



Guidebook

Enhancing Inclusive Practices for Young People

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Enhancing Inclusivity

Many young people participate actively in diverse forms of politics, a fact that professionals working with youth engagement know very well. However, research shows that opportunities for participation are unequally distributed across the population¹ and that individuals with more resources and skills tend to participate more actively². This applies also for the young; Political inactivity is often not a matter of free personal choice, but a consequence of the unequal distribution of various forms of capital that facilitate political involvement³. In our efforts to mobilise young people, it is vital to remember that young people are not a homogeneous but a diverse group. Accordingly, we must ensure that our participation practices are inclusive and reflective of this heterogeneity, particularly when engaging with underrepresented youth groups that are often rendered voiceless in political processes.

This guidebook offers research-based recommendations on how to enhance inclusivity in deliberative and participatory practices aimed at young people, taking place in schools, organisations, and local communities. These recommendations are based on existing good practice in schools, municipalities, regions, and countries across Europe. The guidebook presents professionals working with young people with questions that can help evaluate and benchmark existing deliberative and participatory practices and suggest ways to improve their inclusivity.

Deliberative and participatory practices are designed to engage citizens in democratic systems, help build social capital and increase the legitimacy of democratic decision-making⁴. This is based on evidence that early, positive experience of participation is likely to increase the likelihood of young people remaining civically and politically engaged as they develop skills and confidence to express their views and experience the impact participation can have⁵. These practices aim to build new channels for political participation and amplify people's voices in decision-making processes. Although the recommendations are designed with deliberative and participatory practices in mind, they can be valuable for all kinds of practices that aim to increase inclusivity in youth engagement as well as other marginalised groups. Lastly, we stress the importance of context. Regarding all the practices and recommendations presented in this guide, practitioners should consider how and to what extent they can be applied in their social, cultural, and political circumstances. We recognize that no one-size-fits-all solutions exist and encourage professionals to actively reflect on the recommendations and refine them further to better work with the specific needs, constraints, and opportunities of their own context.

The recommendations focus on five different themes relevant to youth deliberative and participatory practices: Inclusion, Youth Voice and Power, Critical Awareness, Recognition, and Impact.

This guidebook is based on research conducted within the framework of the Horizon Europe project The Intersectional Inclusion in Deliberation and Participation with Youth (SINCROny). In particular, the content is based on findings from deliverables D3.1-D3.4⁶. The questions and recommendations in this guidebook were also turned into an Inclusivity Footprint Calculator⁷. The project has received funding from the European Union under grant agreement no. 101132459, UKRI grant no. 10099512, and SERI grant no. 23.00494.

¹Russell J. Dalton, *The Participation Gap: Social Status and Political Inequality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

²Marien et al., *Inequalities in Non-Institutionalised forms of Political Participation: A Multi-Level Analysis of 25 Countries* (Political Studies, 2010); Verba et al., *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

⁴Robert E. Goodin and John S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Impacts: The Macro-Political Uptake of Mini-Publics* (Politics & Society, 2006).

⁵Involve, *People & Participation How to put citizens at the heart of decision-making* (London: Involve, 2005).

⁶Huttunen, J., Korventausta, M., Leino, M. & Setälä, M. (2024). D3.1 Assessment of EU-level deliberative and participatory practices through an intersectional lens.; Mirshak, N. and Pilkington, H. (2024) Assessment of National and Local Practices, SINCROny Deliverable Report 3.2.; Mirshak, N. and Pilkington, H. (2024) Integration of Critical Assessment of Practices, SINCROny Deliverable Report 3.3.; Ylikoski, O., Huttunen, J., Korventausta, M., Leino, M., & Setälä, M. (2025). Inclusivity Footprint Calculator. SINCROny Deliverable Report 3.4.

⁷The Inclusivity Footprint Calculator can be accessed at SINCROny website (sincronyproject.eu).

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Inclusion

The questions and recommendations in this theme allow practitioners to reflect on how far participation encourages a critical approach to underlying inequalities, and how different aspects of a person's identity may lead to exclusion. This section focuses on recruitment practices, proactive outreach, accessibility, steps taken to ensure participants feel they belong, and support mechanisms for participation. When evaluating your practice from an inclusion perspective, the following questions can be used as a guide.

1. In participant recruitment, are **active efforts** made to recruit those who would not typically participate?
2. Are participants recruited through a process that does not solely rely on self-selection (participants putting themselves forward for participation), e.g., by targeted invitations, random sampling, or quasi-random sampling?
3. If people are recruited as representatives, do all of those whom they will represent have the opportunity to (s)elect their representatives?
4. Are efforts made to reach out to those young people with least access to participation and encourage the participation of people with diverse gender, class, or sexual identities, (dis)abilities, as well as different racial, ethnic, or migration backgrounds?
5. Are spaces (physical or virtual) of participation accessible for those with additional needs, whether physical or mental?
6. Is plain and accessible language used in recruitment and activities?
7. Is participation in multiple languages possible, and is language interpretation available for those who need it in order to participate?
8. Are all the costs of participation compensated for the participants?
9. Is training provided to enable participation?
10. Is the venue or space comfortable, welcoming, and safe for all young people?

Recommendations:

Here are recommendations on how to improve inclusion in recruitment, accessibility, training, and creating spaces of belonging.



Inclusive recruitment.

To promote inclusion, it is not enough to recruit the “young”. It is also important what kind of young people are recruited and who might be missing from the room. Some young people need more encouragement and support to participate. **Recruitment processes that rely solely on self-selection can result in heavily skewed demographics.**

Identify what kind of young people are missing from your practice and **target your recruitment** to ensure you include these groups. **Existing good practices have reached out specifically to young people facing the greatest barriers to getting involved.** Ensure that people with diverse class, gender, or sexual identities, ethnic backgrounds, and (dis)abilities are proactively encouraged to participate. Targeted recruitment can be done, for example, by focusing on young people living in vulnerable neighbourhoods or through organisations for disabled young people. Snowballing, asking participants to help identify other potential participants, and using more diverse recruitment methods, such as videos, have also been used.

- **Wider recruitment networks.** Try to reach as many people as possible with your recruitment and utilise digital solutions. Existing practices have, for example, used digital invitations to reach tens of thousands of young people and drawn on existing connections with partners, including high schools, scouting or similar organisations, and Youth Councils.
- **Use random or quasi-random sampling.** **Random sampling** is a method where participants are selected entirely by chance from a larger group, ensuring that everyone has an equal probability of being chosen. **Quasi-random sampling** refers to selection methods that incorporate some degree of randomness but may also involve stratification based on certain characteristics, such as gender, age, education, and origin. This approach ensures diversity while maintaining some level of randomness. Online tools, such as free-to-use Panelot.org, can be used to help in stratification. Random sampling has especially been used in deliberative democratic practices.
- **Ensure that all young people can participate** and consider all possible barriers that might unintentionally exclude people based on, for example, (dis)abilities, religion, and/or identities. Existing projects have, for example, noted that if information about activities is not clear, neurodiverse young people may be excluded.
- **Communicate in the recruitment process** how barriers to participation are counteracted (for example, provide accessibility information or information about language interpretation) to ensure that no one opts out of participation because they think they cannot participate.
- **Design explicit processes for selecting representatives.** Existing practices have, for example, employed application processes, either by writing or video, which have been followed by democratic election campaigns whereby candidates canvas those they are meant to represent to vote for them.



Ensuring accessibility.

Ensure that the space and practice are accessible. Take into consideration accessibility as a multidimensional issue.

- **Ensure that the space is wheelchair accessible and adapt the activities to be accessible for wheelchair users.** Consider and communicate how wide the doors are and what the dimensions of the bathrooms are. Provide the information and measurements in the invitation and the information you send to participants. Consider how the planned activities can be adapted to wheelchair users if needed.
- **Take into account special arrangements to ensure safe and enjoyable participation** for people with all different kinds of needs. Provide, for example, a quiet space for participants who may need to take a break from all the stimuli.
- **Consider organising meetings as a hybrid online meeting** to enable young people who cannot physically get around to participate. Distance participation has also been used by existing practices to enable youth participation in remote or rural areas.
- **Use language that is easy to understand.** Existing good practices use **plain language**, are prepared to **clarify key concepts**, and use **images or activities to illustrate points**. They also note that the language and concepts used must support equality. Consider **providing training in inclusive language** to avoid, e.g., ethnocentrism and sexism. Use language that speaks to the young. Existing practices have, for example, used memes, short engaging infographics, and easy-to-read reports.
- **Consider organising participation in multiple languages.** Translate the used materials into multiple languages. If there is a need for interpretation, ever-evolving technological solutions could be utilised.
- **Offer training and remunerate participation** to ensure that the activity is accessible for young people from different backgrounds.



Providing support for meaningful participation.

Provide participants with training and support to enable participation for everyone, irrespective of pre-existing knowledge or political experience.

- **Organise expert panels** and help young people engage with experts.
- **Tailor detailed instructions for participation.** Ensure that the instructions are understandable for everyone, regardless of their previous skills and knowledge.
- **Use exercises and training to build participants' capacities.** This has been done in existing practices with model parliaments and community decision-making activities, which help young people practice democratic participation in realistic but low-risk environments.
- **Offer mentoring.** Pair young participants with mentors who have experience in civic engagement. Establish peer-to-peer networks where participants can share knowledge, ask questions, and support each other in navigating participation processes.
- In projects where **young people are involved in conducting research ('citizen science'), introduce young people to new skills via co-creation and cooperation between young people and experts in**, for example, data collection or analysis. In existing practices applying 'citizen science', young people have, for example, been trained to collect written evidence from experts and analyse interviews and surveys.
- **Provide ongoing and versatile support.** Existing practices have, for example, offered leadership training, which provides participants with skills and capacities to lead a project. Young participants have been offered ongoing support also in the form of, for example, media training.



Creating spaces where young people feel a sense of belonging.

Provide participants with training and support to enable participation for everyone, irrespective of pre-existing knowledge or political experience.

- **Make sure that your venue is comfortable, welcoming, and safe for all kinds of young people.** Building more inclusive, safer, non-judgmental spaces starts by **declaring this goal out loud**. Experiences from previous practices show that different methods can be used to make the space welcoming, including the utilisation of art and creative expression to ensure the young people feel at home in the space.
- **Peer-to-peer support and youth-led workshops** have been helpful in developing safer and comfortable participation spaces in existing practices.
- Appointing specific **equality ambassadors** (or well-being and anti-bullying ambassadors) to promote equality and participants' safety is one concrete way to improve the safety of the space.
- Make **active efforts** to ensure participants do not feel excluded due to their age, (dis)ability, or identity characteristics (such as class, gender, sexuality, ethnic, racial or migration background). To achieve this, **take into consideration accessibility and language questions and provide training**. Encourage participants to take responsibility for making the space and practice inclusive for all and appoint, for example, equality ambassadors to help in situations where support may be needed.

Youth Voice & Power

The questions and recommendations under this theme help practitioners reflect on the forms and spaces for participation practices, young people's inclusion in decision-making processes, the extent of young people's agency, and the diversity of participation practices.

1. Are young people co-designers and/or co-producers of the activities? This means engaging them in all stages of planning, development, and implementation of outcomes.
2. Are digital technologies and/or social media employed to facilitate the participation of young people?
3. Are young people able to participate in non-formal, everyday settings?
4. If young people participate in formal sites, do these include places that would otherwise be hard for them to access (e.g. parliament and other institutions of power)?
5. Is participation led and/or initiated by young people?
6. Can young people set the agenda by bringing their issues into discussion?
7. Are young people seen mainly as subjects of democratic education rather than political or civic actors?
8. Is a wide range of voices heard in the participation process?
9. Are facilitators or moderators employed to ensure equality and mutual respect in participation?

Recommendations:



Furthering youth voice and power.

Ensure young people not only participate but also have a voice, and that their voices are heard. Provide opportunities for young people to act as political actors with practices that have real policy aims. Ensure youth involvement in the process from the beginning to the end.

- **Make sure young people are co-producing and co-designing the activities.** Give young people opportunities to act as agenda-makers and designers of the process, not just participants. **Young people should actively shape projects, policies, and decision-making processes, ensuring their ideas translate into real impact.** Existing practices have had young people co-design, for example, interventions and research projects.
- **Create opportunities for young people to formulate concrete recommendations that give input to the policymaking processes.** Organise, for example, workshops where young people develop a list of recommendations, which are published and presented publicly. Or build projects and platforms that are policy manifesto and/or proposal-based, where young people critically explore relevant socio-political issues and design proposals for change in their communities.
- **Ensure that your activities are youth-led and youth-powered.** Existing practices have, for example, enabled young participants to write manifestos delivered to politicians and launch petitions to bring forward policy changes. **Young people should be given actual power, not just, for example, be seen as subjects for civic education.**

- **Work with authorities and the local community** to ensure that the youth voice has an impact and that young people's proposals are implemented and responded to. Existing examples of good practices include building online channels for youth voice with a guaranteed response from policymakers, where youth feedback and demands, as well as the policymakers' responses, are made public.
- **Create opportunities for young people to participate in institutionalised processes.** Existing good practices include, for example, participatory budgeting processes and youth councils with representation in local decision-making bodies.



Recommendations specifically for schools:

- **Co-production and co-design also work in a school context.** Existing practices have, for example, introduced class-level co-design and consulting on weekly teaching plans and a wide range of school-related issues, including educational questions and interpersonal conflicts.
- **Participatory budgeting** has been utilised in schools to help students improve their school environment by giving them budgetary power.
- In existing good practices, **students' access to institutionalised processes** has been organised, for example, by having student representatives meet with the Directorate of Education to present their perspectives and give concrete suggestions for changes.



Consider the sites for participation,

i.e., where your activities are held.

- Ensure that **the sites feel comfortable, accessible, and informal** for young people. Existing practices have, for example, organised their activities in under-resourced urban areas to ensure local young people can easily access the activities. Reflect on bringing everyday elements into your activities, for example, by introducing music, photography, film, performances, different types of presentation, meetings, and assemblies.
- If the activities are held in more formal sites, seek to organise them in venues **that young people would otherwise find hard to access.** Existing practices have organised events in the City halls or other institutions of power, providing the young an opportunity to be a part of formal power structures.



Role of facilitation.

Facilitation plays a crucial role in ensuring active, inclusive, and interactive participation rather than passive learning. Effective facilitators create safe and structured spaces where young people can voice their opinions, engage in discussions, and take action.

- **Facilitate active and interactive participation, not only learning.** Young people should get to do, not just hear about, politics. Create participatory formats that allow young people to experience democracy, governance, and activism firsthand.
- **Using trained, unbiased facilitators and moderators** can help foster discussions where everyone gets their voices heard. The facilitators do not need to possess issue specific knowledge, and it is important that they do not act in an expert role – they do not act as providers of information, fact-checkers or as any kind of expert when facilitating. **Prioritise inclusive facilitation methods** that actively engage those young people with the least access to participation.
- **Combine moderated discussions with other participation forms.** Existing practices have combined empathetic moderation with pair and small group work as well as live polling to ensure interactive discussions where everyone has the opportunity to express their opinions.



Use digital technologies and/or social media.

Young people increasingly engage with the world through digital spaces, making social media and online platforms essential for effective participation.

- **Use interactive tools such as online surveys, virtual forums, live Q&A sessions, and digital storytelling** to encourage participation. Existing practices have created **digital platforms** to provide young people with opportunities to submit their ideas and initiatives to influence a range of policy areas. They have also used **online consultation**, where young people answer online surveys and contribute to published reports on various themes.
- **Gamify participation**, if possible. Games can be used not only to facilitate participation but also to offer support and training for participation as well as to educate on the question at hand. Incorporate points, badges, leaderboards, and interactive challenges to make participation more engaging and rewarding.
- **Ensure digital inclusion and accessibility.** Provide free access to online participation tools for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Consider translating digital content into multiple languages and offering screen, reader-friendly versions. Ensure accessibility by using **plain language, subtitles, and alternative formats for diverse participation.**
- **Offer digital training and support for participation** to ensure all young people can engage.

Critical Awareness

The questions and recommendations in this section reflect on the extent to which young people's participation challenges power structures and whether practices critically examine systemic inequalities and recognise intersectional exclusions.

1. Does the practice make visible societal power structures? For example, does it reveal norms related to race, colonial history, gender, social class, sexuality, ability, or age that reinforce existing hierarchies?
2. Does the practice challenge societal power structures? For example, does it question norms related to race, colonial history, gender, social class, sexuality, ability, or age that reinforce existing hierarchies?
3. Are participants encouraged to develop a shared understanding of a social phenomenon as problematic or unjust?
4. Does the practice actively encourage learning from people in socially excluded positions?
5. Does the practice aim to bring about institutional changes in public or political institutions, schools, and organisations?
6. Does the practice aim to challenge injustice?

Recommendations:



To promote inclusivity, it is essential to challenge existing societal power structures and injustices. This can be done by focusing on building participants' critical awareness by making existing structural power relations visible and encouraging learning from those not often heard, such as people in socially excluded positions. Consider if institutional changes to the existing power structures can be encouraged by building more opportunities for young people.

- **Use games to build participants' critical awareness and to enhance understanding about privileges and injustices.** In existing practices, this has been achieved with games where participants reflect on how social, economic, or political factors impact opportunities and challenges differently across society. Such games include, for example, **the step forward game**, where characteristics to which privilege attaches are read out aloud, and participants either step forward or stay in their place depending on whether they share that characteristic.
- **Use interactive digital tools, quizzes, and storytelling games to explore topics** such as discrimination, climate action, or democratic participation.
- **Invite participants and experts from communities with the least access to power.** Encourage peer learning from those with different experiences. Learning from people in socially excluded positions prepares participants to live in diverse societies.
- Existing practices have also built youth-friendly **resource packs** on topics such as anti-racism, feminism, and identity, addressing the different forms of inequality and how they intersect.
- Consider using **more participatory methods** to help the participants develop a shared understanding of social phenomena are problematic and unjust. Existing practices have, for example, brought young people from around the world together to share their views, working towards a common position by using interactive activities, such as watching videos, engaging in playful group exercises, and photography.

- **Aim to also raise critical awareness in institutions of power.** Existing practices have, for example, called on their city to recognise and fight the discrimination, exclusion, and violence being faced by a range of young people due to disability, sexuality, or migrant background and called on all policymakers to acknowledge and counteract the devastating impacts of the climate crisis.
- **Challenge the existing power structures by working on institutional changes.** Consider, for example, introducing participatory budgeting to give young people budgetary power over decisions affecting them. Find ways to **embed young people in decision-making structures** via youth advisory councils, student governance bodies, and/or policy review panels **where young people contribute to shaping decisions.**
- **Advocate for real policy reform.** Support youth-driven campaigns that push for legislative, political, and/or institutional changes. An example of such campaigns is the youth-powered and youth-driven climate strike movement. Since the climate crisis is a political issue that affects young people and future generations most severely, supporting such campaigns supports brighter futures for young generations.

Recognition

The questions and recommendations in this section reflect on the extent to which youth participation is recognised and accorded acknowledgement and respect.

1. Is participation publicly acknowledged, e.g., through media, social media, or website publication?
2. Is participation remunerated (compensated)?
3. Is participation recognised in a non-monetary way (e.g. accreditation, certification, awards, publicity)?
4. If participants gain expert knowledge or training during the practice, is this knowledge or skill accredited or certified?

Recommendations:



Recognition is essential in fostering youth participation by making young people feel valued and motivated to engage in civic activities. It encourages continued involvement, builds a culture of respect, and positions youth as role models, inspiring peers to participate.

Public acknowledgment can enhance the influence and impact of youth participation, and recognition strengthens youth agency, promotes inclusivity, and empowers young people to challenge power structures and shape democracy.

- **Acknowledge the work young people have done publicly.** Showcase young people and their work in media, videos, pictures, websites, and social media. Award ceremonies and specific events for thanking young participants are also good ways to acknowledge their work. **Be imaginative:** existing practices have, for example, published a collection of novels giving a voice to young people's diverse experiences or organised rap music workshops, which were later discussed in a podcast.
- **Recognise young people's work by remunerating them.** This entails paying the participants for their work. In some existing practices, young participants have been paid the same rates as other experts in the subject area. Consider remuneration when planning the project and its budget to make it possible.
- If financial remuneration is not possible, consider **non-monetary rewards** such as accreditations, certifications, or other awards. Existing practices have also, for example, organised award ceremonies with food served to celebrate the work done by young people.
- **Recognise the knowledge and training the participants have gained.** Consider linking the participation to career-building opportunities, such as mentorship programs, training, or professional certifications. Existing practices have, for example, ensured that participants achieve a range of qualifications through a hybrid learning model combining one-to-one mentoring, online learning, and group work.
- **Involve the young participants in designing** how incentives, rewards, and recognition are given.



Recommendations specifically for schools:

- **Acknowledge the work students have done by forwarding the results to educational authorities.** This can also lead to a broader impact.
- **Students feel acknowledged when their efforts are recognised.** Consider implementing the students' ideas as part of the school culture. Create spaces where students' voices are actively considered, for example, in curriculum design or student governance.

Impact

The questions and recommendations in this section ask about how the practices can influence actual policies in relevant organisations and whether there is a system in place for monitoring and documenting the impact of young people's participation.

1. Do young people's voices contribute to decision-making?
2. Are explicit recommendations made to achieve a policy impact?
3. Do the process outcomes have a specific and relevant recipient?
4. Is there an informal or formal procedure for decision-makers' response to the participants and their recommendations?
5. Is there a system for monitoring and evidencing the impact of the practice?
6. Has the practice or project been formally assessed?
7. Have the results of the assessment and the impact of policy recommendations been made publicly available?

Recommendations:



To make youth participation meaningful, it is essential to ensure that young people's voices contribute to policy change, that their recommendations are considered by decision-makers, and that the outcomes of their participation are monitored, assessed, and made public.

By embedding assessment, transparency, and accountability into youth participation initiatives, practices can ensure that young people's contributions lead to meaningful change.

- **Plan your practice and project to ensure policy impact.** Existing projects have offered tools and resources to help young people submit proposals to local authorities for changes in their community, combined with continued work with the authorities to ensure that the selected proposals are implemented. An example of good practice includes the EU Youth Dialogue, which creates a dialogue between young people and decision-makers at the European level.
- Ensure that the outcomes of the process are targeted at **specific and relevant recipients**. Knowing who you are targeting with the practice makes it more likely that its outcomes will be considered. For example, in existing practices, young participants have written a collective 'letter to the city' outlining issues the young want local authorities to address, or organised policy campaigns specifically targeting a local transport authority.
- Develop systems to **track and measure impact**. Make sure that young people have an opportunity to **give feedback**. For monitoring impact, existing practices have, for example, introduced a steering group to ensure a constant process of monitoring how young people's voices are heard, by whom, and with what impact.
- **Document how young people's voices have informed concrete policy and practice.** Make sure to assess the impact and publish a separate impact assessment report. Existing practices have, for example, published all youth initiatives that have been sent to the municipality authorities, as well as the authorities' responses to the initiatives on a website or shared information in a blog format. As evidenced in existing good practices, **concrete policy changes are the best evidence of impact**.
- Even if young people's voices did not result in concrete changes, **assess the impact of the process. Assess what has been learned from the project in regards to impact, or lack thereof, and what could have been done differently to increase the young participants' impact.** Transparent and regular reviewing ensures that future practitioners can use your findings and work to help increase the impact of their projects. When possible, also tell the young participants why their recommendations were not taken up.



Recommendations specifically for schools:

- To ensure impact, existing good practices have introduced student assemblies, which have broad powers to influence all aspects of school life, from food served in school canteens to budgets and curriculum.
- Consider if the monitoring, assessment, and documentation of the impact of students' activities could also be shared publicly to a broader audience, or regional or national education departments or ministries.

Concluding **words**

Inclusivity is a dynamic process whereby work with young people in deliberative and participatory practices can never be 'finished' but is continuously reviewed and improved. Recognising this is even more important today as societies and issues of concern change rapidly. Whether inclusivity is not yet a priority or already constitutes a core element of your practice, there is always room to enhance understanding, challenge assumptions, and empower voices that are still underrepresented. In order to continue building inclusive practices, please consider sharing your insights with other practitioners. Together, we can move towards creating environments where young people feel seen, heard, and valued.