

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS



**Project title:** Are You(th) Voting in the Upcoming European Elections?

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## PROJECT INFORMATION

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## ANALYSIS

Citizens' participation in the main democratic processes, and specifically in the electoral process, has been steadily declining both at a national and European level. Especially at the European level, this statement is confirmed by the percentages of voter turnout, which are gradually declining. In more detail, at the European elections from 2004 to 2019, the corresponding participation rates traced a downward trend. Specifically, in 2004, the participation rate was recorded at 72.5%, while the corresponding rate in 2019 had just risen to a shocking 50.7% (Hosli et al.,2022).

The data collected by [Eurobarometer 2023](#), which focused on the upcoming European elections, indicates that young people are not interested in politics in general or that they are not convinced by any political party or candidate and feel like what's happening in the European Parliament doesn't concern them. Thus, they do not vote in the European elections or in political elections in general. Furthermore, based on the same research, additional reasons for the young people's low turnout in the European elections are that they do not know very well what the role of the European Parliament is, they are not aware of the elections, or they are too busy.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that the data collected from Cyprus for [Eurobarometer 2023](#) reflects the same trend as the rest of Europe, with the main reasons for abstaining being the distrust of the political system in general, the belief that their vote will not change anything, and the low interest in politics in general. In addition, the young Cypriots mentioned that they feel like what's happening in the European Parliament does not concern them, which indicates the need for strengthening the common European identity. Moreover, it is clearly stated that young people are not aware of the EU institutions, structures, or electoral process. This is a troubling fact that jeopardizes our democracy.

The issue of European Democracy was also discussed during the Conference on the Future of Europe. In particular, the focus was given to the topic of Citizens' information, participation, and youth and the topic of democracy and elections, resulting in recommendations on the [Citizens' Proposals](#) adopted during the plenary on how to engage youth in democratic processes. Those recommendations reflect and recognize the needs identified above.

For example, Proposal 36 on “Citizens information, participation and youth” aims to “increase citizens’ participation and youth involvement in order to develop a ‘full civic experience’ for Europeans and ensure that their voice is heard also in between elections and that the participation is effective, and Proposal 37 aims to make the European Union more understandable and accessible and strengthen a common European identity by making the European Union more understandable and accessible and strengthening a common European identity. Moreover, Proposal 38 on “ Democracy and Elections” main objective is to strengthen European democracy by boosting participation in European Parliament elections, fostering transnational debate on European issues and ensuring a strong link between citizens and their elected representatives.

In addition to the problems mentioned above, there are additional problems that discourage young people from casting their vote. One of the most prominent problems is accessibility, as identified by the participants of the 3-day conference, either regarding information availability and visibility, the complex registration processes, the lack of alternative forms of voting, or the physical accessibility of the election centers.

In the Cyprus case, in particular, the electoral regulations and procedures for each type of election are published on the [official government platform](#), which is not a channel particularly popular with youth and is translated into the three official languages (Greek, English and Turkish). However, that information is published only a few months before the elections, which sometimes does not provide enough time for people, especially first-time voters, to familiarize themselves with the rules or procedures. Also, in the case of Turkish Cypriot voters in the European elections, the information is more difficult to access for the youth and the producer is more complex, so voting becomes less convenient.

Moreover, in the current election registration procedure we have in Cyprus, there is no provision for automatic registration in the electoral catalogue when a young person comes of age. Therefore, new voters must register in the electoral catalogue during specific time periods before elections. Additionally, if you change your address or are in a different city than your residence, you must follow a certain procedure in order to transfer your electoral rights to the area of your current residence and Cypriot citizens living abroad sometimes have difficulty reaching voting centres.

Furthermore, sadly, in previous elections, members of the Cyprus Paraplegic Organization expressed their complaints (publicly and to the federation) about the lack of accessibility in the voting centers, especially to get from the yard to the voting hall and another person in a wheelchair could not reach because there was no special box for persons in a wheelchair in each voting center. However, the lack of accessibility for people with disabilities is not an issue that exists only in our country. Characteristic is the example of the [USA](#), where people with disabilities voting are 7% lower than the general population and one in nine people face difficulties during voting procedures. This indicates how extensive the problem is, as well as the need for continuous improvement in accessibility and ensuring that people with disabilities can easily exercise their right to vote.

In conclusion, it is true that younger people are less likely to vote, especially in European elections, and the main causes are a general lack of interest in politics, the conviction that their voice won't be heard even if they vote, a lack of knowledge about the electoral procedures, the political structures, and the EU, the absence of a shared European identity, and accessibility restrictions. Therefore, CYC hopes that this policy paper, which was inspired by the findings of the three-day conference titled "Are You(th) Voting in the upcoming European Elections? ", will not only highlight the key factors that contribute to young people's declining participation in elections but also help to shape the social and institutional environment that will empower them to exercise their right to vote and increase their participation and representation in democracy.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Thematic Area 1: Raising Awareness & Social Media Usage**

In this thematic area, we stress the importance of raising awareness among young people about the upcoming European elections, and, by default, other regional and national elections through the wider visibility of accurate and comprehensive information through youth-friendly media and mainstream media, available in all official languages of the Cyprus Republic.

We ask as:

1. The European Parliament Liaison Office in Cyprus (EPLO in Cyprus) and the European Commission in Cyprus will expand the election campaign materials (videos, TV programs, booklets, merchandise, etc.) for the European Parliament Elections in June 2024 to the Turkish language immediately. Expand EP election materials in Turkish will ensure that the Turkish-speaking population in Cyprus can fully exercise their democratic rights. By providing information in their native language, Turkish-speaking citizens of the EU feel included and recognized as citizens of the EU. Therefore, this policy can increase the level of Turkish-speaking Cypriot participation in the EP election.

This measure can be implemented through the translation of the election materials into the Turkish language. EPLO in Cyprus can outsource third-party translation companies with the support of the European Commission's Aid Program for the Turkish Cypriot community. First, the translated election material can be published on social media platforms as sponsored advertisements. More on social media, supportive of election materials, and other social media tools (podcasts, reels, etc.) can be used to raise awareness about voting in EP elections. Also, in their offline distribution, EPLO in Cyprus can collaborate with EC Cyprus (since they have a presence in the Turkish Cypriot community) to reach out to citizens of the Republic of Cyprus who also do not reside in the government-controlled areas of the Republic of Cyprus.

2. The development and dissemination of accurate, comprehensive, and multifaceted information related to the European elections will ensure that citizens are informed about all the positions of all the candidate MEPs, giving them the opportunity to make a more informed decision. That information can be presented in a youth-friendly manner and disseminated through mainstream media outlets, the national press, the radio, political and election campaigns, as well as through non-traditional means or outlets (which are more popular with young people, like podcasts and social media).
3. The dissemination of accurate and comprehensive information through the official social media accounts (e.g., Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook) of EU institutions to ensure that young citizens are properly and accurately informed about the EU, as well

as the promotion of comprehensive information on developments concerning European institutions and other European topics through traditional and alternative media.

## **Thematic Area 2: Educational Actions**

Focusing on the youth, who will be voting in the next EU elections, the target audience includes students at high schools and universities as well as young professionals, aged 18 to 30 years old. Importantly, the policy recommendation involves teachers in high schools, professors, adult educators, and VET providers. The target audience is both the ultimate beneficiaries—young people—and, more importantly, educators and VET providers who will build knowledge and skills to support young people in acquiring knowledge and skills and promote active citizenship.

The recommendations are divided into short and long-term goals.

In the short term, the suggestions include:

1. **Youth Educational Activities**, *including camps, workshops, simulation exercises and youth panels*

NGOs, educational institutions, and private schools will organize simulation exercises in an inclusive and accessible venue and format (language). The activities will be organized on the whole island. During the activities, debates and mock elections will take place to allow participants to understand the processes.

These camps should take place on a frequent basis based on the volume (monthly workshops, semi-annual camps, etc.)

2. **European Parliament Ambassador School (EPAS) Programme**

Taking advantage of existing initiatives, we recommend that the EPAS program expand its reach and network by increasing the number of affiliated schools. This will increase the reach of students.

3. **Visits to local authorities, Parliament, etc.**

NGOs, in collaboration with local authorities, organize study visits to understand the processes. As per the research, there are currently such visits happening; however, not all schools are taking part in this opportunity. Hence, our suggestion is to have a rotation plan so all schools can take advantage.

4. **Online games and mobile apps**

Existing games and apps exist to build the knowledge of young people. We suggest that these games be further developed using local and EU funds and disseminated across the island. The games will be interactive and give credits.



## 5. HRDA - Human Resource Development Authority

Include as vital importance European studies and civic participation skills.

In the long term, the focus needs to be on developing the EU identity from a young age. Hence, we ask the Ministry of Education:

1. Change the curriculum of primary schools to incorporate civil education or activities (e.g., games and workshops) that will promote civil education.
2. Reinstatement of Civil Education in secondary education (junior high school), and the educators should be political scientists in order for students to be exposed to topics that will promote critical thinking, active citizenship, and democracy, offer knowledge about the governmental structures at national, European and international levels and electoral procedures.
3. Application of interactive methodology in Civil Education to acquire knowledge about the European Union. This methodology should include, among others, the use of audiovisual materials or virtual reality, books with pictures, comics, flashcards, storytelling, theater, role play and group presentations.
4. Wider integration of European programs in educational institutions of all levels through the implementation of education tours and trips, increasing available places for participation in European programs (like Euroscola and Erasmus). In addition we recommend the establishment of EU Weeks with activities, booths and speeches from MEPs and experiential workshops with MEPs

### Thematic Area 3: Simplified and Accessible Voting

In the Short term

We ask the Cypriot government to:

1. Produce online platforms to allow the online registration of voters.
2. Modify the websites that show voting centers per person to allow the changing of the voting centers.
3. Make an app with information about election laws, the rights of the youth, and all of the candidates.
4. Arrange public transport to voting centers.
5. The voting centers should be set up by the relevant authorities after consultations with the representatives of vulnerable groups in order to accommodate the needs of people with difficult mobility problems.
6. Creation of a platform for requests for help from people belonging to vulnerable groups from the local authorities and the recruitment of assistants for people who need help on election day.
7. Development of a voting ballot adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. vision problems)

## In the Long term

We ask the European Commission to propose new common legislation that:

1. Extends voting days to at least 2 days per country.
2. Make voting days public holidays or make it mandatory for employers to give at least 2 hours for employees to vote.
3. Provide a common encrypted voting platform controlled by the EU or the national government.

## **Thematic Area 4: Bring MEPs/Politicians Closer to Citizens**

In this thematic area, our goal is to promote dialogue and interaction between young people and their elected representatives in the European Parliament so that they can learn about the important role of the European Parliament, establish a strong sense of European community, and strengthen European identity among young people.

1. We suggest the launch of a new European initiative called "Europe Tour", which will allow MEPs to visit other EU member states besides their own and engage with young people with the goal of promoting active citizenship and youth participation in electoral processes, with a focus on educating them about the significance of their vote. The European Parliament offices and the National Youth Councils of each member state can organize or facilitate the "Europe Tour," and within this context, the activities in which MEPs take part may include:
  - Appearances and participation in festivals, where young people will have the opportunity to discover the cultural diversity of Europe through music, dance and art.
  - Visits to schools to promote debate and information about the European Union and political participation
  - Experiential workshops that will provide educational experiences for young people on topics such as democracy, human rights and political decision-making.

This initiative is key for strengthening the common European identity among young people because it will inspire young people to engage with European issues, recognize the power of their voice, and act for Europe's future. Furthermore, the young people will be encouraged to exchange ideas, be informed about political processes, realize the importance of active participation and develop the skills necessary to be informed and active citizens.

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