

# **Structured and Meaningful Youth Participation in Policy and Decision-Making Processes - Mapping Local, National, EU, and International Good Practices**

STUDY



European Economic  
and Social Committee



# **Structured and Meaningful Youth Participation in Policy and Decision-Making Processes**

## **Mapping Local, National, EU and International Good Practices Study**

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## General information

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## 1. Executive summary

This study explores effective practices for youth participation in policy and decision-making processes, providing a comprehensive overview of what youth participation means and its key characteristics. The aim of the study is to provide recommendations for mainstreaming structured and meaningful youth participation within the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and other EU institutions, in line with the EU Youth Strategy and the UN Youth Strategy, and based on good practices at local, national, EU, and international levels.

The research methodology is qualitative, with semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, desk research to map and evaluate youth participatory mechanisms, and secondary data analysis. This project employs a case study methodology, a qualitative research approach that explores a specific subject in depth within its real-life context. The focus is on gaining a comprehensive understanding of complex issues through detailed contextual analysis. It is based on four diverse examples selected by purposive sampling, i.e., a non-random sampling technique used to select cases that are particularly informative. The project includes four examples that have been carefully chosen to represent a wide range of contexts:

- **Local level:** This example represents the grassroots or community level, examining how youth engagement policies are implemented and experienced within a specific local area.
- **National level:** This example looks at how national policies and frameworks support youth engagement across an entire country.
- **EU level:** This example considers policies and programs initiated by the European Union, providing a supra-national perspective on youth engagement.
- **International level:** This example includes global initiatives and policies, offering insights into how youth engagement is promoted on a worldwide scale.

The selection is guided by the Theory of Change that in this study helps in identifying the necessary preconditions, pathways, and assumptions that link activities to outcomes. In this project, the Theory of Change guides the analysis of youth engagement policies by providing a structured approach to understand how and why specific strategies work or fail.

From this perspective of policy evaluation, the study has come up with specific, actionable recommendations.

The study has emphasised that while intentions to involve youth are very positive, actual implementation is generally limited by a lack of understanding of young people's needs, insufficient managerial and financial resources and engagement strategies, and a lack of recognition of youth intersectionality. To be effective, young people must be seen as an integral part of civil society, and their participation must be a structured process, not just an add-on. A distinction needs to be made between the terms 'youth engagement', referring to participation in activities, and 'youth participation', referring to active roles in decision-making. This distinction is important to empower young people to become active players in governance.

## 1.1 The case studies

The study presents four case studies illustrating effective models of youth participation:

- **Local Youth Council in Klaipėda, Lithuania:** The legal framework in Lithuania encourages youth participation by stipulating local youth councils, one of them being the Youth Affairs Council in Klaipėda. This council is able to successfully integrate young representatives into the governance structure at the municipal level and hence influence policymaking. Some of the strengths of this council include organised selection procedures, proactive influence on policy, and capacity-building. Challenges include maintaining the active involvement of young people and overcoming bureaucracy. In the Klaipėda model, one may find an example of good youth participation with space for further improvement in resource sustainability and inclusiveness.
- **Austrian National Youth Council:** The National Youth Council of Austria has been constituted under the Federal Youth Representation Act and represents over 3 million young people through its member organisations. It plays a very influential role in national and international policymaking. The council performs very well in terms of inclusiveness, and advocacy. Having a clear operational legal framework and financial support makes it sustainable and gives it a very clear role in the youth domain. Challenges include, effectiveness of engagement and operational efficiency and further improvements in some transparency components.
- **The Co-management System of the Council of Europe:** The Council of Europe involves youth representatives in the European youth policy decision-making process through a co-management system comprising the Joint Council on Youth, the Advisory Council on Youth, and the European Steering Committee for Youth. It is an example of a model opening possibilities for youth participation in priority-setting and policymaking. Despite this, it has some successes, but also challenges related to representativeness, resource allocation, and burdensome bureaucracy. The effectiveness and relevance of the programme will depend on how these problems are resolved.
- **OECD Youthwise Initiative:** Created in 2021, Youthwise aims to bring the voice of young people in global policy-making. It unites young professionals from OECD member states. The structure excels in diversity and inclusivity, maintaining gender balance and ensuring representation from various OECD countries, including ethnic minorities and marginalised groups. The selection process and activities of Youthwise are transparent, with information readily available and accessible to all interested parties. However, co-creation, as well as the duration of the mandate, advocacy and impact, and financial viability, remain areas for improvement if this initiative is to have a long-term impact.

In short, the results of this study demonstrate that meaningful youth participation is a prerequisite for democratic governance and effective policy-making at all levels. The case studies highlight a variety of participation mechanisms, with invaluable lessons in diversity, inclusivity, advocacy and transparency.

## 1.2 Conclusions and recommendations

Participation of young people in policy and decision-making processes lies at the heart of democratic societies and sustainable democracies. While different organisations and international agencies appreciate this importance, further investment in improving participatory standards and institutionalising youth participation at all levels of governance is still required.

Across all levels, a variety of participatory mechanisms—including youth councils and advisory boards—act as vehicles for the active engagement of young people in decision-making processes. In all case studies, the need to further improve diversity, inclusiveness, resources, transparency, and advocacy is underlined in order to maximise their influence. Further policy dialogue and mutual learning between stakeholders are important prerequisites for developing these structures so that they can continually adapt to the changing needs and aspirations of young people around the world.

The **research question** for the study is: what are the characteristics of participatory mechanisms which can meaningfully integrate young voices in policy and decision-making processes?

This study concludes with several key recommendations. Notably, operational standards should be recognised by the EESC to structure the youth participatory mechanism. This should include clearly defined objectives and their alignment with the EESC's priorities, advertisement through an open call for applications with explicitly clear terms and expectations, and member selection criteria based on age, geography, and engagement.

The representativeness & legitimacy are also critical. Modes of engagement and operations with its members must be agreed, the group size must remain manageable, between 10 and 20 members, for reasons of efficiency, a three-year term of office is recommended. Inclusiveness and non-discrimination should be guaranteed by including participants from EU Member States and, if possible, Western Balkan countries, defining youth age between 18 to 30 years, including diverse representatives, in particular from marginalised groups, and ensuring physical and digital accessibility.

Another critical area is capacity-building. Dedicated orientation meetings for new members should be organised, as well as capacity building in meaningful youth participation and participatory democracy. In addition, training opportunities for personal and institutional development should be provided, and the smooth transition of new members should to be ensured through adequate information.

Financial & human resources considerations include transparent decisions about remuneration or fees in return for members' time and commitment. Terms of reference, rules of engagement, and clearly identified responsible persons or teams need to be developed.

The structure should be very transparent to avoid any loss of integrity. A high degree of transparency must be maintained at the base, in the rules and in the selection procedures. Detailed information on activities, decisions, and policies should be published frequently, and the lists of selected people and criteria for evaluation should be published in a timely manner. E-mails on the status of the application should be sent to candidates, and guidelines on the disclosure of conflicts of interest should be developed to ensure integrity.

Advocacy & impact are also essential in youth decision making. The representatives of youth organisations should make recommendations about how to go about helping young people, especially that risking marginalisation, to cope with their challenges and raise awareness on concerns that are of importance. They should also debate, support, and promote youth-friendly policies and programs. There needs to be clear and detailed feedback from these representatives so that young people know how these suggestions work in practice. This study indicates that at times, it is important to consult specialists who will provide necessary information whenever the need arises. Further still, a strong measurement system must exist for assessing how effective a particular advocacy effort has been and measure its impact. This implies regular checks and evaluations which show whether the policies and programs are functioning well or not, as they need to be modified if the desired results are to be achieved.

Finally, resilience, monitoring, & improvement will be essential to ensure the continued success of the youth participation structure. This will require three to four structured annual meetings with clear objectives, synergies between different EESC activities, a feedback mechanism to allow members to share their experiences and suggestions, and an annual report outlining activities and achievements.

These recommendations will help improve the effectiveness, inclusiveness, and transparency of the EESC's participatory structure for youth, which should engage with young people across Europe and serve as a baseline for improvements to other existing structures.

## 2. Introduction

This study is focused on the positive practices of youth participation in policymaking and decision-making processes. A comprehensive research study has been conducted to map local, national, EU and international good practices. The research aims to provide concrete policy recommendations, actions, and strategies for how the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), and other EU institutions can mainstream youth in their work, ensure youth voices are meaningfully heard, and increase necessary mechanisms to secure youth participation in policy-making and decision-making processes. This will align with the goals outlined in the EU Youth Strategy<sup>1</sup> and UN Youth Strategy<sup>2</sup>.

This work is being conducted through a collaboration between the Albanian Young Professionals Network (YPN)<sup>3</sup> and Developing Youth Participation in Local Level (DYPALL Network)<sup>4</sup>. YPN is a non-profit, non-political organisation based in Albania, while DYPALL Network is a non-profit based in Portugal. Both organisations have distinguished experiences in the youth sector, implementing and undertaking various initiatives that address youth quality of life and meaningful participation.

In recent years, interest in the needs and capacities of young people has grown, recognising them as important actors in the labour market and in sustainable democracies. Therefore, different institutions and international organisations have made effort to increase youth perspectives in their work and to mainstream them in various stages of governance. This was also stated by Commissioner Mariya Gabriel, "the European Year of Youth should bring a paradigm shift in how we include young people in policy and decision-making"<sup>5</sup>.

Importantly, young people should be seen as a vital part of the civil society, with their voices included in broader societal discussions alongside other groups.

Despite positive intentions, this is often not developed effectively due to a host of different factors.

- There's a lack of understanding of youth needs as a diverse target group, considering their varied experiences, backgrounds, and identities.
- Insufficient awareness of appropriate engagement approaches hinders effective youth participation.
- The failure to recognise youth intersectionality overlooks how various aspects of young people's identities intersect and influence their experiences.
- Youth participatory mechanisms are not consistently established as standard practice in policy and decision-making processes.

The EESC has, in several opinions<sup>6</sup>, called for an integrated approach that considers young people's diverse needs and rights across multiple sectors, emphasising a comprehensive understanding of issues

<sup>1</sup> EU Youth Strategy Platform. Available at: [https://youth.europa.eu/strategy/euyouthstrategyplatform\\_en](https://youth.europa.eu/strategy/euyouthstrategyplatform_en) Accessed on 8 February 2024

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Youth Strategy Available at: [https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/18-00080\\_UN-Youth-Strategy\\_Web.pdf](https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/18-00080_UN-Youth-Strategy_Web.pdf) Accessed on 8 February 2024

<sup>3</sup> Young Professionals Network. Available at: <https://ypn.al/> Accessed on 8 February 2024

<sup>4</sup> DYPALL. Available at: <https://dypall.com/> Accessed on 8 February 2024

<sup>5</sup> European Commission, Press Release (2021) Commission kick-starts work to make 2022 the European Year of Youth. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_21\\_5226](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_5226) Accessed on 20 May 2024

<sup>6</sup> EESC opinions: A new European Union youth strategy, Towards structured youth engagement on climate and sustainability in the EU decision-making process; European Year of Youth 2022; The EU youth test.

which impact young people<sup>7</sup>. As it is a relatively new domain that should be continuously developed and refined, it is essential to continue researching the good practices and knowledge sharing among different organisations, countries and entities to further consolidate youth participation.

To properly implement and address all what was mentioned above, it is important to understand different concepts that are in place and the differences that exist among them. In the realm of youth empowerment, distinguishing between youth engagement and youth participation is pivotal for understanding the depth and impact of young people's involvement in societal processes. **Youth engagement** often denotes the involvement of young people in various activities or initiatives, providing them with the opportunity to contribute their ideas and energy. However, it does not necessarily imply a share in decision-making power or influence over outcomes of policy making. On the contrary, **youth participation** embodies a more structured and meaningful involvement, where young people actively partake in policy and decision-making processes, influencing policies and initiatives that affect their lives and communities. This distinction underpins the need for mapping local, national, EU, and international good practices that not only engage but also truly empower youth by integrating them as pivotal stakeholders in governance and societal development. Such an approach aligns with the principles set forth by the Council of Europe's Recommendation on youth work<sup>8</sup>, and the EU Youth Strategy<sup>9</sup>, which advocate for increased youth participation in democratic life.

### 3. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative methodology. This decision was made based on the listed requirements in the tender specifications. Therefore, qualitative method approach is applied, using semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and desk research as the main research tools for data collection. The current study adopts a case study approach and the use of secondary data.

Regarding the methodology approach, the 'Theory of Change' approach will be considered in terms of conceptualising this study. It is through this approach that change, structured youth engagement in our case, becomes more evident and visible. The second conceptual approach will be strictly policy evaluation perspective, as the objective is to develop a set of policy recommendations. The conceptual approach of this study is 'participatory theories of youth engagement'. Its added value lies in examining the key characteristics of youth participation and its structure.

#### 3.1 Assessment scope and objectives

The proposed research methodology aims to explore participatory mechanisms to ensure that the voices of young people are duly integrated in the EU policy and decision-making process. Therefore, the general objective and specific objectives of the study are as following:

<sup>7</sup> EESC resolution the long-lasting legacy of the European Year of Youth: youth mainstreaming and empowerment. Available at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/documents/long-lasting-legacy-european-year-youth-youth-mainstreaming-and-empowerment> Accessed on 12 June 2024

<sup>8</sup> Council of Europe (2017) Recommendation on youth work. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/-/recommendation-on-youth-work#:~:text=The%20recommendation%20draws%20special%20attention,of%20youth%20workers%20and%20appropriate> Accessed on 10 March 2024

<sup>9</sup> European Union. EU Youth Strategy. Available at: [https://youth.europa.eu/strategy\\_en](https://youth.europa.eu/strategy_en) Accessed on 8 March 2024

The overarching goal of this study is to increase youth participation in the EU's policy and decision-making processes by proposing a set of policy recommendations and some key characteristics for the EESC and other EU institutions to develop the most appropriate participatory mechanisms.

Furthermore, this goal is displayed in the following specific objectives:

- Develop a baseline of what is called meaningful youth participation, criteria to achieve it and youth participation in the EU based on already existing studies.
- Analyse the ongoing practices and experiences of structured youth participation in policy and decision-making processes at the local, national, EU and international level based in criteria set.
- Provide policy recommendations and proposing possible actions for the EESC and other EU institutions.

The **research question** for the study is: what are the characteristics of participatory mechanisms which can meaningfully integrate young voices in policy and decision-making processes?

### 3.2 Sampling

The study uses purposive sampling which is a strategy in which settings, persons or events are selected deliberately in order to provide valuable information that cannot be obtained from other choices (Maxwell, 1996). In this context four cases related to youth participation are deliberately selected based on specific criteria that are relevant to the research objectives. The choice of case studies is purposeful and driven by the researcher's aims. Furthermore, since the four case studies represent different bodies and various levels of participation (local, national, EU, international), they are complementary to each other. Based in the desk research developed and, in the consultation, held the chosen entities are: Local Youth Council in Klaipėda (Lithuania); Austrian National Youth Council; Co-management system of the Council of Europe on youth policy; OECD Youth Advisory Board.

### 3.3 Data collection

The instruments used for data collection was semi-structured interviews, desk research and the use of secondary data. The interview questions were designed to explore the key factors and practices of youth participatory mechanism in local, national, EU and international levels, as well as any barriers or challenges to improving meaningful participation. Eight interviews took place with different type of youth stakeholders such as former members of the targeted youth structure, youth expert, staff involved within the structure and representatives of the institution on charge.

### 3.4 Ethical considerations

The study adheres to ethical principles of research, including obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and protecting the rights and welfare of participants such as:

- Informed consent: all participants informed for the aim of the assessment and their consent will be asked at the beginning of the questionnaire.
- Voluntary participation: participation in the assessment process is voluntary.
- Anonymity and confidentiality of the individuals assured.
- Participants informed that data gathered in this process is used only for cumulative analyses and not an individual one.

### 3.5 Case studies assessment

In order to analyse the four chosen case studies, a set of areas were defined that allow to look into depth for each of them. The following set of areas were developed to systematically assess different options, choices, and criteria of the participatory mechanism in the four levels (local, national, EU and international) which were examined. The areas were defined according to the main aspects that were consider important in mechanisms of meaningful youth participation, as it is explored in the Chapter Four, and the combined knowledge and experience in youth participation between YPN and DYPALL Network.

The areas of assessment reflect the significance directions for cooperation between different policy and decision makers and youth and the criteria's that are needed to provide their meaningful participation and to define the so-called 'positive impact'<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, the areas of assessment were used to investigate each case coherently and evenly. Meanwhile dedicated indicators provide the ground for the assessment of the participatory structures targeted and the main aspects which are important for the aim of this research.

The primary areas considered to analyse and explore each case study are the following one:

- **Co-creation & ownership:** Involvement of young people or youth organisations in the designing of the participatory mechanism.
- **Representativeness & legitimacy:** Composition of the mechanism, in terms of the diversity of youth population as well as other relevant stakeholders from policy and decision makers to CSO's (if any).
- **Inclusiveness & non-discrimination:** All young people, regardless of their background, interests, positions or abilities, can take part in the body with equal rights and opportunities.
- **Capacity building:** Existing tools and materials for enhancing the skills, knowledge, and confidence of young people to understand the mechanism they are participating in and how it influences decision-making.
- **Financial & human resources:** Clear framework and adequate allocation of resources to ensure the functioning of the structure, reflects budget, facilities, equipment's and staff.
- **Transparency:** All processes including selection process, activities and decisions are regularly communicated and open to participation and can be easily understood.
- **Advocacy & impact:** Systematic methods and structures to ensure that all representatives engage in advisory and advocacy processes that follow wider strategies and include establishing relevant collaborations and increasing political recognition
- **Resilience, monitoring & improvement:** Monitoring and continuous improvement systems that ensures the continuity of youth participation over time, and its impact and recognition.

Each of the areas of assessment are accompanied with specific qualitative and quantitative indicators, which, for the sake of the length of the text, are not included in the above methodology.

<sup>10</sup> DYPALL Network (2023) Quality charter on participatory and inclusive local youth councils. Available at: [www.dypall.com/catalogue-of-resources](http://www.dypall.com/catalogue-of-resources). Accessed on 15 May 2024

## 4. Enabling structured and meaningful youth participation

This chapter sets a mutual understanding of what youth participation is and how it can be meaningfully achieved. The chapter provides a brief literature review of existing resources and up-to-date information on the topic to provide a qualitative base for the research. Furthermore, the chapter delves into definitions of youth participation following a comparative approach. Following it, the chapter offers the set of criteria that will be used in order to differentiate the four cases and make their analysis.

### 4.1 A comprehensive exploration: key concepts

This subchapter will provide a brief definition of meaningful youth participation and discuss why it is important to enabling youth to have a voice in decision-making processes. The development of this subchapter will also consider the definition that the EESC included in the resolution *The long-lasting legacy of the European Year of Youth*<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, this subchapter will incorporate definitions for key concepts: youth participation (including age range), policy and decision-making.

Youth participation is changing its role to a more magistral and becoming recognised as a fundamental aspect of democratic decision-making. It encompasses a broad range of activities that enable young individuals to engage in society's political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. Nowadays, young people are considered to be a distinct group to which a wide range of fields explicitly or implicitly relate, including but not limited to youth policy and youth political participation.

Youth participation can be defined as the active involvement of young people in shaping their communities and societies through various forms of engagement, including decision-making.<sup>12</sup> There are a few ways to define participation, and each definition focuses on some important aspects of what is youth participation. For example, one of the definitions especially emphasises the responsibilities, inclusion, and accessibility that are criteria of part of the participation "In a nutshell, participation means to be involved, to have tasks and to share and take over responsibility. It means to have access and to be included."<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, the Charter<sup>14</sup> defines youth participation as a compilation of several factors beyond voting. "Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are essential elements. Participation and active citizenship are about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary, the support to participate in and influence decisions and engaging in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society."<sup>15</sup>

This definition of participation reflects the shift in the approach to youth involvement. Young people are now seen as active contributors in organisations or in the community; they are seen as partners with

<sup>11</sup> EESC resolution *the long-lasting legacy of the European Year of Youth: youth mainstreaming and empowerment*. Available at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/documents/long-lasting-legacy-european-year-youth-youth-mainstreaming-and-empowerment> Accessed on 12 June 2024

<sup>12</sup> Joerg Forbrig and Council of Europe (2005). *Revisiting youth political participation: challenges for research and democratic practice in Europe*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, Cop.

<sup>13</sup> Lauritzen, P., keynote speech on participation presented at the Training Course on the development and implementation of participation projects at local and regional level, the European Youth Centre, Strasbourg, June 2006

<sup>14</sup> Council of Europe (2015). *Have Your Say!* Council of Europe.

<sup>15</sup> Congress and Council of Europe (2003). *Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*. Council of Europe.

lots of motivation, knowledge, talents and strengths. They should have the opportunity to express their needs and to find ways of satisfying them.

The age range for youth participation is subject to varying definitions across different contexts, and traditionally, 6 approaches to defining youth are recognised across Europe:

- Predominant European model: 14 to 30 years of age (23 European countries)
- Shortened youth age model: 13 to 25 years of age (5 European countries)
- Start-earlier-and-end-later youth age model: 12 to 30 years of age (5 European countries)
- Prolonged youth age model: 12 to 35 years of age (5 European countries)
- Youth age model comprising childhood: 3 to 30 years of age (3 European countries)
- Children and youth merged model: 0 to 30 years of age (6 European countries).

The age-range in the predominant European model accommodates the diverse stages of transition from childhood to adulthood. This approach acknowledges the capacities and needs of young people at different ages.

Participation is not merely about involvement in activities; it embodies the essence of being part of a community, sharing responsibilities, and having the opportunity to influence decisions that affect one's life and society at large. The EESC's resolution<sup>16</sup> highlights that participation extends beyond electoral politics, encompassing active citizenship and the contribution to building a better society through various forms of engagement.

The motivation behind encouraging youth participation can be classified into four types:

- **Rights-based:** Recognises participation as an inherent right of all individuals, including young people.
- **Empowerment:** Participation as a means to empower young individuals by involving them in processes that affect their lives.
- **Sustainability and efficiency:** The inclusion of young people in decision-making to harness their unique long-term perspectives, innovative ideas and capacities, therefore enhancing the effectiveness of policies and initiatives.
- **Personal development:** Participation as crucial for the personal development of young people, enabling them to acquire new skills and a deeper understanding of democratic processes.

The United Nations General Assembly distinguishes the following areas of youth participation:

- **Economic participation** relates to employment and work in general, to economic development, eliminating poverty, building a stable economic situation in a society, a region or for young people as a group.
- **Political participation** relates to authorities and governments, public policies, exercising power, the influence on the distribution of resources at various levels.

<sup>16</sup> EESC resolution *the long-lasting legacy of the European Year of Youth: youth mainstreaming and empowerment*. Available at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/documents/long-lasting-legacy-european-year-youth-youth-mainstreaming-and-empowerment>  
Accessed on 12 June 2024

- **Social participation** relates to involvement in the life of a local community, addressing local problems and challenges.
- **Cultural participation** relates to different forms of art and expression (visual arts, music, film, dance, etc.).<sup>17</sup>

In line with these definitions, this study will mainly focus on political participation which includes policy and decision-making processes.

Such youth participation can significantly benefit individuals, organisations, and communities. This process is fundamental for a strong democracy building. It allows young people to express their needs and opinions, thus ensuring that policies and initiatives are responsive to their aspirations and challenges, as well as future oriented. Involving young people in decision-making processes enhances the representativeness and inclusiveness of democracy, bringing fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to local and regional problems. The partnership between young individuals and adults combines the dynamism of youth with experience, promoting mutual learning processes for all stakeholders. The sense of belonging also increases motivation and willingness to engage and remain in communities, which is good for the communities themselves. By including young minds in decision-making, democracies become more representative and sustainable, welcoming diverse perspectives and fostering innovative solutions.

#### 4.2 A detailed blueprint: key characteristics

This section outlines the key characteristics that make up meaningful youth participation, drawing on concepts like co-creation, ownership, representativeness, inclusiveness, resources, transparency, advocacy and monitoring, etc. It will reference frameworks like the Council of Europe indicators and other important policy documents.

Youth political participation can differ from consultation processes through deliberation and participatory processes, decision-making, or even protesting against some decisions. Analysing various sources, it is possible to point out a few common aspects considered key to defining meaningful youth political participation<sup>18</sup>:

- **Power sharing:** Youth should have the capacity to partake in decision-making processes independently or in collaboration with other stakeholders. The conditions should be transparent and clear for all involved. Essentially, there should be a well-defined structure outlining the distribution of responsibilities, voting rights, or criteria for decision acceptance. This arrangement ensures that young people are aware of the parameters shaping their participation and the circumstances in which their opinions are significant.
- **Information and communication:** Young people need up-to-date information for their political participation to be meaningful. Channels of communication should be open between young people and adults in the relevant area, allowing information to flow smoothly in both directions. Meaningful youth political participation activities must also include capacity-building opportunities for youth,

<sup>17</sup> United Nations (2018). *Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* / United Nations for Youth. [online] [www.un.org/development/desa/youth/world-youth-report/wyr2018.html](https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/world-youth-report/wyr2018.html). Accessed on 15 April 2024

as these also contribute to increasing youth knowledge.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, information should be available in a youth-friendly manner and on the topics that concern young people through youth-focused conferences, workshops and other capacity-building formats implemented in line with the needs of young people.

- **Material and non-material support:** Young people should have the necessary support available to safely engage in youth political participation activities regardless of their background, status, or identity.
- **Transparency and accountability:** All processes should be transparent and clear to all stakeholders, including young people. Accountability processes should be established to support transparency and establish the trust of all stakeholders in political participation processes. Young people should be informed well in advance about the processes and mechanisms that are taking place and involving them. They should know what roles they play, what other actors participate in, and in what capacities. The explicit responsibilities of the various actors should be communicated to all stakeholders, with contingency planning in place (e.g. what processes apply if no consensus is reached or if certain stakeholders do not fulfil their obligations, etc.).
- **Authority and voice:** The youth voice must be heard and respected by other stakeholders in political participation processes, an aspect promoted well by horizontal working structures. Young people must be considered responsible citizens with the right to make a choice.<sup>20</sup> In other words, young people and their counterparts should either have the same competencies and responsibilities, or the responsibilities should be clearly set out, with the young people occupying positions that are afforded appropriate attention.

All aspects of youth political participation in a given context must be considered. For instance, young people may not be able to cover their own travel expenses when engaging in youth political participation activities. At the same time, young people should feel welcome and appreciated when engaging in youth political participation activities, with other stakeholders acknowledging their contributions to the process.<sup>21</sup>

The Charter <sup>22</sup> further elaborates on practical strategies and tools that local authorities can leverage to foster meaningful youth participation across various spheres. The following areas are identified as areas useful for meaningful participation:

- Training in youth participation: This includes training for youth workers and multipliers, as well as peer-group and non-formal education.
- Informing young people: This category refers to youth centres, addressing accessibility issues for information services and creating measurement tools for the sustainable improvement of such centres.
- Promoting youth participation through ICT: The participation effect may be enhanced with the usage of technologies and ensuring wider access to them.

<sup>22</sup> Council of Europe (2015). Have Your Say! Council of Europe.

- Promoting youth participation in media: Raising awareness is a crucial factor in meaningful participation that can be empowered through supporting youth-developed local media and training young individuals in media organisations.
- Encouraging voluntary work: Meaningful youth participation can be amplified through increasing access to information about volunteering opportunities and developing systems to recognise and validate voluntary activities.
- Supporting young people's projects and initiatives means facilitating the implementation of youth projects with professional, financial, material, and technical assistance.
- Promoting youth organisations: Youth-led organisations provide wider opportunities for meaningful participation through implementing co-management and decision-making partnerships.
- Promoting participation in NGOs and political parties.

#### 4.3 Barriers and challenges to meaningful youth participation

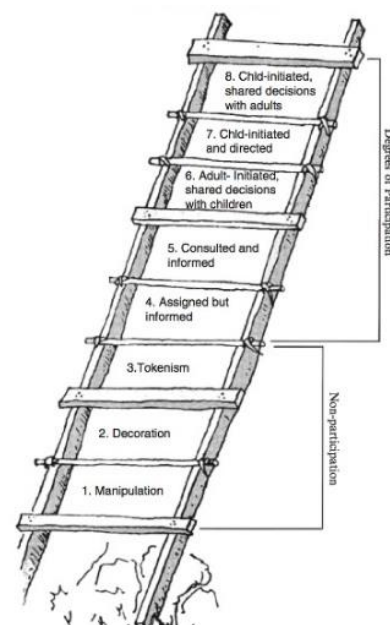
This section examines common barriers that prevent meaningful youth participation from being realised, like lack of resources, age restrictions, tokenism, etc.

Youth participation can bring very concrete and visible benefits, not only to young people themselves but also to the organisations/institutions and communities they are involved in. However, evidence shows that if it is dealt with in an inappropriate way (represented, for example, by the lower rungs of Hart's Ladder of Participation), it might actually have a negative impact on those involved.

Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation applied the conceptual framework of Sherry Arnstein's *Ladder of Citizen Participation*<sup>23</sup> to the participation of young people in adult projects, programs, and activities, including forms of work, advocacy, and citizenship. In its original 1992 illustration, Hart's model features eight 'rungs' that describe the characteristics associated with different levels of decision-making agency, control, or power that can be given to young people by adults.<sup>24</sup> In the context of this study, the term 'child' in the illustration is interchangeable with young people.

It is necessary to distinguish meaningful participation, acknowledging genuine participatory processes, from activities that fall short. The passive consumption of information, devoid of mechanisms for young people to express their opinions and influence policy decisions, does not constitute meaningful participation. Similarly, any format that relegates young people to a passive

Figure 1: The Ladder of Participation



<sup>23</sup> Arnstein, S. (1969.) *A ladder of citizen participation*. Journal of the American Planning Association, 35(4), 216–224.

<sup>24</sup> Hart, R. A. (1992). . Florence, Italy: United Nations Children's Fund International Child Development Centre.

audience role, with no opportunity to provide feedback or have their ideas genuinely considered, cannot be considered genuine engagement. True participation must ensure an active and collaborative environment where young people can articulate their concerns, propose solutions, and witness the incorporation of their contributions into the policy-making and decision-making processes.

Moreover, mandatory events cannot be considered as youth participation. Hence, any school parliaments or consultative processes in which young people must take part are not participation processes but rather educational or support activities. For example, young politicians who participate in political processes are engaged in politics and not in youth participation. The distinction is important as the category of political participation is distinct from mandatory political work in ways such as power distribution, influence, and accountability.

Therefore, some barriers to meaningful participation can be identified, such as:

– **Tokenisation of youth**

Tokenism emerges as a significant barrier to youth participation when young individuals are included in participatory processes only in a superficial manner without genuine consideration or integration of their views and contributions. Young people are given some roles within an activity; they have no real influence on any decisions. This barrier may affect participation in a detrimental way as it creates an illusion of meaningful involvement when, in fact, young people have no access to participation, thus leading to frustration and future disengagement.<sup>25</sup>

– **Lack of inclusion**

High turnover of young participants, driven by varying commitments and interests, challenges the continuity and depth of youth involvement in long-term projects or initiatives. It can lead to a situation where those young people who participate are not fully representative of the broader youth demographic, thereby limiting the diversity of perspectives and experiences within participation processes. According to the 2023 study<sup>26</sup> young men from less affluent backgrounds participate the least, followed by young women from poor backgrounds.

– **Lack of resources and transparency of the processes**

The practical aspects of participation, such as costs, location, accessibility issues for those with disabilities, and the logistical challenges posed by long meetings, school commitments, and other interests, further limit young people's ability for meaningful participation. Moreover, the lack of transparency and capacity-building opportunities can pose limitations and disappointment in the process.

– **Lack of intergenerational solidarity**

The traditional placement of youth in the social hierarchy and the tendency of adults to patronise youth can reinforce negative stereotypes, as well as mutual misunderstanding. Such dynamics can distort the youth's voice and prevent them from further participation.

<sup>25</sup> Council of Europe (2015). Have Your Say! Council of Europe.

<sup>26</sup> Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs (2023). Young people's participation in European democratic processes. European Parliament

- **Lack of youth-friendly procedures and policies within organisations** (for example, substantial amounts of formal documents to read, analyse and react to).

Institutional structures often do not consider the needs and specifics of work with young people. For example, it is not rare that young members of local youth councils are overwhelmed by the number of formal documents they need to read in order to understand a case—the excessive bureaucratic processes function as a significant challenge for meaningful participation. Furthermore, coupled with a pervasive belief among some that youth participation is the responsibility of someone else, this leads to a lack of initiative-taking efforts to engage young people meaningfully. The practical aspects of participation, such as costs, location, accessibility issues for those with disabilities, and the logistical challenges posed by long meetings, school commitments, and other interests, further limit young people's ability for meaningful participation.

- **Trends toward individualisation**

The 2021 European Parliament youth survey<sup>27</sup> shows that less traditional and non-institutional forms of political engagement are more popular and only 14% joined a youth organisation. The most common forms of engagement included signing petitions, whether online or offline (42%). Other popular forms of political engagement were posting their opinion online (26%), consumer boycotting (25%) or participating in street protests and demonstrations (24%) among other individual forms of participation.

Researchers noticed an increased preference for personal solutions over collective efforts and a growing distaste for group activities. This trend has led to a diversification of opportunities, but also to a fragmentation of risks. A notable effect of this shift is the reluctance of many young Europeans to join traditional youth organisations that require regular attendance and follow a set routine. Consequently, there is an ongoing demand for more adaptable forms of participatory frameworks that can attract youngsters in Europe.<sup>28</sup>

## 5. Case studies

This subchapter provides the mapping of four case studies in local, national, EU and international level where youth were able to meaningfully participate in a decision-making process and have a positive impact.

### 5.1 Local Youth Council in Klaipėda

Lithuania is a country divided into municipalities at the local level, each with its local government structure. Lithuania has a legal framework that supports and promotes youth participation, providing a basis for establishing and functioning Local Youth Councils (LYCs)<sup>29</sup>. The Law on Youth Organisations, enacted in 2003, recognises LYCs as key actors in youth participation and stipulates their rights and responsibilities. It outlines the principles of LYCs establishment, membership, and functioning, ensuring their independence and democratic decision-making processes. The Local Youth Councils (LYCs) operate within the decentralised municipal system and have a significant presence

<sup>27</sup> Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs (2023). Young people's participation in European democratic processes. European Parliament

<sup>28</sup> Joerg Forbrig and Council of Europe (2005). *Revisiting youth political participation: challenges for research and democratic practice in Europe*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, Cop.

<sup>29</sup> Youth Wiki (2023) Available at: <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/lithuania/53-youth-representation-bodies> Accessed on 20 June 2024

across various municipalities. The LYC structures and dynamics may vary depending on the local context. Nevertheless, the National Youth Policy adopted an action plan for 2022-2024, where key objectives of the plan include monitoring the youth situation for evidence-based policy and strengthening youth policy internationally and regionally.

Particularly, the municipality of Klaipėda has demonstrated a strong commitment to youth engagement. The Youth Affairs Council, the LYC of Klaipėda Municipality is an essential platform for youth involvement in local governance and community activities, which plays a pivotal role in empowering young people and fostering youth participation in civic processes. This council is part of the broader effort to address youth-related challenges and promote engagement among Klaipėda's young population.

It typically consists of young members elected or nominated from various youth organisations, schools, and informal youth groups within the city. These are organised in a Council of Municipal Youth Organisations (i.e. the Association of Klaipėda Youth Organisations 'Round Table') - a significant structure aimed at uniting various youth organisations within municipalities and representing their interests at the local level. In Klaipėda, the Round Table works closely with the Youth Affairs Council by ensuring representation, providing training and capacity-building, facilitating information sharing, assisting with problem-solving, and securing financial and logistical resources. This multi-faceted support helps maintain a robust and effective mechanism for youth participation in local governance.

The Youth Affairs Council operates under a formal structure, often comprising positions such as a chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary, and various committee heads, depending on the council's specific needs and activities. Youth Affairs Council members are elected with a mandate of two years – the same as the regular Municipal Council of Klaipėda and is composed of a total of fourteen members. Seven of them are representatives of the city's youth, and seven are representatives of the local government. The representatives of Klaipėda's youngsters are elected by the Assembly of the Round Table.

While applying for the European Youth Capital, the municipality developed the Klaipėda Youth Forum<sup>30</sup>. This forum still serves as a platform for young people to raise issues, solve problems, and make suggestions, acting as a think tank supporting the city's structures working with young people. The forum is 2 days event where youngsters work on various themes and formulate proposals to LYC and city council.

The Klaipėda Youth Affairs Council regulation, defines the following main goals:

- Examine issues related to youth policy in the municipality.
- To submit proposals to municipal institutions and institutions regarding the youth policy, its implementation and related legal act projects.
- To strengthen cooperation between municipal institutions, institutions and youth and organisations working with youth.

<sup>30</sup> Choose Klaipėda (2024) KLAIPEDA – EUROPEAN YOUTH CAPITAL 2021! Available at: <https://chooseklaipeda.eu/eyc/Klaipeda-youth-forum/> Accessed on 20 June 2024

From the perspective of those involved in the Klaipėda Youth Affairs Council<sup>31</sup> the main goals are:

- To collaborate in the definition and implementation of local youth policies according to national and European policies
- To seek an integrated vision and action in the Municipality's youth policy
- To inform the City Council regarding the problems of young people in the municipality who require support or initiatives in the sphere of municipal competencies
- To formulate proposals within the scope of the activities it pursues and submit them to the President or Councillor(s) responsible for the respective areas of interest for youth policies
- To promote debate and dialogue about the needs and aspirations of youth
- To promote young people's active citizenship and participation.

For fulfilling these goals, the Klaipėda Youth Affairs Council focuses on:

- Youth Empowerment and Participation: The Youth Affairs Council collaborates closely with the Klaipėda Round Table, providing a platform for young people to raise issues, solve problems, and make suggestions. The forum acts as a think tank where young experts contribute ideas and initiatives to help municipal structures work more effectively with youth.
- Policy Influence and Advocacy: The council ensures that the voices of young people are heard in policy-making processes. It gathers insights from various youth groups during the Forum Assembly, which meets twice a year to set priorities and identify relevant issues. These priorities are then addressed by smaller working groups that formulate proposals for the council.
- Strategic Initiatives and Projects: The Youth Affairs Council was instrumental in Klaipėda's successful bid for the European Youth Capital 2021 title. The #chooseKlaipėda initiative, driven by youth participation, aimed to tackle local challenges such as decreasing population, low social and civic participation, and the need for a more vibrant and inclusive environment for young people.
- Capacity Building and Support: The council provides tools, opportunities, and support for young people to engage in civic activities. It also offers consultations and helps youth representatives articulate their arguments effectively to ensure their contributions have significant impact.
- Collaborations and Partnerships: The Youth Affairs Council works with local, national, and international organisations to expand its reach and effectiveness. Through partnerships and collaborative projects, it aims to build a youth-friendly environment that supports entrepreneurship, creativity, and social cohesion.

The council's efforts are part of a comprehensive strategy to create an open, cooperative, and youth-friendly city, addressing the diverse needs of young people and enhancing their role in shaping the future of Klaipėda.

The procedures of the council typically involve regular meetings where members discuss ongoing issues, plan activities, and review progress on various initiatives. The council also organises forums, workshops, and community events to gather input from a broader youth demographic and foster greater participation in its activities

For LYCs fair youth participation, the mechanism addresses and makes suggestions on important themes such as LGBTQ+, mental health, inclusion of disabled people, etc. It can also have external meetings

<sup>31</sup> DYPALL Network. 2024. "Local Youth Councils, Analysis of Policy and Mechanisms." Available at: [www.dypall.com/catalogue-of-resources](http://www.dypall.com/catalogue-of-resources). Accessed 20 June 2024.

with other institutions or Youth organisations to address more youth problems such as drug addiction or NEETS. To increase the impact and involvement of young people, it looks to include new topics that address their needs. Moreover, annual surveys can be launched among young people. Lastly, LYC can have mentors for young representatives to improve their knowledge of policies. In this way, the Klaipėda Youth Affairs Council looks for distinction in inclusivity, innovation, and capacity-building matters. The council focuses on inclusivity, ensuring that marginalised and underrepresented youth groups participate in its activities. This approach helps in creating a diverse and comprehensive representation of youth opinions and needs. There is a clear definition of roles for each LYC member, and they are responsible for setting or reviewing the agenda for the LYC meetings. The conclusions and recommendations of the LYC meetings are public and easily accessible to the population in general and to young people in particular.

Through initiatives like the #chooseKlaipėda movement during Klaipėda's tenure as the European Youth Capital in 2021, the council demonstrated a commitment to innovative practices in youth engagement. This included using digital tools and creative platforms to enhance participation and visibility. Additionally, it invested in sustainable youth participation with Klaipėda city developing a digital tool called 'Solve the problem in the city', where youngsters can suggest solutions or point out problems and direct them to the LYC.

The council places a strong emphasis on building the capacities of its members through non-formal education, training modules, and international exchange programs. This helps equip young people with the skills and knowledge necessary to influence local policy effectively.

Based on insights from a Youth Affairs Council member and a staff member responsible for the participatory structure, the following analysis was conducted.

In terms of **co-creation & ownership**, the Youth Affairs Council in Klaipėda integrates young people and youth organisations into its design and participatory mechanisms. The legislative framework for youth participation has been in place for nearly two decades, with local youth organisations responsible for organising elections and setting candidate criteria, allowing some degree of co-creation and autonomy within established guidelines.

Some changes have been made to simplify the process of application, for example, such as removing the requirement for recommendations from other youth organisations. However, youth issues are typically raised by the local youth organisations council rather than directly by the youth themselves. Young people do not often submit proposals to the Youth Affairs Council (LYC), and there is little competition in the selection of its members from both youth and municipal council members.

Young people are informed about decisions and can propose changes, though the structure and established rules limit the extent of co-creation.

In terms of **representativeness & legitimacy**, the Council is composed of both young representatives, from 15 years old, and politicians, ensuring a balanced representation of various stakeholders. This dual structure includes elected members by the local youth organisations and municipal representatives, which strengthens the legitimacy and diversity of the council. This setup ensures that different perspectives, including those of policymakers and young people, are included in decision-making processes. The Young members selection involves diverse youth organisations through a Municipal Council called Round Table, which unites various youth organisations in Klaipėda. This ensures the representation of a broad spectrum of youth interests.

Members of the LYC primarily consider received positions or suggestions rather than actively creating their own. The effectiveness of this representation can also be hampered by the differing motivations and time commitments of its members.

In terms of **inclusiveness & non-discrimination**, these topics were identified as central principles of the Youth Affairs Council. Young people from diverse backgrounds, regardless of their interests, positions, or abilities, can participate equally. The Youth Affairs Council is open to all young people regardless of background, interests, or abilities. While formal documents do not mandate specific representation of groups such as national minorities or individuals with disabilities, inclusiveness is practiced. The council has, in the past, included representatives with disabilities and ensures accessibility, while providing sign language interpretation during meetings. This approach promotes equal rights and opportunities for all young people in the municipality. Despite this, there is an expectation for municipality or city council members to complete proposals with budget and implementation plans. Unfortunately, not all youth representatives have the necessary qualifications to deliver such comprehensive proposals.

In terms of **capacity-building**, it is primarily supported by the Round Table, which organises trainings and meetings to enhance the skills and knowledge of Council members. National initiatives also provide additional training opportunities. The Council itself does not directly organise these activities but benefits from the support of external bodies. To enhance the skills, knowledge, and confidence of young people, the council, along with the National Youth Affairs Agency, also organises regular trainings and consultations. These activities are crucial for young members to understand their roles and the decision-making processes they are involved in. Local youth organisations also conduct workshops and events to further support youth engagement and development. Nonetheless, there is a notable discrepancy in policy literacy, with some municipality and city council representatives displaying low youth policy literacy, while youth representatives often have limited general policy literacy.

In terms of **financial & human resources**, the Youth Affairs Council functions as an advisory body without a dedicated budget. Financial resources are allocated through various projects and collaborations with local organisations. Although there is no specific budget line for the council within the municipal budget, projects such as regional youth council meetings and training sessions are funded through partnerships and external resources. This lack of a dedicated budget for the Youth Affairs Council, makes it dependent on the Round Table's resources. The Round Table receives some funding for its functions, including supporting the Council, but this budget is often insufficient and dependent on project-based funding. Both the Round Table's and the Council's budgets need to be increased to ensure sustainability and proper functioning. Creating official documents and other communication sources lies with the Youth Organisations Council, which then delegates youth representatives to the LYC. This then makes it highly dependent of the availability and engagement of young people which in some committees can be challenging.

In terms of **transparency**, it is maintained through regular communication and public documentation of activities and decisions. Meeting minutes are published on the official municipality website, and social media is used to engage with the wider community. Information is shared with all members and participating organisations, and efforts are made to ensure clarity and understanding among young people involved. Although maintaining active communication is often the responsibility of youth representatives, the council ensures that all processes are open and easily understood.

In terms of **advocacy & impact**, The Youth Affairs Council employs systematic methods to ensure effective advocacy and impact. The inclusion of both young representatives and politicians allows the council to directly influence decision-making processes. This structure enables real-time advocacy and ensures that youth voices are considered in policy discussions, with once-a-month meeting. The council also provides recommendations and collaborates with various stakeholders to promote youth interests. However, the extensive time needed to implement decisions and the primarily advisory role can reduce the perceived impact of the council's work. There is also a perception that the municipality does not always consider the Council's proposals seriously. Instances like the repurposing of youth centres during Covid-19 without consulting the Youth Affairs Council illustrates this challenge.

In terms of **resilience, monitoring & improvement**, continuous improvement and monitoring are integral to the council's operations. Annual reports and activity plans are created and approved by the council, providing an overview of achievements and areas for improvement. This process ensures that youth participation remains resilient and effective over time, adapting to new challenges and maintaining its impact and recognition within the community. Due to the tendency of youth representatives and municipal officials to focus on received positions or suggestions rather than generating their own initiatives, the sustainability of the process may be fragile. This means that the motivation and activity level of Council members' variability will affect the Council's overall resilience and impact. Also, the sustainability of the Youth Affairs Council is closely tied to the existence and functionality of the Round Table. If the Round Table were to cease operations, like seen previously in other cities in Lithuania, it would significantly impact the Council's effectiveness and continuity.

## **Conclusions and lessons learned**

Youth participation and active engagement in governance and decision-making processes are critical components of democratic societies. The theoretical foundations for these elements are rooted in various frameworks that emphasise the importance of involving young people in shaping policies that affect their daily lives. The Youth Affairs Council of Klaipėda Municipality serves as a practical example of these theories in action. By incorporating both young representatives and municipal politicians, the council creates a platform for youth to engage directly with policy makers. This structure aligns with the higher rungs of Hart's Ladder (see Figure 1), where young people share decisions and initiate projects.

Compared to other models, such as youth parliaments or advisory boards, the Youth Affairs Council's approach to inclusiveness, transparency, and capacity building stands out. While youth parliaments often simulate legislative processes, the Youth Affairs Council integrates youth directly into the municipal governance framework, providing them with real influence and responsibility.

Despite the successes, challenges such as ensuring continuous engagement, maintaining inclusiveness, and overcoming bureaucratic inertia are prevalent. The lack of a dedicated budget makes the council vulnerable, as it depends on securing funds from partners and external sources. These challenges reflect the theoretical issues of sustaining elevated levels of participation and the practical difficulties of implementing inclusive policies that genuinely reflect diverse youth voices.

In conclusion, the Youth Affairs Council of Klaipėda exemplifies the principles of youth participation theories while also highlighting the complexities and challenges of translating these theories into practice. Through continuous improvement and adaptation, it strives to maintain an effective and inclusive platform for youth engagement.

## 5.2 Austrian National Youth Council

According to different studies and resources in place Austria is ranked among the countries with a strong welfare state, social partnership tradition and a good quality of life<sup>32</sup>. Additionally, Austria was one of the first European countries to lower its voting age to 16 for national elections in 2007. Applying this kind of policy on youth political participation makes its youth representation mechanisms particularly relevant in the realm of analysing positive practices and challenges of participatory democracy. Furthermore, considering their progressive youth policies and socio-economic level, it provides an interesting context to further analyse how youth interests are represented and negotiated. Therefore, taking into consideration that this case study aims to analyse the good practices and experiences of structured youth participation in decision-making processes at the national level, it was decided to focus on the Austrian National Youth Council.

The Austrian National Youth Council (Bundes-Jugendvertretung - BJV) is the body which legally represents young people in Austria. This body was established as a result of the Federal Youth Representation Act which came into force in 2001. This act is an important piece of legislation in Austria's efforts to involve young people in the political process and ensure their voices are heard at the federal level. The Austrian National Youth Council serves as the legal representative body for children and young people in Austria and it has equal in status with the legal representations of other so-called social partners like the Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber of Labour, the Trade Unions, the Chamber of farmers – or the Austrian Senior Citizens' Council.<sup>33</sup> This providing this entity with an equal importance with other important entities called Social Partners.

The aim of the structure is to represents the interests of young people at the national level and in international forums and to give them a voice in political decision-making processes, especially on issues that affect them directly. The act ensures that youth organisations and representatives have a say in federal legislation and policies related to young people. Therefore, the Austrian National Youth Council is composed of various youth organisations and works to promote youth participation in democratic processes. According to official sources of information it represents around 3 million people from 0 to 30 years old.<sup>34</sup>

The organisation advocates for the rights and concerns of young people thus being comprehensive in a range of topics such as education, participation, health and entry into the job market. It aims to amplify youth voices in political and administrative spheres, conveying their concerns and perspectives to decision-makers. The Council develops and implements projects and programs designed to facilitate direct youth participation. It also works to establish collaborations and joint initiatives among various youth-focused organisations. Acting as a liaison, the Council connects different clubs and organisations

<sup>32</sup> OECD (2023) *OECD Better Life Index*. Available at: <https://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/austria/>

<sup>33</sup> Federal Chancellery – Republic of Austria (2023) *Austrian National Youth Council*. Available at: <https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/en/agenda/youth/youth-policy-in-austria/austrian-national-youth-council.html>

<sup>34</sup> The Austrian National Youth Council (BJV) (2023) *About the BJV* Available at: <https://bjv.at/ueber-die-bjv/>

dedicated to young people's interests. Additionally, it provides opportunities for youth engagement at the international level. Through these activities, the Austrian National Youth Council seeks to integrate youth perspectives into decision-making processes and promote youth involvement in various aspects of civic life, both domestically and internationally.

The Austrian National Youth Council has more than 59<sup>35</sup> member organisations and the aim are to act on Participation; Inclusion; Protection; Rights; Prospects; Opportunities (Council Brochure 2017) of youth. The entire directing team of the Council work daily in order to adequately represent the different concerns, backgrounds and views, by conducting studies and surveys and not only develop programs for children and young people, but also give them the opportunity to actively shape their own future. The structure of the organisation is composed by the board which leads the association and represents the organisation externally and it consists of 12 young people from different member organisations, women's committee which is a platform of many young women who decide together how women's policy, and the office which has a more operational role as it coordinates and organises the ongoing work of the Federal Youth Representation. Based on the developed areas of assessment in this research and the background information provided, a comprehensive view of how the Austrian National Council functions to integrate youth voices in national and international policy spheres is developed.

In terms of **co-creation & ownership**, the Austrian National Youth Council was created as a result of the Federal Youth Representation Act. Available information does not indicate significant mobilisation by youth organisations or groups to request its establishment. This suggests the council's creation was primarily a top-down initiative, rather than emerging from a bottom-up approach. Nevertheless, the structure in place of Council showcases that youth are integral part of the structure of the organisation and youth organisations participate in shaping the agenda and priorities of the organisation. This mechanism is characterised by membership-based representation where every organisation of the members has the right to be part of the board structure and of the decision-making process. The highest decision-making body of the organisation is the board which consists of 12 young people from various member organisations. They are elected every two years by the member organisations and supported by the management office. Meanwhile, the board has a chair and deputy chairs who are selected through a lottery system, with the chair and deputy chairs determined by the order of draws. Each serves a six-month term. The Council delegates its strategic and political decision-making authority to the Board. Additionally, the Board serves as the official spokesperson for the Youth Council, interacting with various external entities such as media outlets and political figures. Regarding meeting frequency, according to the statutes, they are obligated to meet at least four times a year.

In terms of **representativeness & legitimacy**, the structure shows a good balance of the youth representation and gender equality. The Chair composed by 4 people the Board composed of 12 people are composed by 100% young people and 50% of them are female and 50% male. The average age of people involved in the mechanisms are 20-30 years old. Meanwhile, the Managing Office which is the supporting team of the youth structure has 11 employees composed by a mix of generations. The Woman Committee is composed to 100% females. The profile of the organisations that are part of the Council is truly diverse, and included academic, regional, religion, political, environmental, ethnic background.

<sup>35</sup> Austrian National Youth Council, Members Organisations (2023) *The Federal Youth Representation has over 50 member organisations!* Available at: <https://bjv.at/ueber-die-bjv/mitgliedsorganisationen/>

The body is recognised by the Austrian government as the official platform on gathering youth input on several policies. Therefore, the organisation implements a series of different mechanism such as the EU Youth Dialogue, UN Youth Delegate program etc. Through its member organisation active all over Austria, who count around 1,5 million members the Council reaches a broad range of youth. Furthermore, the organisation is recognised as a social partner in Austria and it holds an equivalent legal standing to other representative organisations, such as employees, traders, farmers or senior citizens. Having in place a clear legal framework which determines the role of the entity helps to empower them and to set a clear standing on their position and voice.

In terms of **inclusiveness & non-discrimination**, there exist an Inclusion Advisory Board, where nine young people with disabilities discussed what measures are needed to remove barriers, especially in the areas of education, leisure and housing. Meanwhile, the meetings of the Councils are always open to all interested youth - regardless of their involvement in member organisations of the Council. ("Diversity", n.d.) Another good example is the Women's Committee which works with a trans-inclusive definition of women, which means that everyone who identifies as a girl or woman is welcome. In addition, the Women's Committee's events are usually open to all genders, unless explicitly communicated otherwise. ("Diversity", n.d.) and to all interested women and girls - regardless of their involvement in member organisations of the BJV. Therefore, the Gender mainstreaming has been a successful and integral part of daily work at Council for years. The establishment of this kind of structure is seen as a positive example of directly including and mainstreaming different target groups. However, having so many different structures/units can pose operational difficulties in terms of keeping them functional and independent at all times.

The member organisations, range from those based in political parties and churches to representatives of open youth work and ethnic groups and minorities, pupil's and students' representatives, and also include the provincial youth advisory committees more specifically:

- nationwide children and youth organisations: 38 organisations
- student and school representatives: 3 organisations
- state youth councils and ethnic group representatives: 15 organisations
- extraordinary members: 3 organisations

Such kind of representation is inclusive and applies a non-discriminatory approach, nevertheless for the big population that the country represents a higher number of member organisation is being expected to be part of the structure. Meanwhile, the organisation has developed a protection concept for its supporters such Code of conduct for employees, hiring criteria; Protection of personal rights in public relations; Case management, how to proceed in suspected cases which serves to prevent all forms of violence and discrimination. Having dedicated policies in this regard is being seen as a positive example on undertaking concrete measures on inclusiveness and non-discrimination environment.

In terms of **capacity building**, different training and group activities happen for the members organisations and mostly for the engaged young people in order to be as much closer to the children and youth and to understand their problems. Also, once a year, a half-day gender training course is held for all board members and the work areas of gender mainstreaming, and women and girls are continuously supported by the organisation. Each year, in the official website, the council publishes the Annual Report which is an overview of the actual situation and what initiatives are taken under the areas of intervention during calendar year. In general, there are being provided different training opportunities and different

toolbox are available on mental health, gender equality, climate change and other important topics. Furthermore, it supports education in non-formal learning for young people and youth workers through certification and validation through the program aufZAQ - Quality of Trainings and Competence in Youth Work.<sup>36</sup> What is missing are tools and materials for enhancing the skills, knowledge, and confidence of young people to understand the mechanism they are participating in and how it influences decision-making. Since, democracy is about rights and obligations, it is necessary for members of main bodies such as the Board to have various materials on how to better exercise their roles and on the principles of meaningful participation as a domain that is continuously improving and increasing standards.

In terms of **financial & human resources**, according to their statute, the organisation is institutionally supported by the Federal Minister for Social Security and Generations, who provides reimbursement for the administrative costs of the Federal Youth Representation's office operations. Additionally, the Minister reimburses travel and subsistence expenses for members of the Presidium, based on existing laws.<sup>37</sup> Having a planned and dedicated budget for the operation of the structure is important and is considered positive for sustainability and providing a clear operational framework. According to the information provided the Council receives about 50% of its funding from the Austrian Chancellery and 50% from project grants. Its annual budget is negotiated yearly, and it also depends on successful project funding applications. However, the organisation's official media lack specific statistics and data regarding budget allocation. Including such information would further increase transparency and accountability in the organisation's work and provide a clearer understanding of the staff's working conditions. As already mentioned, the available staff which support the operation of the Board, and other available structure are 11 people which considering the ongoing activities and different bodies can cause high volume of workload. The engagement of the board and of the council is in voluntary bases ("About the Council" 2024). In the realm of youth economic empowerment, it should be considered that, depending on the workload and dedicated time, small economic incentives could be provided for these roles as well. This would support a better balance among different engagements and recognise the time dedicated to the organisation from the youth representatives. While addressing meaningful youth participation, compensation for the time and expertise contributed by young people should start being discussed and normalised as well.

In terms of **transparency**, being the legal representative of Austrian young people, the organisation is empowered to have a say in all important political issues and decisions, so being transparent is fundamental. Furthermore, transparency and clear information lead to increase of trust among citizens on the functionality of the structure. In the official mediums of the organisation, it is possible to find important documents which set the baseline of operation for the entity starting such as status, rules and procedures of operation, organisation chart, representation tasks of the organisation, Annual Reports from 2017-2023 etc. Furthermore, updated information can be found on the news on their recent activities and other important development. Additionally, there are various official pages that reflect activities of the council and specially the election process with documents and news available, such as:

- Federal Chancellery Republic of Austria
- European Youth Forum

36 AUFZAQ (2024) Quality of Trainings and Competence in Youth Work. Available at: <https://www.aufzaq.at/english/>

37 Federal Chancellery of the Republic of Austria (2024) Federal law consolidated: Complete legal provision for the Federal Youth Representation Act. Available at: <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20001059>

– Youth Wiki etc.

While the prominent level of transparency is positively evaluated, it would be necessary to provide information in a simpler way for a larger audience on the functionality, selection process, professional background and power of the Chair and the Board. Furthermore, publishing financial annual reports would increase accountability towards the work of the organisation and demonstrates openness, allows stakeholders to assess the organisation's financial health, and builds trust. It also ensures compliance with legal requirements, facilitates informed decision-making, and can attract potential investors or donors. Ultimately, this practice promotes responsible management and sustainable operations.

In terms of **advocacy & impact**, having a recognised role by laws in place from the Austrian government and being in equal bases on equal bases with other Social Partners such as groups of employees, businesspeople, farmers and the Austrian Senior Citizens' Council makes them to be well positioned in making youth voices heard. There are a variety of advocacy publications such as position papers, Statements, Studies etc which advocate for different important youth related matters. The latest activity in this regard has been the 5th Austrian Youth Conference, which is part of the EU Youth Dialogue, and was jointly organised jointly with the state youth departments, especially the Styrian State Youth Department, and the Federal Chancellery where around 50<sup>38</sup> policy recommendations were delivered on inclusivity. There are numerous examples of mechanisms used for advocacy and impact by the organisation, and a recent achievement is the free access to the HPV vaccine for young people. However, the role of youth organisations in all these advocacy efforts should be clearer.

In terms of **resilience, monitoring & improvement**, a robust system for continuous youth participation and improvement is employed. An annual plenary meeting brings all representatives together for evaluation, feedback, and board elections. The management structure includes a diverse board with age caps of 30 years and two-year term limits. In any case, the operational phase ends with the next management election. This structure, combined with annual evaluations, creates a continuous feedback loop. By balancing consistent youth involvement with regular assessment, the Council maintains its relevance, enhances its impact, and strengthens its recognition in the community, demonstrating a commitment to both stability and innovation in youth representation.

## Conclusions and lessons learned

Having various mechanisms for civic organisation within the central government is crucial not only for ensuring youth voices are represented at the highest levels of policymaking, but also for effectively translating their perspectives into actionable policies and initiatives. These mechanisms serve as pathways to bridge the gap between youth input and meaningful outcomes, thereby fostering a more inclusive and responsive governance framework. Various governments have implemented different policies to establish youth councils, support youth umbrella organisations, or create other types of models for youth engagement. At any case important is to set a clear legal and financial operation for the youth representative structure.

The Austrian National Youth Council has managed to create a platform that amplifies young people's voices and encourages meaningful involvement in national policy-making processes through coordinated efforts and advocacy. This is mainly attributed to the clear legal and financial framework

38 Austrian National Youth Council (2024) Youth Conference: Around 50 political recommendations for more inclusion. Available at: <https://bjv.at/das-war-die-5-oesterreichische-jugendkonferenz/>

provided from the respective institutions which has created the foundation for the growth and operation of the organisation. In general, the organisation has a particularly satisfactory performance in terms of transparency, equality, inclusiveness and non-discriminatory practices thus offering various materials and mechanism to support that. Young people are mainly represented and engaged in various important programs at national and EU levels. However, engagement with youth organisations and activities that benefit them in terms of capacity building and other important aspects of their functionality should also be considered. While including young people is necessary, as a body composed of youth organisations, their perspectives should be better disseminated as well. This is an issue frequently encountered in youth councils, where there's a fine line between operating for young people and working with youth organisations for youngsters. While the ultimate goal is improving young people's quality of life, it's important to recognise that youth councils are umbrella organisations for youth groups. As such, there should be a stronger emphasis on collaborating with these member organisations.

The entity has a strong structure with the existence of several different boards which are important on the topics they address, but they are difficult for the team who is engaged in the office to support. The structure and available materials offer comprehensive and transparent information on the work of the organisation. This structure aligns with the higher rungs of Hart's Ladder (see Figure 1), where young people share decisions and initiate projects.

### 5.3 Co-management system of the Council of Europe on youth policy

The Co-management system of the Council of Europe<sup>39</sup> on youth policy is a place for common reflection and co-production. It is a collaborative framework that brings together the combined voices of young Europeans and public authorities responsible for youth issues allowing for experience sharing and evaluation. Through dialogue, in a spirit of mutual understanding and respect, each party has an equal say, where ideas and experiences can be exchanged.

The Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) is the co-managed body that brings together the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) and the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ). The Joint Council makes decisions on the youth sector's priorities, programs, and budget. Then, the detailed planning and implementation of the youth sector, is the responsibility of the Programming Committee on Youth (CPJ), working closely with CMJ to ensure that youth policies are effectively executed. The CPJ consists of 8 government representatives from the CDEJ and 8 non-governmental representatives from the CCJ and aims to establish and monitor the program of the European Youth Foundation (EYF) and the European Youth Centres (Strasbourg and Budapest).

The Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) is a non-governmental partner. It consists of 30 representatives from youth NGOs and networks across Europe, aged 19 plus. The CCJ's main functions include advising the Committee of Ministers on youth-related issues, ensuring youth policies are integrated into the Council of Europe's activities, formulating opinions and proposals on youth sector priorities and budgets, and promoting youth policies within and beyond the organisation. The CCJ designates, for two

<sup>39</sup> Council of Europe (2023) *Co-management*. Link available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/co-management> Accessed on 20 June 2024

years, the 8 members who are invited to represent it in the Programming Committee on Youth (CPJ).

The European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) consists of representatives of ministries or bodies responsible for youth matters from the member states. It fosters cooperation among European governments on youth policy, advises the Committee of Ministers on youth-related issues, and develops youth policies and standards to address challenges faced by young people. It supports public authorities in implementing these policies, oversees the Council of Europe's Youth for Democracy programme, and promotes youth policy standards.

The creation of co-management in the Council of Europe youth sector was driven by the need for a collaborative and structured approach to engage young people in decision-making processes. In the 1960s efforts were done to create an experimental European Youth Centre and the Parliamentary Assembly. In the following decades, disagreements on the objectives and tasks of youth initiatives highlighted a gap between governmental bodies and youth organisations.

Since 1972, the Council of Europe has been the leading force in youth policy development and youth work across Europe. Through its innovative co-management system, member states and young people have collaborated to create a just, more democratic, and secure society throughout Europe. This co-management system evolved to bridge this gap by including both governmental representatives and youth NGOs in decision-making, ensuring that youth policies and programs were directly influenced by the young people they aimed to serve. This approach tackles youth's lack of ownership, commitment, and involvement in societal problem-solving, thus fostering active youth participation at the local and regional levels.

The Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) is the non-governmental partner in the co-management structure. It establishes the standards and work priorities of the Council of Europe's youth sector and makes recommendations for future priorities, programmes and budgets. It is made up of representatives from youth NGOs and networks in Europe and its main task is to advise the Committee of Ministers on all questions relating to youth, ensuring youth policies are mainstreamed into the Council of Europe's programme of activities by providing opinions and proposals to all of the bodies and also ensures that young people are involved in other activities of the Council of Europe and promotes the policies further beyond. It is also a promoter of the co-management system in decision-making processes at all levels as a good practice for youth participation, democracy, and inclusion. In this way, it contributes to preparing and encouraging young generations to take responsibility to build their desired society.

On the other hand, the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) brings together representatives of ministries or bodies responsible for youth matters from the member states, to oversee the Council of Europe's Youth for Democracy programme, to advise the Committee of Ministers on all youth-related issues, as well as to develop youth policies and standards that tackle the challenges and obstacles young people face in Europe and guarantee youth participation and young people's access to rights.

In practice, the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) contribute to the effective mainstreaming of youth policies in the Council of Europe program of activities. It does so by formulating opinions and proposals on general or specific questions concerning youth in the Council of Europe. Also, the CCJ addresses

these opinions and proposals to the Committee of Ministers or other bodies of the Council of Europe. All statements and publications of the Advisory Council can be consulted online<sup>40</sup>.

The European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) fosters co-operation between governments in the youth sector and provides a framework for comparing national youth policies, exchanging best good practices and drafting standard-setting texts. Within the scope of this, it has developed a variety of principles and values that should underpin youth policies and helps public authorities to implement these, providing advice and capacity-building support through a series of assistance measures. Key topics include young people's access to human and social rights, learning, inclusion and social cohesion, citizenship and participation, safety, health and well-being. As far as the Council of Europe's action plans – both thematic and country-specific – and other activities are concerned, the CDEJ implements any aspects relative to young people. The Programming Committee on Youth (CPJ) meets twice a year in order to take the decisions on all applications submitted to the EYF as well as on the study sessions organised in co-operation with the European Youth Centres. The Calendar of activities can be consulted [here](#).

Youth participation in this co-management system is based on structured and meaningful involvement. The system ensures young people's voices are heard in decision-making processes, providing them with opportunities to influence policies. Effectively, the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) is composed of young representatives who actively contribute to policy proposals and program implementations. However, challenges such as lack of resources and complex institutional processes can limit the extent of their influence. Based on insights from a former Advisory Council member and a staff member responsible for the participatory structure, the following analysis was conducted.

In terms of **co-creation & ownership**, the co-management model has been in existence for over 50 years, proving to be a sustainable structure with the role of young people now deeply embedded within it. This integration has contributed to the model's effectiveness and resilience. The structure allows for continuous input from new generations every two years, ensuring fresh perspectives and ownership by each new cohort. The co-management system was not fully co-created by young people, as the structure and guidelines were primarily drafted by the Committee of Ministers. Youth organisations like the Youth Forum were likely consulted, but the co-creation aspect was limited. Youth members' participation focuses more on advocating for activities and policies rather than structural changes, with limited opportunities to institutionalise feedback within their roles. One of the most visible aspects of this model is the work of the Programming Committee on Youth, where youth are actively involved in programming and fund allocation, showcasing their ownership in these processes.

In terms of **representativeness & legitimacy**, the structure and guidelines of the Advisory Council are set by the Committee of Ministers, leaving little room for the Advisory Council to propose changes. Young representatives are expected to be more active compared to government representatives, which sometimes leads to frustration due to the complex relationship with the Secretariat.

The Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) consist of 30 delegates, 20 elected from the European Youth Forum and 10 through individual applications decided by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. This rigorous selection process ensures elevated levels of expertise among members.

<sup>40</sup> Council of Europe, Advisory Council on Youth (2023) *What is the Advisory Council on Youth? The voice of young people in the Council of Europe*. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/advisory-council-on-youth> Accessed on 14 June 2024

Additionally, the Ministers' Committee, the highest decision-making body, recognises the Advisory Council on Youth and attributes mandates, ensuring formal legitimacy. In co-management processes, consensus is preferred due to the larger number of Steering Committee members compared to the Advisory Council. In the Programming Committee, decisions are voted on by equal numbers of governmental and non-governmental representatives, ensuring balanced input.

In terms of **inclusiveness & non-discrimination**, the co-management system faced challenges in inclusivity. The selection process was transparent but not widely publicised, making it accessible primarily to those already within certain networks. This often excluded those without prior international experience or connections. Although efforts were made to include local and regional organisations, the system tended to favour representatives from larger organisations.

In terms of **capacity building**, the system provided numerous opportunities for young people to enhance their skills, knowledge, and confidence. Young representatives had the chance to engage in activities, network, and influence decision-making processes, which helped in building their capacity for advocacy and leadership. New members undergo a 2–3-day Induction Course to equip them for their roles, supplemented by experienced members who offer guidance. Participation in meetings provides young people with invaluable opportunities to develop skills in negotiation, facilitation, and policy discussion. The Summer University of the Council of Europe, as part of the intergovernmental programme, also provides capacity-building opportunities both for CDEJ and CCJ members, preparing members for meetings. Empowering young people through training is crucial for them to understand their roles and for other staff and members of the Council of Europe. Comprehensive training is crucial for empowering young people, ensuring their involvement in decision-making, and preparing future generations for leadership and civic engagement.

In terms of **financial & human resources**, it was critical in ensuring the functioning of the co-management structure. There were instances where successful advocacy led to financial contributions from specific countries, highlighting the importance of adequate resource allocation for the system's operations. All Advisory Council members work as volunteers, balancing their roles with personal responsibilities. They only earn per diem income for in-person meetings, with no payment for other work, highlighting a need for better financial support.

In terms of **transparency**, one of the main challenges was the lack of visibility and promotion of the Advisory Council's activities and opportunities. While the selection process was transparent, it was not widely publicised, affecting the overall transparency and accessibility of the system. Meetings include observers who can access content and intervene, adding a layer of transparency. Young people's involvement is documented, but formal recognition like certificates is lacking, which could enhance transparency and acknowledgement of their contributions.

In terms of **advocacy & impact**, the co-management system made a significant difference in advocacy and impact. It gathers normally twice per year, for a full body meeting, plus other working moments for groups with different portfolios (two-three other meetings per year), creating numerous opportunities for networking and influence, particularly in interactions with government representatives and decision-makers. Committed members brought notable results, and successful advocacy efforts led to tangible outcomes. The opportunity to participate in the Joint Council on Youth meetings equips young people with invaluable skills for advocacy and policy influence. The co-management system effectively

involves youngsters in decision-making, giving them a voice and power equal to that of ministers in the Programming Committee on Youth. This structure ensures that the youth budget is decided with equal input from both youth representatives and ministers.

In terms of **resilience, monitoring & improvement**, the system's resilience is evident in its 50-year history and the continuous adaptation to new members every two years. This regular influx of new competencies and agendas maintains pressure on minister members and ensures ongoing relevance and innovation. However, the institutional nature of the system, with its long-standing processes, sometimes led to repeated patterns, but it also provided a sense of ownership and commitment among the young people involved. The system's resilience was evident in its ability to adapt and incorporate feedback for continuous improvement, ensuring the continuity of youth participation over time. A lack of structured feedback from former members and the absence of formal recognition for participation indicate areas that need improvement. Regular monitoring and structured feedback mechanisms could enhance the system's resilience and continuous improvement.

### **Conclusions and lessons learned**

The co-management system of the Council of Europe has proven effective in integrating youth participation into policymaking. This structured approach has led to significant achievements in youth policy development and implementation. The co-management system exhibits both strengths and limitations. It ensures an elevated level of legitimacy and numerous opportunities for youth participation but somewhat still faces challenges with inclusivity, visibility, and adaptability in its feedback processes. Current practices may not be effectively capturing valuable insights from former members or adequately acknowledging participant contributions. Continual improvement in making the system more accessible and responsive to the diverse needs of young people across Europe is crucial.

Lessons learned include the importance of ensuring young people's voices are genuinely considered in decision-making processes and the need to address barriers such as resource limitations and institutional complexities. While the selection process itself was transparent, limited publicity meant participation was primarily restricted to those within existing networks. This might lead to exclusion of individuals with valuable skills but lacking international experience or connections. Future efforts should focus on enhancing inclusivity and accessibility to ensure broader youth engagement across diverse backgrounds. Youth participation and active engagement within the co-management structure of the Council of Europe are underpinned by theories such as Hart's Ladder of Participation, Shier's Pathways to Participation, and the Youth Engagement Continuum. These frameworks emphasise the progression from tokenistic involvement to genuine partnership and shared decision-making, highlighting the importance of empowering young people to influence policies and decisions that affect them.

It operationalises these theoretical principles by involving young people and youth organisations in decision-making processes at the highest levels. This is achieved through the Joint Council on Youth, which includes the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) and the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ). This co-managed structure ensures that youth representatives and governmental officials work together to set priorities and implement youth policies, embodying the ideals of meaningful youth participation.

In comparison to other models of youth engagement, such as youth councils or forums, the Co-

management system of the Council of Europe on youth policy is distinguished by its institutionalised framework that integrates youth voices into formal decision-making processes. While youth councils may advise on youth issues, the co-management model places young people in positions of equal partnership with policymakers, aligning with the top rungs of Hart's Ladder (see Figure 1) where young people have shared control and responsibility. This model has shown significant impact in shaping youth policies and programs within the Council of Europe. However, it also faces challenges such as ensuring representativeness, maintaining continuous engagement, and addressing bureaucratic inertia. These challenges reflect broader theoretical issues in youth participation, such as sustaining elevated levels of involvement and inclusiveness, and effectively translating youth input into actionable policies.

In conclusion, this case study highlights the impact and importance of co-management in youth policy, showcasing how collaborative efforts between young people and authorities can lead to meaningful change and active youth participation in governance. The co-management system of the Council of Europe exemplifies the theoretical principles of youth participation and active engagement. By institutionalising youth involvement in governance, it provides a robust framework for young people to influence policies, while also highlighting the practical challenges of sustaining meaningful participation in complex bureaucratic environments.

#### 5.4 Youthwise, the OECD Youth Advisory Board

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an international organisation that works to build better policies for better lives.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, their main goal is to shape policies that foster prosperity, equality, opportunity and well-being for all.<sup>42</sup> As an important organisation which is well known for standard setting within its member countries and beyond, their Youth Advisory Board is a good example to be further investigated in terms of practices that have in place, challenges, lessons learned and positive impact. Therefore, the aim of this case study is to analyse and evaluate structured youth participation mechanisms in policy and decision-making processes at the international level, identifying good practices and examining their design, implementation, and impact through focusing on the Youthwise, the OECD's Youth Advisory Board.

Youthwise, the OECD's Youth Advisory Board, was established in 2021 with a dual mission: to foster a better understanding of the OECD's work and international policymaking among young people, and to bring forth the valuable perspectives and ideas of youth to the Organisation. ("Youthwise", n.d.)

Among other things, this global effort aims to empower younger generations to work alongside policymakers and stakeholders in designing inclusive policies. While, OECD Members are committed to investing in skills, education, gender equality, quality jobs and mental health to help them rejuvenate their educational and career prospects, young people also need to shape the policies that will affect them, so they can bring forward their ideas, energy and attitude. Therefore, young people's perspectives and ideas into the policy debate on jobs and learning, given the nature of current and future challenges related to climate change, digitalisation, globalisation and automation are in the focus of this body.

41 OECD (2024) About the OECD. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/about/#:~:text=The%20Organisation%20for%20Economic%20Co,and%20well%2Dbeing%20for%20all.> Accessed on 14 June 2024

42 ibid

The establishment of this type of youth body came as a necessity to better include young people's perspectives on pivotal topics which are the focus of the OECD's work. Furthermore, it is aligned with the OECD Action Plan on Youth, launched in 2013 and further updated in 2021<sup>43</sup> and it contributes to the Recommendation of the Council on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People<sup>44</sup>. Successful engagement of young people in the labour market, public and political life, and society overall is crucial not only for their own personal well-being and economic prospects but also for overall economic growth and social cohesion, trust in government and public institutions, and the resilience of democracy. ("OECD Legal Instruments" 2022)

The organisation realised there was a crucial voice missing from its discussions - the voice of youth. The issues being debated, and the policies being shaped would profoundly impact the future of young people, yet their perspectives were often absent from the table. The creation of this youth body represented more than just a structural change. It signalled a shift in thinking, an acknowledgment that the complex challenges facing the world required diverse viewpoints and need young people to make democracies sustainable.

Thus, recognising the significance of youth representation in international policymaking, this research will further analyse several crucial aspects of the operational and structural components of this body as outlined in the assessment areas. The analysis will provide insights into the current state of the structure regarding meaningful youth participation, highlight positive practices it employs, and identify lessons that can be learned from it.

In terms of **co-creation & ownership**, the structure has been created recently and has been operating only for three years. The structure was established by the organisation units itself after COVID-19 as a respond to the necessity to include young people perspectives in their work. Therefore, while consultation has taken place, co-creation has been limited. Nonetheless, considering that this body is young and new, it provides the OECD with an opportunity to further gather comments and inputs from the young individuals involved and other important youth stakeholders. This feedback can be used to improve and further develop the Youth Advisory Body, increase ownership and serving as a testament to the OECD's commitment to inclusive governance and its recognition that effective policymaking must span generations.

In terms of **representativeness & legitimacy**, the structure consists of young people aged 18 to 30, who bring a wide range of professional backgrounds and interests to the table, including in fields such as artificial intelligence, education, environment, technology, gender equality, health and social care, law, politics, climate, natural sciences, social mobility, and beyond. In 2021, when the Youthwise was created 23 young individuals were part of it; in 2022 the structure had 24 members and in 2023 there were 22 young representatives. According to the data gathered 100% of the members of the structure have been young people. The process opens doors to young individuals from OECD member countries, requiring fluency in English and a keen interest in shaping a green and inclusive future. Furthermore, upon

43 OECD (2013) C/MIN (2013)4/FINAL. Available at: [https://one.oecd.org/document/C/MIN\(2013\)4/FINAL/en/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/C/MIN(2013)4/FINAL/en/pdf) Accessed on 14 June 2024

44 OECD/LEGAL/0474 (2022) Recommendation of the Council on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People. Available at: <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0474> Accessed on 14 June 2024

examining the profiles of all three Youthwise cohorts published on the OECD website<sup>45</sup>, a diverse participation of youth is noticeable. Geographical representation is very present as there are participants from all the OECD countries including always ethnic groups, minorities and marginalised groups. Therefore, the structure brings together young people from different continents and from different OECD countries which is an incredibly positive way to ensure different perspectives. This framework ensures a diverse yet focused group of advisors, balancing inclusivity with specific qualifications relevant to the OECD's work. Nevertheless, current participation predominantly comprises young professionals and individuals engaged in specific expertise, rather than representatives from youth organisations or stakeholders, which could enhance representation of the target group by including more entities knowledgeable in youth participation. Meanwhile, in terms of the mandate, the youth delegates have a mandate for 10 months. Based in other practices this timeframe is not considered as a suitable period to make tangible actions or to allow the delegates to understand how the organisation works. Granting more time to the youth delegates to be engaged within the organisation it would help to achieve proper youth mainstreaming within the OECD work and recognise the structure within member states. As per the information available, all members should be able to dedicate up to 8 hours per month to Youthwise-related activities (including preparatory reading, group work, meetings, speaking at events, etc.)

In terms of **inclusiveness & non-discrimination**, by taking a look at the OECD Youthwise website and further confirmed by the other instruments used for data gathering, it is noted that the youth and gender balance has been kept in the focus of selection process. Almost every year 55% of the structure has been composed by female and 55% by male. All the online materials review show that the language used within the structure and other communication documents is inclusive and non-discriminatory. Meanwhile, regarding the accessibility of the activities, most of them take place online, except for cases where conferences or similar events require the presence of selected youth members. In light of the procedures in place and the makeup of the structure, discriminatory practices do not exist, and the structure exhibits a high degree of inclusivity.

In terms of **capacity building**, members of the Youth Advisory Board have different opportunity to develop skills and to be engaged in conferences, seminars etc. Each cohort has had a specific theme under which they have been engaged such as the future of work, climate and environment, digitalisation and youth representation etc. The most recent activity has been the OECD Youth Workshop<sup>46</sup>, Berlin, Germany on 13 November 2023 where all the members of the structure participated. This workshop was organised aiming to gain a better understanding of young people's needs and priorities and to discuss the role that youth and youth organisations can play in the implementation of the *Recommendation of the Council on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People* to help ensure it delivers the best possible outcomes for young people. Furthermore, the delegates participated in webinars and consultations with member states and engage with OECD experts and members of the OECD Global Parliamentary Network, thus gaining a better understanding of how the OECD functions. Additionally, an introductory meeting on the work of the OECD takes place at the beginning of the mandate. While providing such activities for members is beneficial, it is pivotal that continuous capacity building be in place for the youth structure. Although the structure is positively evaluated for its diversity and inclusion

45 OECD (2024) OECD Youthwise: putting youth at the centre of policy making. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/about/civil-society/youth/youthwise/> Accessed on 14 June 2024

46 OECD (2024) OECD Youth Workshop, Berlin - 13 Nov 2023. Link available at: <https://oecd-gallery.org/sharedBasket?sessionId=023A342E404FB82DF7E336E5F177E9D9.f4?token=bnf4VA9Mj> Accessed on 10 June 2024

of young representatives from different regions, further capacity building is needed to equip members with necessary knowledge on youth participation principles and to ensure a consistent level of understanding and engagement among members from diverse backgrounds. Providing more tools and materials will help the members to further understand their responsibility and create a deeper understanding of policy making process, the structure itself and roles.

In terms of **financial & human resources**, the Youth Advisory Board is financed through the OECD by engaging the OECD team of experts to support the youngsters, but the structure itself does not have a budget. Also, the costs of any roundtable or workshop are covered by the OECD. The 2023 cohort has even benefited from the support of the TUI Care Foundation to further increase activities in place. As per the communication held, youth is part of a dedicated unit, and there is a dedicated person in charge, which is a positive aspect for the clarity of members and for the functionality of the structure. To manage to have clear lines of communication, responsibilities and a structure which has the support to undertake events as per their objectives and not only when their events organised by other parties the structure should have a dedicated budget which would facilitate a bottom-up approach in terms of youth engagement. Meanwhile, the delegates at Youthwise operate completely on a voluntary basis. Empowering young people economically and trying to support them with small incentives for their work should be envisaged as well, as it creates a fairer and more inclusive environment for youth participation.

In terms of **transparency**, every year OECD opens the applications on its official webpage and social media, and the call for applications is disseminated on other official webpages related to OECD partners as well. Members of OECD's Youth Advisory Board have been selected each year based on established criteria by an inter-generational jury in order to create a diverse, representative group of young people. All documents regarding the program, the selection criteria, and the expected outcomes are open and visible to everyone. The selection process, all cohorts, and activities are regularly communicated through OECD mediums and can be easily understood by all interested parties which is a positive aspect in terms of clarity and reaching out different audiences. However, both the process and the members would have gained more from well-defined terms of engagement. Such terms ensure that members comprehend their roles and other stakeholders understand the nature of their involvement with the OECD. It's crucial to establish clear structure, objectives, and engagement parameters, while maintaining enough flexibility to modify and enhance the process when needed.

In terms of **advocacy & Impact**, each month, every member of the Advisory Board has to engage at least 8 hours per month to Youthwise-related activities which includes preparatory reading, group work, meetings, speaking at events. The Youthwise Statement at the 2023 OECD Ministerial Council Meeting *Our Future in Three*<sup>47</sup> is positive step on highlighting pressing issue among different regions and reinforcing them availability on tackling important challenges that the world is facing. While these engagements and publications are considered highly positive in terms of leaving a lasting impact, it is important to further enhance the recognition of this structure among member states and promote its institutionalisation. This would help to achieve impact and to make the structure sustainable in its advocacy role.

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<sup>47</sup>Youthwise (2023) Youthwise Statement at the 2023 OECD Ministerial Council Meeting "Our Future in Three". Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/mcm/documents/Youthwise-Statement-2023-OECD-Ministerial-Council-Meeting-EN-FR.pdf> Accessed on 15 June 2024

In terms of **resilience, monitoring, & improvement**, considering the short duration of the advisory board's engagement, they have achieved some initial milestones. These milestones can ensure a more structured engagement of the OECD with youth over the years. However, continuous efforts should focus on enhancing its resilience and ensuring ongoing improvements to sustain the platform.

## **Conclusions and lessons learned**

As previously mentioned, OECD, as an internationally recognised organisation for setting standards, has the opportunity to lead by example in youth participation within policy-making and decision-making processes. Therefore, it is crucial to continue improving the structure while upholding positive practices. The OECD's Youthwise initiative emerged as a structured response to the need for youth representation in international policymaking and showcases a positive example of how international organisations can further integrate youth in their work. This serves as a way of spanning generations and ensuring that the organisation's work not only impacts youth life but is also shaped by their realities, perspectives, and aspirations. While it is acknowledgeable that the structure is young and new, it should be further developed to improve and reach more youth organisations and youth stakeholders.

Given the lifetime of the structure, there is still time to improve its functionality in accordance with the participatory democracy and youth engagement ideals. An important aspect is the duration of the mandate (10 months) which does not provide the necessary time to the members to advance their respective agendas, to adjust with the new responsibility and to understand the OECD itself. Another important aspect which can be addressed in this frame is the sustainability of the structure and its existence, in a long-term vision, to ensure continuous youth engagement and lasting impact on policy-making processes. Therefore, in the Hart's Ladder of Participation young people are assigned but informed. Any process that brings together OECD representatives and delegates of the Youthwise structure is recommended to further collaborate on institutionalising the structure and its development based in existing practices.

Meanwhile, in terms of diversity, gender balance, and representation, the entity sets a particularly good example, thus adhering to principles of equality. Even in terms of communication, the available information is comprehensive and accessible, making the structure and its role understandable to every interested audience. Considering the definition of youth participatory mechanisms, Youthwise represents more of a body engaged in policy-making processes. This structure has already set a good example in this regard, and in the upcoming year, its role and activities should be further developed to establish its position more firmly.

## **6. Strategies for promoting meaningful youth participation**

This chapter provides conclusions and recommendations on how to promote meaningful youth participation. It will cover ideas such as capacity building, youth-adult partnerships, the use of technology, and the inclusion of young people's perspectives. The conclusions and recommendations will summarise any positive impacts of the practices, including lessons learned, a critical approach and the potential for replication in other contexts.

## 6.1 Factual data

This table summarises key factual data from four case studies on youth participatory mechanisms. It includes quantitative information such as age ranges and mandate durations, as well as other relevant factors identified as crucial for structured, meaningful and sustainable youth engagement. These components were selected to provide insights into the design and effectiveness of various youth participation models across different contexts.

*Table 1: case studies' factual data*

<b>Participatory mechanism</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Age range</b>	<b>Mandate duration</b>	<b>Legal framework</b>	<b>Budget allocation</b>
Local Youth Council in Klaipėda	up to 25	15 or above	2 years	Yes	No
Austrian National Youth Council	12	0 to 30 years old	2 years	Yes	Yes
Co-management system of the Council of Europe on youth policy	30	19 or above	2 years	No	Yes
OECD Youth Advisory Board	22	18 to 30 years old	10 months	No	No

## 6.2 Conclusions

Youth participation and youth mainstreaming in policy and decision-making processes at various levels are pivotal for democratic societies and sustainable democracies. Although this awareness has started to take hold among different organisations, institutions, and international bodies, it is important to continue investing in raising the standards of participatory mechanisms and institutionalising youth participation in different levels of governance.

At the local level, the case study of the Youth Affairs Council of the Klaipėda Municipality is a strong example of a structure that has demonstrated a strong commitment to youth engagement for many years. This structure allows young people to apply for membership and their selection is supported by the local youth organisations' Round Table, integrating young people directly into the framework of municipal governance, providing them with real influence and responsibility. By incorporating both young representatives and municipal politicians, the council creates a platform for young people to engage directly with policy makers. Despite these successes, the challenges are to ensure continued engagement, maintain inclusivity and overcome bureaucratic inertia.

Mechanisms of youth participation in central government are crucial to translate the voices of young people into effective policies. The Austrian National Youth Council is an example of this, operating within a clear legal and financial framework that enables its growth and impact. While excelling in transparency, equality, and inclusiveness, the council faces the common challenge of balancing direct youth representation with support for its member organisations. The council's structure, though comprehensive, can put a strain on human resources. However, its alignment with the higher levels of

the Hart's Ladder (see Figure 1) demonstrates a commitment to meaningful youth participation. In the future, youth councils should strive to maintain this delicate balance, ensuring that they not only represent young people but also empower youth organisations, thus maximising their impact on policy and youth quality of life.

At European level, the Council of Europe's Co-management system on youth policy has been a model in place for more than fifty years. It has established itself as a collaborative framework that brings together the voices of young Europeans and public authorities responsible for youth issues. The different structures that comprise the co-management system not only ensure that young people's interests and concerns reach the policy making level, but also enable them to actively participate in the planning and allocation of funds, showcasing their ownership in these processes. The structured approach of this system has led to significant achievements in the development and implementation of youth policies, although it has both strengths and limitations. Future efforts should focus on enhancing inclusivity and accessibility, mainly due to resource limitations and institutional complexities.

The OECD's Youthwise initiative demonstrates a commendable effort to integrate youth perspectives into international policymaking. Although the structure is relatively new, it has already set a positive example for youth engagement in global organisations. The initiative's strengths lie in its diverse representation, gender balance, and accessible communication. However, there is room for improvement, particularly in terms of the mandate duration and long-term sustainability. In order to make progress in the development of the structure, more efforts should be made to institutionalise it further. This process should build on existing practices while aiming to enhance youth participation in decision-making. By continuing to refine and develop Youthwise, the OECD can consolidate its leading position in meaningful youth engagement, ensuring that policies are not just for young people, but shaped by young people themselves.

All case studies analysed at local, national, European, and international levels demonstrate the existence of youth participation mechanisms and practices. These targeted participatory mechanisms illustrate numerous examples of how young people can engage in policy and decision-making processes. From local initiatives to international fora, each case study highlights different approaches and methods that empower young people to meaningfully contribute to the shaping policies and decisions that affect them. The most common participatory mechanisms include local youth councils, national youth councils, advisory boards, youth parliaments, and other relevant structures. Different organisations or entities use different terminologies, such as members, representatives, delegates, or voices, but the aim remains consistent. Most of these initiatives have developed through a top-down approach. As long as they provide space for youth and youth organisations to improve and co-design the future of their respective structures, they generally do not encounter significant issues.

There are many good practices to learn from in terms of diversity, inclusiveness, transparency and advocacy roles, but also many lessons to learn in terms of finances and capacities in place to support the youth organisations, legitimacy and co-creation. Therefore, it is necessary to continue working on their improvement and to have policy dialogues to learn from each other, thus maintaining a positive approach towards youth inclusion and agenda policy mainstreaming on youth issues.

## 6.3 Recommendations

The recommendations provided are drawn from the case studies developed, but also from other referenced studies and research. This section provides concrete recommendations to the EESC and other EU institutions to ensure meaningful youth participation in their work, aspects to be avoided in this process, the most appropriate age range for youth participation at EU level and other important elements which will provide a clear framework for participatory mechanisms.

### 6.3.1 Co-creation & ownership

- It is essential to establishing a set of operational standards for the youth participatory mechanism, recognised by the EESC. This would institutionalise the structure and ensure its continued functionality over the years. Operational standards can include a range of broad guidelines and practices ranging from governance structure to ethics and compliance, or health safety.
- Develop a clear aim for the youth participatory mechanism on how and why it will serve the EESC and align with other ongoing developments within the institution.
- A call for applications should be created and disseminated among various organisations (without limitations on the level of organisations as long as they are legally registered), leaving ample time for interested applicants. The call should include clear terms and references, providing the necessary information to ensure a clear understanding of the expectations.
- Creating a set of criteria for selecting members, such as age, geography, commitment etc. In addition, a short interviews process could be developed and an evaluation committee formed based on available human resources and capacities.

### 6.3.2 Representativeness & legitimacy

- It is important that rules of engagement and operation of the participatory mechanism are agreed and discussed with the chosen members.
- To create a manageable and effective group, the mechanism should consist of no more than 20 people and no less than 10 people.
- In terms of mandate, the most suitable duration would be 3 years. Two years may be too short to carry out objectives and pass very quickly, while four years may be too long considering the nature of the group and other dynamics.

### 6.3.3 Inclusiveness & non-discrimination

- In terms of geographical coverage, the participatory structure should target participants from the European Union. However, considering the prospects of EU Enlargement and recent initiatives announced by the EESC, it is recommended to also include the Western Balkan countries.
- The age range for youth participation is subject to different definitions in different contexts, and traditionally six approaches are recognised in Europe to define youth. Nevertheless, based on the case studies and the EESC context, the recommended age range is 18-30.
- The participatory mechanism should include various youth stakeholders (e.g. members of local and national youth councils or adolescents; representatives of youth organisations; representatives of young professional bodies, as well as representatives of marginalised groups, who very often are not members of such groups).
- The structure should ensure physical and digital accessibility, making its meetings, events and communication platforms accessible to all members.

- Young people should be encouraged to contribute to the agenda-setting process, allowing them to raise relevant topics and issues and giving them a meaningful role in shaping the activities.

#### 6.3.4 Capacity-building

- In order to ensure that youth representatives are well integrated into the work of the EESC, it is suggested that dedicated presentation meetings are organised. The timeframe, methodology, and other details can depend on the institution's structure, and the available resources and capacities of the team.
- Dedicated capacity-building activities on meaningful youth participation and the importance of participatory democracy are recommended to ensure that the youth representatives have the necessary skills and an equal level of understanding on how best to exercise their role.
- It is recommended to have a strategy to provide members with opportunities to access training and build personal and institutional capacity for better participation.
- The participatory structure should create practices that ensure the transition of new members by providing information, background data and meeting with previous members.

#### 6.3.5 Financial & human resources

- To ensure that members of the youth participatory mechanism feel valued and motivated for their engagement and time, as well as to hold them accountable for their responsibilities, consideration should be given to providing a remuneration or fees.
- In this framework, clear terms of reference, rules of engagement and operation, and at least a person in charge for this participatory structure should be developed, but a team is also encouraged.

#### 6.3.6 Advocacy & impact

- Member should provide recommendations and raise awareness on relevant topics, discussing policies and advocating for youth friendly policies and programmes.
- Clear information should be in place on how the recommendations and other feedback provided by youth representatives are taken into account and translated into concrete policy measures or actions.
- Whenever necessary or requested by members, experts should be called in to ensure quality information and decisions.

#### 6.3.7 Transparency

- It is important for any participatory structure to have a high level of transparency in terms of the bases on which it was founded, the rules and procedures on which its members operate, information on the selection process, etc. Having an open and transparent medium fosters accountability and increases trust in the structure.
- It is also important that the structure has and uses channels for regularly publishing comprehensive information about its activities, decisions and policies, ensuring accessible and up-to date information for young people and the broader community.
- As part of transparency and accountability, it is recommended that the list of selected individuals is published timely. Depending on the internal evaluation system of candidates and the internal policies of EESC, the list of evaluation points may also be published.
- All applicants should receive an e-mail notification to ensure transparency and keep them informed of the status of their application. This promotes a positive experience for candidates and maintains open communication, which reflects positively on EESC.

- The mechanism establishes guidelines and procedures for members to disclose any potential conflict of interest, ensuring the integrity of decision-making processes and promoting public trust.

#### 6.3.8 Resilience, monitoring & improvement

- It is recommended that three or four meetings per year are held with clear objectives as to why they meet. Creating synergies with other EESC activities can be considered.
- Implement a structured feedback mechanism for participants. This system should allow members to regularly share their experiences, concerns, and suggestions regarding the processes and activities of the participatory mechanism. This feedback process will help identify areas for improvement, increase participant engagement, and ensure the participatory mechanism continues to respond to the needs and perspectives of its members.
- The youth participatory structure should produce an annual report with the results of decisions, proposals, representations and activities developed.

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## 8. Annexes

### 8.1 Glossary

- **Participation:** Involvement of people in decision-making processes that affect them and their communities.
- **Engagement:** The emotional commitment or involvement that individuals have towards an organisation, cause, product, or relationship. / Refers to involving young people in activities or initiatives where they contribute ideas and energy.
- **Policy-making processes:** The process of formulating and implementing laws, regulations, and guidelines by governments or organisation.
- **Decision-making processes:** Refers to the procedures through which decisions are reached, either formally (legislative processes) or informally (organisational decision-making).
- **Empowerment:** Process of enabling people to take charge of their lives and futures, often through education, employment opportunities, and participation in decision – making.
- **Meaningful:** It ensures that people are genuinely involved in decision – making processes, with their contributions having substantive impact.
- **Participatory mechanisms:** Structures and processes designed to facilitate the involvement of stakeholders, including youth, in decision – making.
- **Recourses:** Material (e.g., funding, infrastructure) and non – material (e.g., training, mentorship) support provided to facilitate youth participation.
- **Transparency:** Openness and clarity in processes, ensuring that information is accessible to all stakeholders involved in participation efforts.
- **Advocacy:** Action aimed at influencing policies, practices, or attitudes to benefit youth interests and rights.
- **Monitoring:** Systematic observation and assessment of participation efforts to evaluate impact, identify improvements, and ensure accountability.
- **Consultation:** Seeking input or feedback from youth in processes, typically in a structured manner.
- **Tokenism:** Superficial inclusion of youth in processes without genuine influence or meaningful engagement.
- **Equality:** Ensuring fairness and equal opportunities for all individuals.
- **Institutionalisation:** Integration of a structure or processes into organisational routines and practices.
- **Stakeholders:** Various groups and individuals representing young people’s interests, such as members of local youth councils, adolescents, representatives of youth organisations, young professionals, and marginalised groups.

## 8.2 Comparative table for the case studies

Table 2: case studies' comparative data

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Local Youth Council in Klaipėda</b>	<b>Austrian National Youth Council</b>	<b>Co-management System of the Council of Europe on Youth Policy</b>	<b>OECD Youthwise</b>
<b>Legal framework</b>	Law on Youth Organisations (2003)	Federal Youth Representation Act (2001)	Council of Europe's co-management system structure	OECD initiative
<b>Purpose</b>	Empower youth in local governance	Represent Austrian youth interests at national and international levels	Involve youth in European youth policy decision-making	Engage youth in OECD's work
<b>Structure</b>	Youth Affairs Council, Council of Municipal Youth Organisations	59 member organisations	Joint Council on Youth, Advisory Council on Youth, European Steering Committee for Youth	Group of young people advising OECD
<b>Membership</b>	Elected youth representatives from various organisations	Youth organisations representing 3 million people	Youth representatives and government officials	Selected young people from OECD countries
<b>Decision-making process</b>	Democratic decision-making within the council	Influence on federal legislation and policies	Shared decision-making between youth and policymakers	Advisory role to OECD
<b>Key activities</b>	Monitoring youth situation, strengthening youth policy, organising youth forums	Advocacy, project implementation, international collaboration	Policy formulation, advocacy, monitoring	Provide insights on youth perspectives to OECD

<b>Challenges</b>	Ensuring continuous engagement, overcoming bureaucracy, lack of dedicated budget	Effectiveness of engagement, operational efficiency, financial transparency	Limited publicity of selection process, lack of formal recognition	Not specified in the document
<b>Strengths</b>	Proactive influence on policy, capacity-building	Inclusiveness, transparency, advocacy	Structured involvement in policy-making	Gender balance, diverse geographical representation and clear communication in website.
<b>Co-creation &amp; ownership</b>	High involvement in local governance, youth-driven initiatives	Average involvement of youth organisations	Shared decision-making, youth influence on policy	Advisory, input considered by OECD but not binding
<b>Representation &amp; legitimacy</b>	Elected representatives from diverse backgrounds	High representation through member organisations	Mixed representation of youth and officials	Selected young individuals, aiming for diverse representation
<b>Inclusiveness &amp; non-discrimination</b>	Focus on local youth inclusiveness	Inclusive of various youth demographics and backgrounds	Inclusive but challenged by bureaucracy	Aims for gender balance and diverse geographical representation
<b>Capacity building</b>	Training and workshops for youth representatives	Different training opportunities available but not specific on youth meaningful participation	Regular training sessions, workshops	Limited, needs improvement for long-term impact
<b>Finances &amp; human resources</b>	Limited budget, reliance on municipal support	Federally funded, financial transparency issues	Budget constraints, needs better resource allocation	Supported by OECD, but financial sustainability is a concern
<b>Transparency</b>	Transparent processes, room for improvement	High transparency in processes and operations but improvement needed in financial disclosure	Needs improvement in publicity of processes	Transparently communicating the structure to the general public, needs further enhancement internally
<b>Advocacy &amp; impact</b>	Strong local advocacy, policy influence	High advocacy impact, effective policy influence	Significant impact on European youth policy	Emerging impact, needs long-term sustainability

<b>Resilience</b>	Continuity challenges, reliance on municipal support	Stable but requires better resource management	Resilient but needs resource improvement	New initiative, resilience yet to be tested
<b>Monitoring &amp; evaluation</b>	Regular monitoring, needs better evaluation mechanisms	Continuous monitoring, effective evaluation	Regular monitoring, needs better publicity of results	Monitoring in place, impact evaluation needs improvement
<b>Impact on youth</b>	Significant local impact, empowering youth in governance	High national impact, strong policy influence	High impact on European youth policy, strong representation	Potential for high impact, needs long-term strategies



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