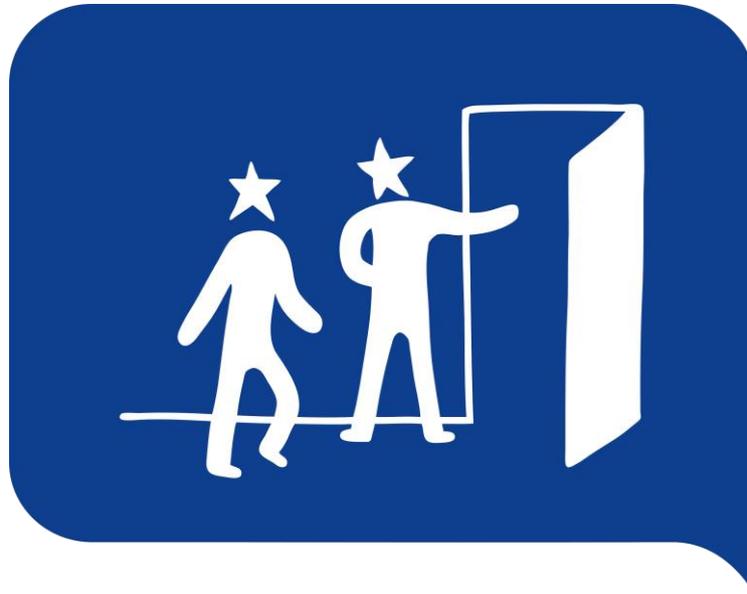# Achieving Youth Goal #9 Target 2

*Findings from the 8th Cycle of EU Youth Dialogue Qualitative Consultation*



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**Youth Goal #9: Space and Participation for all:** Strengthen young people's democratic participation and autonomy as well as provide dedicated youth spaces in all areas of society.

*Young people are underrepresented in decision-making processes which affect them, although their engagement is crucial to democracy. They need access to physical spaces in their communities to support their personal, cultural and political development.*

> **YG#9 Target 2:** Ensure equal access to everyday decision making for all young people from different backgrounds.

**Guiding question used in the EUYD8 consultation:** What actions/measures should be implemented to ensure young people from different backgrounds have access to decision-making processes?

**Key topics in this report:** Inclusion, marginalised groups, inequality, civic and political education, youth information, outreach programmes

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# Target 2: Ensuring equal access to participation

### Wider context: What is meant by equal access to decision making?

A number of common ideas about inequality and participation were found across the Working Group Reports. It was generally understood that **young people are not a homogenous group** and **some young people are marginalised** or have fewer opportunities compared to others. Some working groups and the INGYO roundtable highlighted that COVID-19 had increased levels of marginalisation among young people.

There seems to be overall belief, among both working groups and young participants, that **social inequality affects access to participation**. The causes of unequal access to participation are interlinked with social inequality in all aspects of life.

> *Young people in Germany see inequality in the access to participation processes as a huge problem. Unequal opportunities of participation are not only a problem in political decision making but also in everyday life.*
>
> German Working Group Report

> *A relevant point highlighted by the target group was that their idea of youth participation and accessibility related both with getting information for all and getting concrete involvement in decision making for all and with everyone.*
>
> Italian Working Group Report

The groups of young people said to be excluded from participation reflected the list of 'young people with fewer opportunities[1]' within the Erasmus+ programme, with two notable additions:

- **Age.** Some working groups said the younger you were, the more difficult it was to be involved in participation.

- **Young people with limited digital access** were said to be more likely to be excluded from participation. This overlapped with young people in rural areas (who might have poor internet connection) and young people with disabilities (who might find the technology used unsuitable for their needs).

As a result of this social inequality, it was claimed that **youth participation projects and initiatives will not be accessed equally** by young people from all backgrounds, **unless active steps are taken** to include marginalised young people.

> *Youth policies open spaces for dialogue with young people, but it is most often the least marginalized young people who express themselves.*
>
> French Working Group Report

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[1] See the SALTO Inclusion and Diversity website [to view this list](#) of groups.

It was often articulated that there was a duty on those responsible for participation programmes and demcoratic decision making to ensure participation initiatives are inclusive:

> *The responsibility of involving young people from all backgrounds lays on the organisations and the decision-making bodies, as they should be the ones who reach out to minority groups and equalize chances when it comes to political involvement.*
>
> Hungarian Working Group Report

> *Involving youth with different backgrounds in decision-making processes is not a 'nice-to-have' but can have an added value for the process as such, as it might lead to unforeseen outcomes and ensure higher approval by the people affected by the policy.*
>
> Austrian National Working Group Report

Overall, social inclusion within society generally cannot be separated from inclusion within participation.

> *The first step should be general and equal integration in society, and afterwards the decision-making processes could occur not only by our initiative, but organically and naturally.*
>
> Lithuanian National Working Group Report

## What issues matter most to young people within this topic?

As well as the role of social inequality, three specific barriers preventing participation of young people from marginalised backgrounds were identified within working group reports:

1. **Poor quality of political and civic education in schools.** A particular concern was inconsistencies between schools resulting in young people from some areas receiving much worse education than others. Poor political and civic education was also something said to be affecting young people from all backgrounds, and is explored more in Report 1.

2. **Limited access to information about decision making and participation programmes.** A particular concern was that information about the European level might often be in English, excluding people who do not speak English. Similar issues were identified nationally in countries with linguistic minority groups. There was also concern that information was not available in multiple formats, and not suitable for people with visual or hearing impairments. Information was also said to be complex and not youth friendly. This particularly affected those young people with lower levels of education or with communication disabilities. Access to information is also explored more in Reports 1 and 7.

3. **Limited representation of people from minority backgrounds in politics and participation generally.** The lack of role models in politics, or an individual's belief that participation projects were not attended by young people from marginalised backgrounds was said to be demotivating.

In addition to this it was clear that there are some barriers which are specific to particular groups:

- Young people in rural areas may be excluded from participation activities by **poor transport**.
- Some young people may be excluded by **limited digital access or digital skills**.
- Young people in **low income situations** may be excluded by participation fees, costs of traveling to activities, or being unable to commit to volunteering time as they need to work.

## Possible actions and measures

While many participants and reports expressed that participation should be 'open to all young people' or 'include people from all backgrounds', ideas for how this might be achieved were more limited.

Two major areas of solutions discussed repeated the suggestions for improving participation generally. These were the need to **improve civic and political education** and **access to information** (see Reports 1 and 7 for more detail). Emphasis was also placed on the importance of **translating communication materials**, and being **aware of the digital divide.**

> *The use of social networks is also a key to reaching more marginalised young people and listening to their particular experiences. However, as many young people experience the digital divide, they cannot be reached through digital platforms. Activities on the field, on the street, are therefore still needed.*
> Belgian Working Group Report - Flemish Community

> *A relevant point highlighted by the target group was that their idea of youth participation and accessibility related both with getting information for all and getting concrete involvement in decision making for all and with everyone.*
> Italian National Working Group Report

Some working groups highlighted that there was a need to **dedicate more resources** (either financial or human resources) **to ensuring existing participation programmes were more inclusive.** This meant committing portions of budgets to outreach activities, removing barriers that might prevent participation in meetings, and increasing the resources available for supporting inclusion within participation projects generally. There was a sense that the many methods of participation were, for the most part, suitable for young people from a wide variety of backgrounds. What was required was a stronger commitment to working accessible within them (for more on budget, see Report 6).

However, a number of working groups and participants did highlight the need to **have targeted or tailor-made participation programmes** specifically for young people from marginalised backgrounds. Ideas in this area included:

- **Dedicated youth spaces** for young people from marginalised backgrounds.
- **Training and support programmes** to encourage young people from marginalised backgrounds to enter politics.
- **Participation outreach programmes** run by civil society organisations who work with specific marginalised groups.

- Initiatives **promoting diversity of leadership within participation structures** and youth civil society.
- **Development of networks, co-ordination and infrastructure** linking existing participation projects to social workers, or civil society organisations working with young people from marginalised backgrounds.
- **Peer-to-peer programmes,** or programmes which relied strongly on role models. Where young people engaged in participation could engage others. These were said to be particularly valuable when the peer leaders were from marginalised backgrounds themselves.
- **Use of personal financial incentives** for young people from marginalised backgrounds to rescue or remove financial barriers to participation.

Among participants, there were some who disagreed with the concept of dedicated youth spaces for young people from marginalised backgrounds. Similarly, the idea of quotas was discussed by some, and this was also controversial.