youth minorities and similar bodies, there is an increasing requirement to promote cross-sectoral policies and universality. There are examples of cross-sectoral policies in the National Youth Reports (in particular, promoting the participation of more, and a greater diversity of, young people) but such examples are still too few in number and require more attention.

Finally, there are some suggestions for future evaluations on youth participation policies among Member States.

Firstly, it is worth mentioning that in some National Youth Reports, two different points of view were presented - both the official answers and the answers that came from young people themselves. In those cases, they portrayed a critical view of the need to foster youth involvement and also of young people who asked for more systematic consultations. Furthermore, the opinions of young people sometimes highlight different evaluations of the specific programmes and initiatives. Hence, for further analyses, and taking into consideration that most countries have Youth National Councils or similar structures, the voice and evaluation of young people should be differentiated from the official view that came from National youth institutions. Obviously, this implies the necessity to plan the evaluation process from the beginning of an initiative. In addition, it implies the ability to visualize criticism which isn't always readily accepted at the administrative and political level.

Secondly, it is important to distinguish the specific priorities of the countries in youth participation, which is not always clear through the National Youths Reports. These concerns might not necessarily be the same as the priorities approved in the framework of the Youth Strategy. Specific information and a contextual overview, considering the priorities in terms of the policies on youth participation among Member States, are needed. We are facing a period of limited public resources and it is worth distinguishing priorities.

And finally, an in-depth country evaluation of relevant experiences and the creation of indicators to evaluate the quality of participation should be encouraged. The reports give invaluable assistance in evaluating the measures in a descriptive basis but it is difficult to gauge the impact of the measures taken and the quality of the participatory processes that are implemented. In some areas, quantitative indicators might give us a complementary approximation of the actions taken. For instance, concerning the use of ICT to broaden and deepen participation of young people, there is relatively scarce information regarding the profile and number of young people who use the ICT facilities and infrastructures for youth participation.