2021



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Research on Youth Participation

















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A RESEARCH STUDY ON YOUTH PARTICIPATION



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DESCRIPTION

The research aims to examine on one side young people perceptions about youth participation, determine what are their levels of involvement in different social-civic-political activities, the barriers they perceive that affect their ability to participate and get involved in issues that affect them or their surrounding communities, what are the motivations for participation as well as the benefits. On the other side it aims to identify the insight views of the approaches and policy in youth participation in formal and informal systems by collecting relevant figures regarding approaches, barriers to youth participation, benefits, as well as practices, forms and instruments of youth participation in 4 countries: Romania, Italy, Lithuania and Turkey.

This initiative is part of the project **Open to change**, financed by European Union through Erasmus+ program, Strategic Partnerships in the Youth field.



The project involves organizations from Romania - International Center for Education, Italy - Oriel Association, Lithuania - Tavo Europa Association, Turkey - Nevsehir School Inspectorate and aims to increase active citizenship and the participation of young people in community life by:

- developing the skills of youth workers to create mechanisms to support the active participation of young people, thus resulting in more effective and coherent educational programs in the field of human rights, active citizenship and social inclusion of young people in partner countries.
- developing the knowledge, skills and abilities of disadvantaged young people from the 4 countries through their participation in international educational and learning by doing activities.



INTRODUCTION

The right to participate is a fundamental right and it represents one of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' guiding principles, which has been reaffirmed in numerous other conventions and declarations. Young people are empowered to play a critical role in their own and their communities' development through active participation, which helps them learn critical life skills, develop understanding of human rights and citizenship, and encourage good civic action. In order to engage effectively, they must be provided with the right tools, such as information, education, and access to civil rights.

Civic participation and engagement in public life and activities, as well as political participation are considered essential elements of democracy. Over the past decade and more, there has been a significant emphasis in societies to engage youth in civic and political life and it encompasses a wide range of formal and informal activities. Participation includes various forms of political activism, environmentalism, community and national service, volunteering, national service, and service-learning

In the recent years the development of youth sector has become a key priority. Important actions have been made at European level to provide a strong voice for young people. However, enabling vulnerable young people to acquire the necessary knowledge to know their rights and duties and be empowered to take control of their own lives and take part in the decissions that affect them dirrectly represents a key issue that needs clear strategies and holistic approaches.

Our study involved applying specific surveys to young people and organisation representatives from each partner country. Because this is a small-scale study, it is not intended to reflect the beliefs and attitudes of the countries, as a result, the findings cannot be extrapolated to broader populations.

Regardless, the results collected will be used for the development of more effective and coherent educational programs in the field of human rights, active citizenship and social inclusion of young people, as part of the project's goals.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the premise that young people represent major players in society. Therefore, our analysis will collect data on young people's perception of active participation, identification of key variables, practices, forms and instruments of youth participation in partner countries.

Its aim is to present a diversified perspective on youth participation in the partner countries with a view to develop more effective and coherent educational programs in the field of human rights, active citizenship and social inclusion of young people.

Specifically, the objectives of this study are to:

 examine young people perceptions about youth participation, determine what

are their levels of involvement in social-civic-political different activities. the barriers they perceive that affect their ability to participate and get involved in issues that affect them or their surrounding communities, what motivations for the are participation well as the as benefits:

 examine the approaches and policy in youth participation in formal and informal systems by collecting relevant figures regarding approaches in youth participation, barriers to youth participation, benefits as well as practices, forms and instruments of youth participation.



To meet these objectives, the following research questions were posed:

Q1. What are the situational contexts of the youth participation across the 4 countries?

Q2. What are the challenges encountered by organisations in engaging the youth and how did they manage and respond to these challenges?

Q3. What are the modes of fostering youth participation among different organizations?



This study involved a review of the literature, reports and related documents along with surveys, during which quantitative and qualitative data were collected and processed.

organizations applied The two partner types of questionnaires: for young people (age range from 14 to 30 years old) and for organizations with different profiles (NGOs, Schools, public authorities involved in education). Partner organizations administrated the two types of questionnaires (184 answers for young people and 53 answers from representatives of different organizations) to assess situational conditions affecting youth participation as well as to collect relevant figures regarding different approaches, practices, forms and instruments of youth participation.



POPULATION DATA

A. AGE AND GENDER

Pertinent to the age groups of the respondents, majority of the young people willing to answer the surveys (184) were individuals coming from the age range of 18 to 24 years old. The second largest group being 25 – 30 years old (Fig. 1). Comparing the respondents from each country, in Romania, the majority of participants are 18 to 24 years old, followed by the second largest group being comprised of individuals between 25 to 30 years old. In Italy, majority of respondents were from the age range of 25 to 30 years old. On the opposite in Lithuania the majority of respondents were coming from the age range of 14-17 old, while in Turkey all the respondents were 18 to 24 years old.

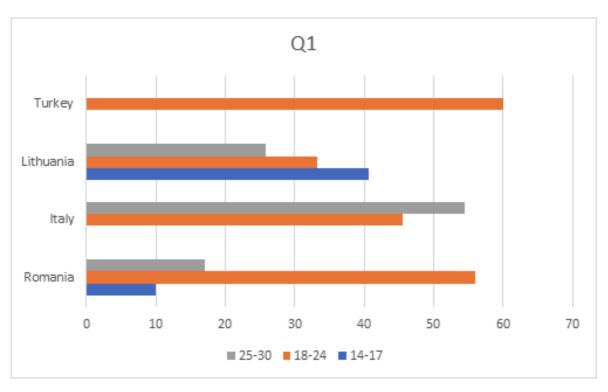


Fig. 1

The results show that young people are in a phase of exploration, in which they begin to practice what they have learned from training and education in real interactions.

Going further, into the gender distribution, results have shown that female participants formed 62.50% of the surveyed young people, while 33,50% were Men and 3% is made up of individuals who identify themselves as neither male or female. (Fig. 2). In Italy, males and females were equally represented, while in Romania, Lithuania and Turkey the majority of respondents were young women.

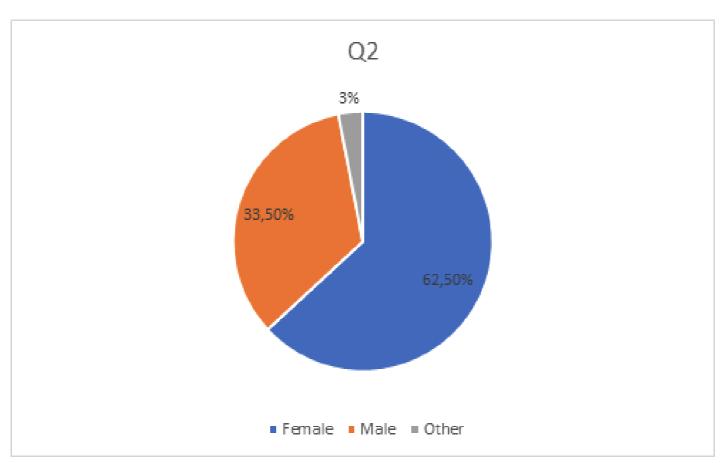


Fig. 2

This demographic profile would provide a better and clearer picture of women's attitudes toward participation, allowing future approaches and research to incorporate or expand on women's needs, goals, obstacles, and motivations. It also emphasizes the importance of involving and engaging various gender communities and subcultures.

B. CURRENT OCCUPATION, LEVEL OF FORMAL EDUCATION

Regarding the professional experience of the surveyed young people (Fig.3), the sample taken from the 184 participants showed that the majority of the respondents were university students.

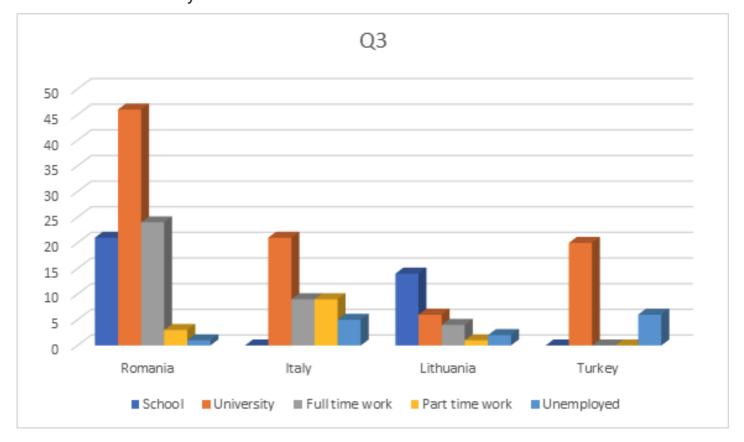


Fig. 3

Looking at the formal education of the respondents (Fig. 4), 32,60% individuals from the four countries, indicated university degree as their highest level of formal education, followed by 25% of the respondents belonging to secondary level. Comparing the respondents from each country, more than half of Romanian respondents belonged to tertiary education, 37% of Lithuanian respondents belonged to secondary education, this coincides with the fact that the majority of the participants fall into the 14 - 17 age group, the majority of Italian respondents belonged to university education (33 out of 44 respondents), while Turkish young people to secondary education.

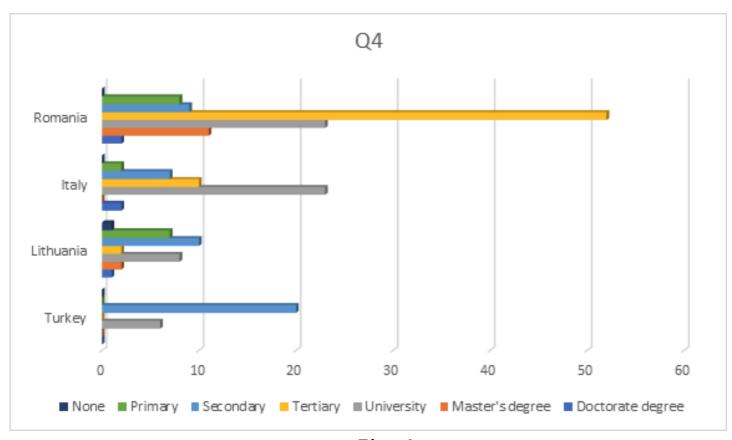


Fig. 4

C. POLITICAL AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

The following part analyzed political and civic participation of young people, their perceptions about different forms of participation, barriers and benefits of participation. Respondents were also about their motivation asked to participate and get involved in issues that affect themselves and their community.

Voting participation of young people

Overall, in all the four countries, 27% of the participants voted in political election at the local, regional, national or European level during the last 2 years, while 12,15% said they did not vote. A high level of voting participation resulted among young people from Romania and Italy. (Fig. 5)

In Lithuania, on another note, about a half of the respondents have indicated they did not have the opportunity to

vote in any election yet. This coincides with the fact that the majority of the participants from this country fall into the 14 to 17 age group.

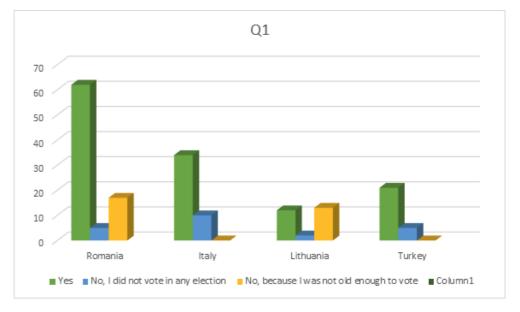


Fig. 5

asked respondents to give their agreement level of on various statements. Results showed that the majority of respondents in all the 4 countries totally agreed with the statements: My vote matters and I have a duty to vote. The majority of the participants mentioned that they had information about politic parties and politics in general. An important percentage of interviewed young people expressed the lack of trust in politicians counting for 25% of the population surveyed.

Forms of political and civic participation

In order to investigate the respondents' participation in certain activities, we offered them multiple answers possibility. Figure 6, shows the diverse answers of the respondents and variety of their political and civic participation.

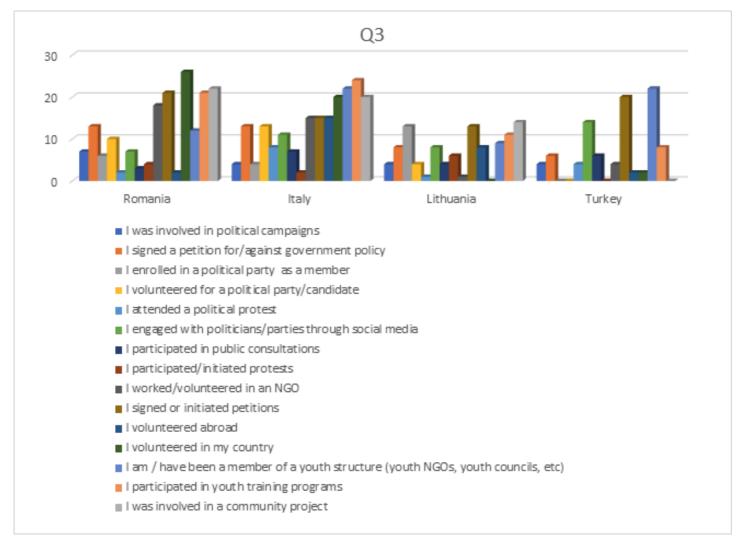


Fig. 6

The figure shows various results, from one country to another. In Romania, the majority of respondents volunteered in their country, 30,95%, followed by the second largest group, counting on 26,19% young people

who declared that they have participated in community projects during the last year. 17,64% of young people from Romania participated in youth training programs. The lowest percentages were recorded for the participation in public consultations (2,52%) or political related activities. In Italy, 45% of young people participating in the survey, declared that they have volunteered in their country, while 50% have been a member of a youth structure. Also, 54.5% participated in youth training programs, and 45.5% were involved in a community project. Similar as to Romania, Italian youngsters also registered a low percentage of participation in political related activities. In Lithuania, most respondents favour civic engagement in youth related fields with over a half of the target having participated in youth training programs and 40.7% having been involved in community projects. Regarding political engagement, young people favour silent or online activism over active participation. 48.1% of young people responded that they have signed a petition for or against government policy and 29.6% have noted that they have previously engaged with political parties over social media. In Turkey, the majority of respondents stated that they volunteered in their country and they signed or initiated petitions. Political engagement of Turkish young people is similar to the other 3 countries, registering a low participation.

Involvement in different stages of an activity

Regarding the young people's participation and their involvement at different stages, the answers the are varied (Fig.7). The respondents majority of respondents believe they were only somewhat or not at all not involved in most of the stages, particularly, planning of finances, reporting, evaluation and the Comparing results in the four countries, Italian youngsters are more likely to be involved in reporting and evaluation phases, while in Lithuania, the majority of the respondents believed they were only somewhat or not at all not involved in most of the stages, particularly, planning of the finances, reporting, evaluation. Involvement in advocacy, planning of financing registered low scoring in all the four countries, majority of respondents stated they were not involved at all in these stages.

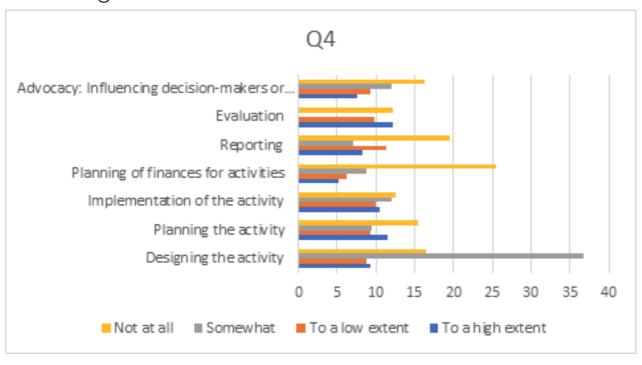


Fig. 7

Perceived benefits

The main perceived benefits of participants from taking part in activities are the following:

- learned new skills,
- their opinions were taken into consideration,
- felt valued as part of a team,
- gained confidence/self-esteem,
- learnt about things that affect them/their community/ the environment,
- added to their CV/job opportunities,
- enjoyed helping other people,
- met new people and had fun,
- felt they made a difference,
- helped a cause/group that they believe in.
- felt better about themselves and they became more committed to participate.



Time willing to invest in a participation activity

Regarding the time the participants are willing to invest in activities, answers provided in all the four countries, showed that the majority of the respondents prefer short term involvement ranging from 3 days to 2 weeks (30,43), followed by 21,19% respondents who stated they would invest from 2 weeks to 3 months.

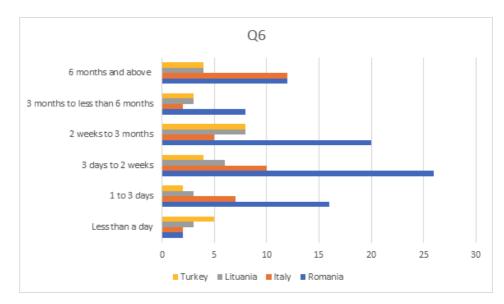


Fig. 8

Entities most likely to support young people voices and address their problems / needs

When questioning respondents who could support them to make their voices

heard and to answer their problems/needs, most of them answered family and friends, followed by NGOs. Lower scoring was registered for religious institutions and politicians in Romania, Italy and Lithuania, similarly, the majority of the respondents from Turkey have stated that these two categories can not support them.

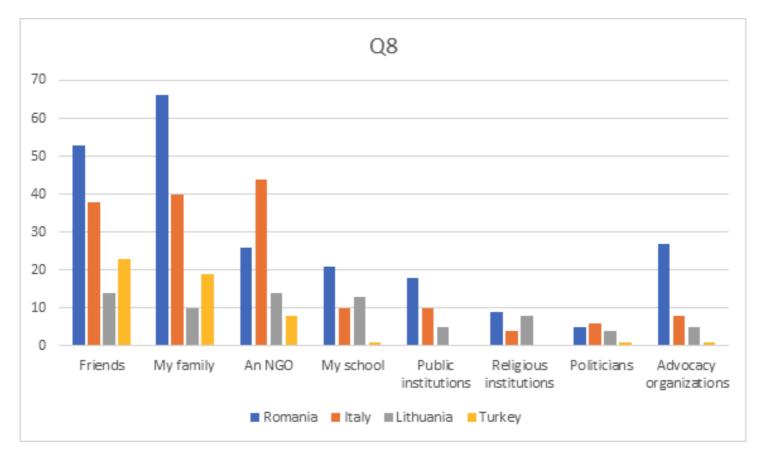


Fig. 9

Perceived barriers for participation

Respondents were asked to express their views on assessing barriers that influence their ability to participate and get involved in issues that affect them or their community. The majority of respondents from all the four countries consider lack of time and finances as their biggest barriers that affect their ability to participate.

Lack of information about the opportunities and geographical location were also identified as potential obstacles in Romania, Lithuania and Turkey.

Motivation and interest in political and civic participation

We asked young people's opinions about motivation and interest in political and civic participation. According to the results, we can conclude that doing activities to help other people in the community is important for the majority of respondents (Fig. 10)

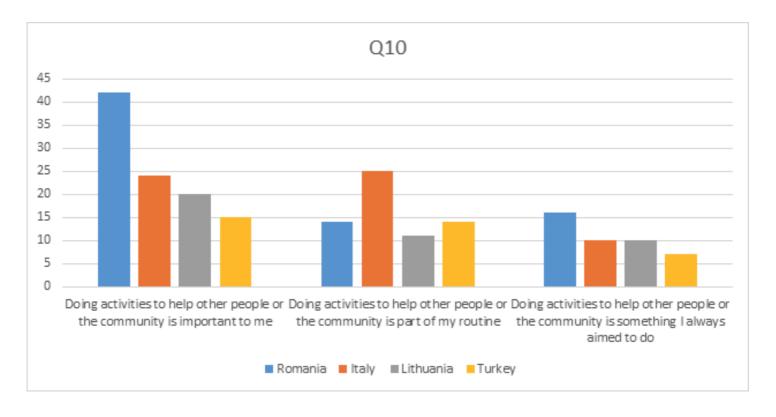


Fig.10

Analysing respondents' motivation to participate in activities (Fig. 11), young people agreed that it is crucial that activities are relevant and interesting for them, this being

emphasized by the majority of respondents from the four countries. The second largest group, stated that it is important that activities are time flexible. Also, most respondents feel more motivated if they can contribute to solving a community problem and if activities are cost-free.

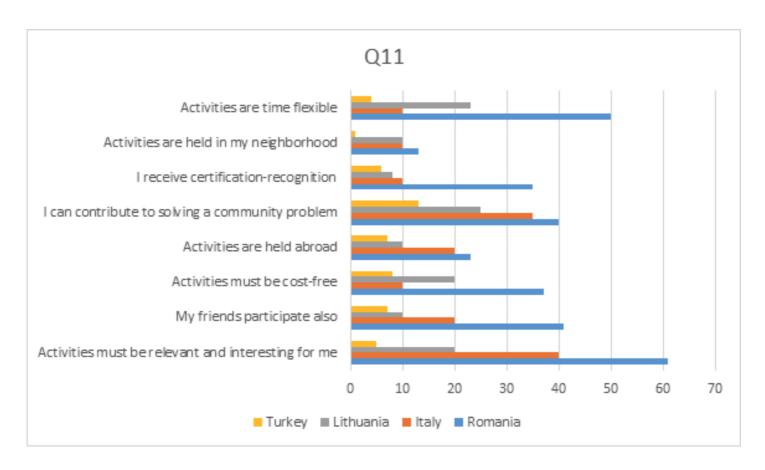


Fig.11

In the next part, young people were asked in open-ended questions, to provide their opinions about what should public or private institutions do to raise their interest and motivation to participate in political and social-civic activities/structures/programs. Participants indicated that institutions should make an effort to educate young people about the existing issues, make participation interesting and

more information youth, accesible to spread opportunities and find better methods of communication. Respondents also believe that organisations should provide financial encouragement, especially for unemployed youth, and invest in the development of young people's skills and competences. In particular, respondents from Romania have underlined the need for information, allocation of financial resources, as well as the establishment of functional youth centers. Lithuanian respondents stated that organisations should provide financial encouragement, especially for unemployed youth, and invest in the development of young people's skills and competences. On another note, Turkish young people, expressed their wishes for their to feel like home and to be a place that gives them a sense of pride, therefore they think public and private institutions should recognize their needs, strenghts, see them as individuals, make thems feel welcome by listening to them and taking them seriously.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION - PRACTICES, FORMS AND INSTRUMENTS

This part presents key findings from the survey questionnaires applied to organizations from the partners countries. It has three sections: the first section includes the demographical data of the participating organizations, the second one includes the characteristics youth of programs organizations and the last part includes the identification of best practices among respondent organizations. The participants' responses provided valuable insights into organizations experiences and perspective on the topics, supporting the consolidation youth participation of programs.



A. DEMOGRAPHICAL DATA OF THE ORGANIZATIONS

demographical The data of the include the participants of type organizations, whether they are regional, international, national and type sector, age distribution, main topics they address, and the number of participants they reached last year.

Cross-cutting findings - Romania

Majority of respondents willing to answer the survey were NGOs, 6 out of 8 respondents, followed by 2 schools. (Fig. 1)

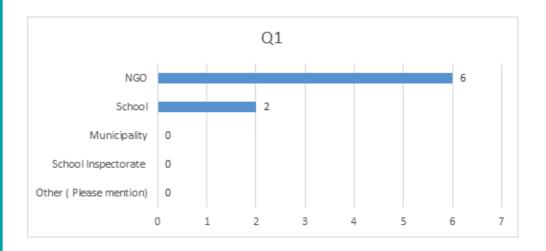


Fig.1

Most of the organizations operate at local level, 4 out of 8, followed by 3 organizations organizations operating at international level and 1 at national level.

Organizations were requested to state the main sector in which they activate, results are shown above:

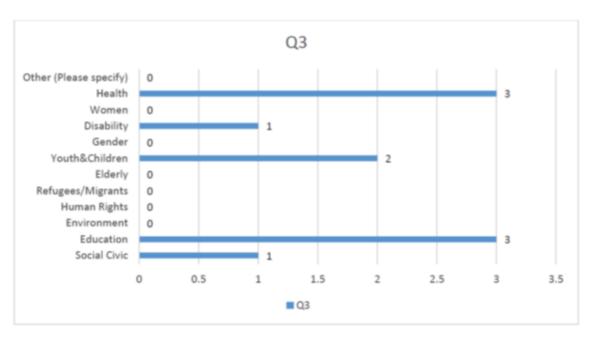


Fig.2

The majority of the organizations work with 18-24 years old and 14 - 17 years old young people. 2 of the organizations work for 25-30 years old, as shown in the above figure:

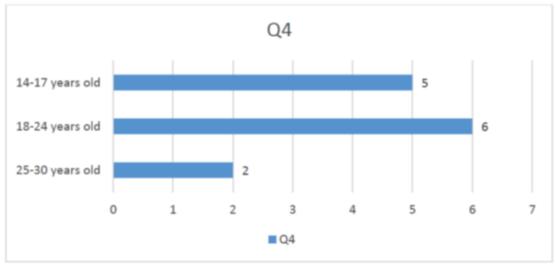


Fig.3

Respondents were requested to state the main topics addressed in their youth programs, the most relevant for our subjects being: health, education, disability and social-civic, while no answer was registered for women topic.

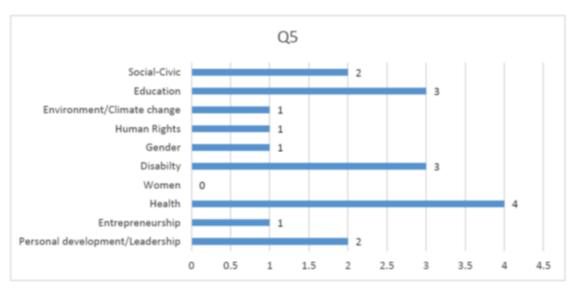


Fig.4

Questioning about the number of young people they worked with in the last year, the majority of respondents stated they worked with more than 50, only one organization worked with more than 100.

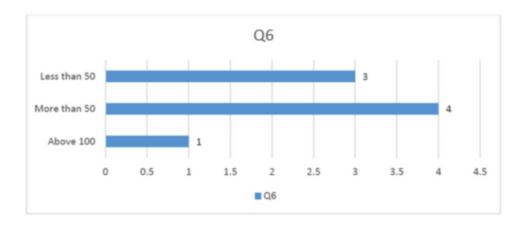


Fig.5

Cross-cutting findings - Italy

The main legal entity of the Italian respondent organizations were NGO/Association (83.3%), followed by 11.1% of Municipality and 5.6% of Foundation. They are mainly local (66.7%), followed by international (22.2%) and national (11.1%) organizations and they are more focused in education, youth and children, social-civic issues.

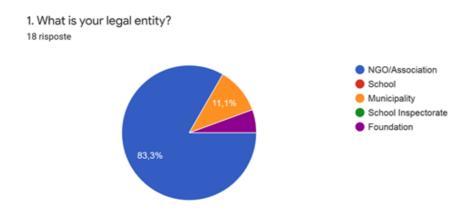


Fig.6

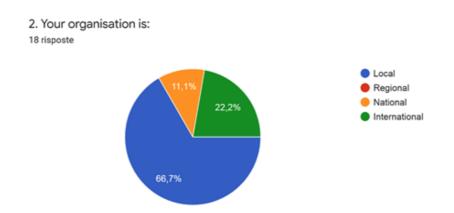


Fig.7

 In which sector is your organization focused on? Please, indicate from those enlisted below or add new ones. (Multiple answers possibility)
 18 risposte

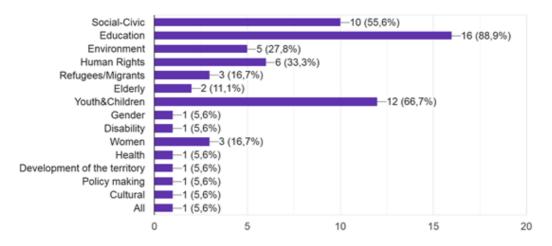
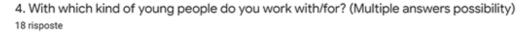


Fig.8

Italian organizations are mostly working with young people between 18 and 24 years old (94.4%), followed by people between 25 and 30 years old (88.9%). Finally, 50% of the respondent organizations are working also with people between 14 and 17 years old.



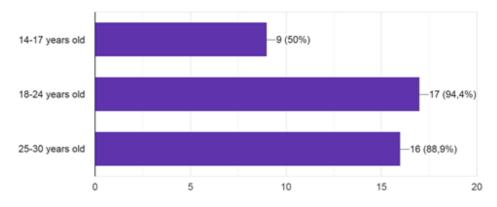


Fig.9

The main topics Italian organizations are addressing in their youth programs are: education (94.4%), personal development/leadership (83.3%), social-civic (72.2%) and entrepreneurship (61.6%), as shown in the above figure:

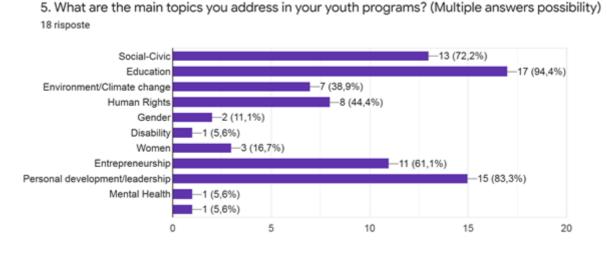


Fig.10

The collected survey data shows that the 38,9% work with groups of less than 50, while 33,3% work with groups of over 50 people but less than 100.

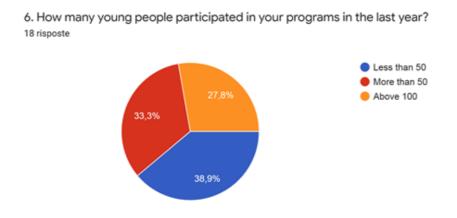


Fig.11

Cross-cutting findings - Lithuania

From 9 organisations who have participated in the research (Fig. 12), 5 have indicated NGO as their legal entity, only 2 answers were from school institutions and the remaining two identified as other organisations working with youth. 8 out of 9 organisations focus their impact on local scope, and only 1 is branching out regionally (Fig. 13). Regarding the key sectors (Fig. 14), two thirds of the participants answered that education is their main focus. As the target group of the survey was oriented towards organisations working with youth, it is only to be expected that Youth & Children topic is also a point of interest among them. It is important to note that none of the organisations specifically focus on either gender, women or migrant/refugee issues.

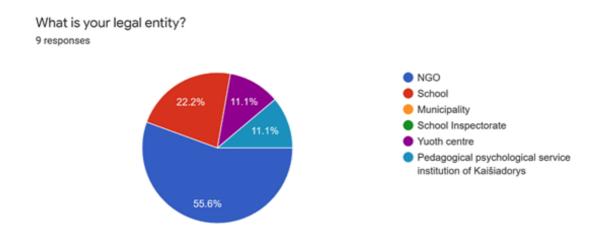


Fig.12

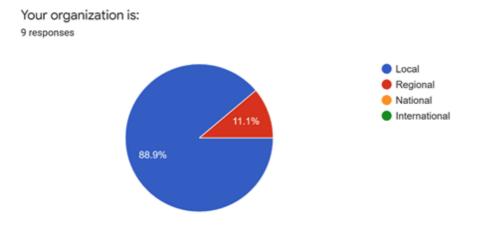


Fig.13

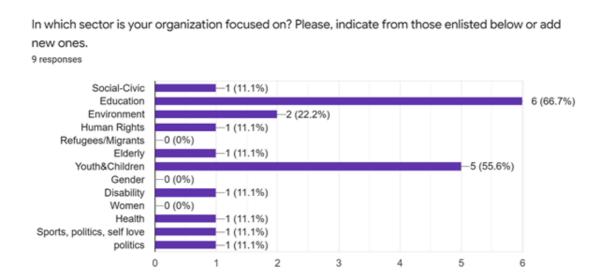


Fig.14

The results revealed that participating organisations focus on various topics in their youth programs (Fig. 15), education and environmental issues being the most common answers, with 6 and 4 responses respectively. Entrepreneurship, personal development and leadership are topics addressed by a third of respondents. Surprisingly, surveyed organisations focus less on subjects regarding human rights, including disability and gender issues.

What are the main topics you address in your youth programs? 9 responses

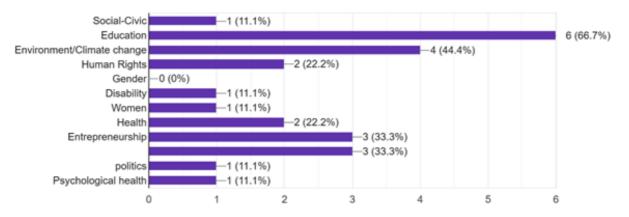


Fig.15

Regarding the target audience of the respondent organisations (Fig.16), we can observe that their main focus is on two age groups, precisely young people of 14-17 and 18-24 years. Only 5 surveyed organisations include young people of all age groups. The collected survey data shows that the same number of organisations (44.4%) work with groups of less than 50 and more than 100 people (Fig. 17). Surprisingly leaving only 1 organisation that works with groups of over 50 people but less than 100.

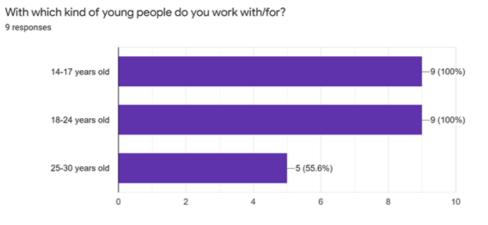


Fig.16

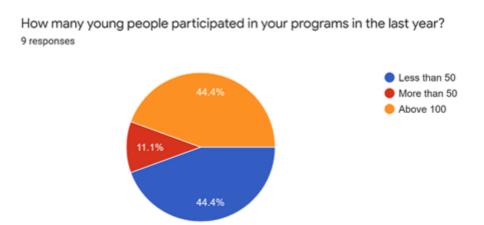


Fig.17

Cross-cutting findings - Turkey

According to the results, 9 organizations are NGO, 7 organizations are schools and 2 organizations are municipalities. Given the distributions of their organizations, 15 of them are local, 2 of them are regional and one of them is national.

Considering the topics they address in their youth programs, nearly half of them stated education and 4 of them stated social-civic. According to the age distribution of the young people participating organizations work with/for, 7 of them work with young people with 25-30 years old, 6 of them work with 14-17 years old and 5 of them work with 18-24 years old.

According to the main topics they address in their youth programs, nearly half of them stated that education, and nearly quarter of them stated social-civic. In addition, most of the participating organizations stated that less than 50 people participated in their programs last year.

B. YOUTH PARTICIPATION MEANING

We wanted to find out the organizations opinions about the meaning of youth participation concept and their main answers were various:

- Involving young people in as many projects as possible to be active;
- Young people involvement in organizing daily activities and coordination to achieve the best results;
- Active engagement and involvement of the young people in their communities, decision making processes, consultations;
- Youth becoming policy makers and organize activities in order to educate themselves and the other part of the society;
- Participation from the bottom, young people creating their own opportunities and give space for their ideas to be realised

- The active engagement of young people in schools, sports, government, community development and economic activity
- Recognizing and nurturing the strengths, interests, and abilities of young people through the provision of real opportunities

Youth participation within the respondent organizations

We asked respondents whether young people voices are visible inside their organizations, and the majority of respondents believe that young people's voices are visible in their organisation.

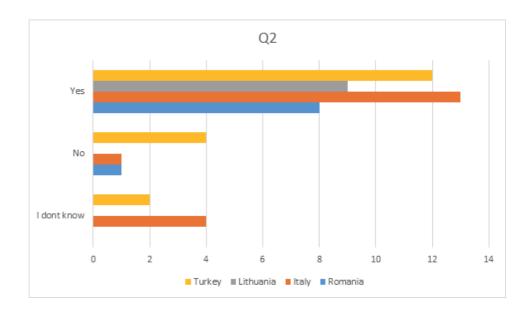


Fig.18

The organisations also state that young people are involved and actively express themselves in all activities. It should be pointed out that young people are particularly active in decision-making, designing, planning, implementing and reporting the activity. On the whole, the youth in the four countries is involved in all activities to some extent, with none of the organisations stating the lack of participation. It should be pointed that there is a missmatch between the opinions of surveyed organizations and young people regarding the extent of involvement in different stages of an activity. Answers provided by the surveyed young people have shown that they see their involvement as minimal in decission-making and reporting.

Regarding the methods organisations use to spread information about their programs, social media is the most common channels in Romania, Italy and Lithuania, while in Turkey the most common channel is represented by the organization website. Other media include promotional materials and events.

In what concerns the most common tools used by the respondents to support young people effective participation, the majority use training/capacity building tools, followed by information and awareness campaign,

consultation meeting for the identification of needs.

Based on the research the majority of repondents from the four countries, stated that they plan activities according to the schedule and other obligations of young people. This shows that organisations collaborate with participants in their programs.

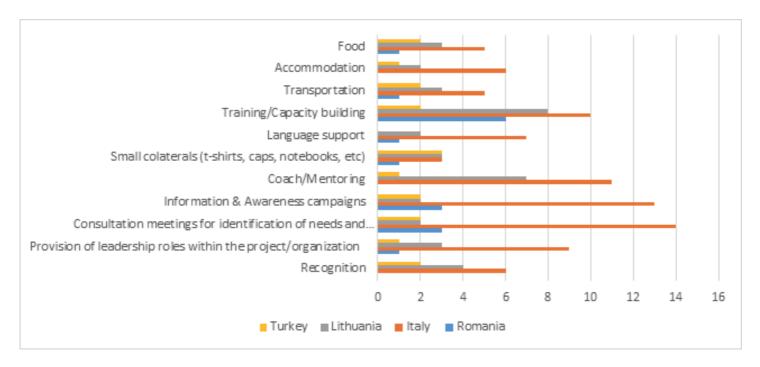


Fig.19

Involvement of young people from diverse social, educational and economic backgrounds

All the respondents state that they to some extent involve young people from diverse social, educational and economic backgrounds in their youth programs, which allows us to believe that surveyed organisations consider participants with fewer opportunities in their work.

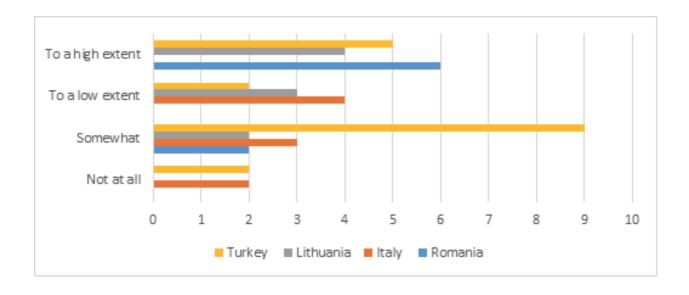


Fig.20

Barriers perceived within the respondent organisations

The main barriers perceived within the Italian respondent organizations are the lack of resources of the organization to implement and evaluate the work with young people, the lack of flexibility to ensure young people involvement regarding the decision making, the lack of knowledge on how to meaningful involve young people in the organization, the lack of interest from behalf of young people and that young people cannot make a meaningful contribution in their organization.

Similarly, in Lithuania and Romania, the main barrier perceived were related to the lack of resources in their organisations, which was identified as having a very significant or significant impact on youth involvement in their programs.

Lack of interest from young people was also perceived as a very significant or significant obstacle in 8 of the Lithuanian organisations. Only slightly less significant barrier is the lack of knowledge on how to meaningfully involve young people in the organisation (3 organisations identified it as a very significant factor, and 5 as significant).

For Turkish organizations, lack of resources remains the biggest obstacle for the organizations in involving young people within their organization programs. In addition, the unfexibility of the organization decision making structure and the lack of knowledge on how to meaningfully involve young people in the organization can be seen other biggest barriers for the organization. Also, lack of interest from behalf of young people is perceived as another obstacle by the organizations.

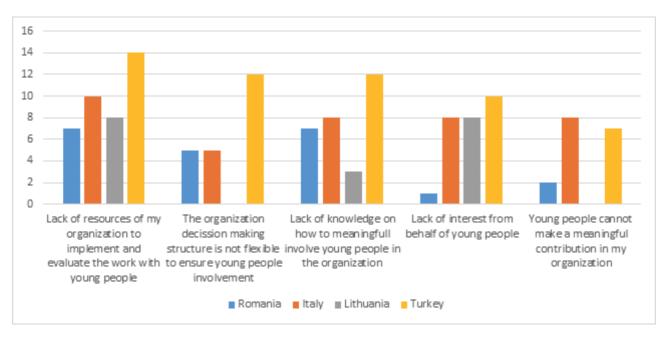


Fig.21

Best practices for meaningful youth participation

The overall objective of this part was to information about gather the practices that the surveyed organizations are currently implementing. Particularly, organizations from Romania stated that they do not have a best practice to exemplify. Also, we should point that the the two respondents from schools participating in the survey have stated that it is difficult to implement a youth participation process in their schools. On another note, organizations were asked what they think it would be a good practice implement to in their organization, thus, elements of success/ best practices identified by them were related to 2 main aspects:

- Focussing learning by doing experiences in which young people take the leadership role;
- Building programs that are design in consultation with young people and upon an in-depth needs analysis.

When analysing best practices for meaningful youth participation Lithuania, 8 respondents believe that they have found methods that work for specific cases. Answers have revealed that common best practices in organisations are related to close collaboration with young people and allowing them to choose motivations and topics they would like to tackle. The majority of the organisations specify that good results, positive feedback and community recognition allows them to believe that practices that they are implementing currently provide meaningful participation for young people.

Respondents organizations form **Italy** have different best practices for meaningful youth participation:

- transforming young participants in young youth leaders;
- including young people in various of activities and projects where they can actively contribute and share ideas and opinions;

- mentoring programs;
- offering free legal support by professionals for youth in need;
- having young people in the board of the organizations;
- include young people into the project design and definition of the needs and actions/solutions.

Respondent organizations in **Turkey** have identified as best practices the following:

- listening to young people advices and take their ideas into consideration when planning an activity;
- offering information, education to participate effectively;
- strengthening young people bond to their local community by involving them in the planning process;
- promote an organizational culture that sees teams to work collaboratively on youth participation as valuable and feasible.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

results have shown that young people from the four countries are selfmotivated to participate in political and civic activities. However, they perceive an absence of information on issues they can contribute and lack to а encouragement from public and private institutions to be actively involved in the society. Young people believe that most institutions are not able to support them or address their problems and needs, with the majority of respondents highlighting minimal levels of involvement. What is more, youngsters from the four countries perceived a lack of training for crucial skills and competences, and financial support, especially for those from vulnerable groups.

On the other hand, taking into consideration the data gathered among different organisations from the four countries, there are similar barriers influencing their capacity to provide

meaningful participation such as: resources within the organisations that often limit their potential, lack of interest from young people to participate, lack of know-how. Also, there is a cohesion in the perspectives offered by surveyed in all the four countries, regarding best organizations practices for meaningful participation which involve close collaboration with young people, allowing them to choose motivations and topics they would like to tackle. However, recognisable lack of understanding there is а and communication between institutions and young people that seemingly contributes to issues that both parties face regarding youth participation, active citizenship and social inclusion.

This study aimed to understand what both issues young people organisations face regarding youth participation. The diverse viewpoints connection actions in to of participation might be explored and development enable the of appropriate tools and methods for including, motivating and supporting youngsters to be active and give their contribution to society growth.











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