
CYPRIOT

ORGANIZATION

CENTERS

YOUTH



— EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

Active Participation and **YOUTH**

Educational Guide for **Youth Workers**
& **Youth Trainers**



PROGRAM

Have Your Say!

Engage, Connect, Empower Youth!

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The Cyprus Organization of Youth Centers, as part of its efforts to promote active citizenship and democratic participation among young people, is implementing the European program “Have your Say! Engage, Connect, Empower Youth!” The program focuses on empowering young people aged 13–30, with a particular emphasis on those facing fewer opportunities due to geographic, social, or other constraints. Through non-formal learning activities, the program aims to substantially enhance young people’s participation in democratic life, develop their skills, and strengthen their voice in society.

At the same time, the program contributes to promoting the values of the European Union and the EU Youth Strategy, strengthening young people’s connections with institutions, policymakers, and professionals in the youth sector. Particular emphasis is placed on the active participation and democratic engagement of young people from urban and rural communities, with the aim of creating a more inclusive and participatory society.

www.haveyoursay.info



The Cyprus Organization of Youth Centers, or KOKEN as it is more widely known, is the largest non-governmental, non-profit youth organization (NGO) in Cyprus. It serves as the central coordinating body for youth centers. KOKEN’s mission is to provide opportunities and resources for education, the creation and management of opportunities, and the development of young people as active citizens. It sets goals that include skill development, the promotion of social awareness, and participation in activities that enhance their personal, group, and social development.

KOKEN is an organization that, in collaboration with its members, government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, the business community, and civil society, plans, develops, and promotes the implementation of effective measures to support young people.

As an organization, KOKEN is governed by its members and is also accountable to them, guided by the principles of democracy, integrity, and transparency.

www.kentraneotitas.org

1 Introduction

This training guide was developed as part of the “Have your Say! Engage, Connect, Empower Youth!” program and is intended for youth workers, trainers, and professionals working with young people aged 15–30. The purpose of the guide is to provide a structured, practical training framework for active participation and active citizenship, with an emphasis on non-formal learning and experiential education.

The guide is based on fundamental European values: democracy, equality, freedom, the rule of law, and solidarity. It incorporates practical activities that can be directly applied in group settings, without requiring specialized technical infrastructure.

Special care has been taken to ensure that the content is inclusive and free from social, racial, gender, or other forms of discrimination. All activities are designed for individuals regardless of their background, experience, or identity.

How to Use the Guide

Each chapter can be read independently. The activities in Chapter 8 are self-contained and can be selected based on the time available, the size of the group, and the training objective.

The teacher’s guide is a tool whose value depends on how and in what context it is used. Every activity carried out, every new person empowered, and every dialogue initiated contributes to the formation of a more active and democratic society.

Active participation is not the privilege of specific groups. It is a right and an opportunity for every young person, regardless of background, origin, gender, or socioeconomic status. The role of youth workers and educators is to create the conditions that allow this opportunity to be realized.

2 Active Participation

Active participation is a central pillar of contemporary theory on democracy, social cohesion, and youth development. As a term, it refers to the conscious, meaningful, and sustained involvement of individuals in decision-making processes, social actions, and collective initiatives that influence society at large.

Active participation goes beyond passive presence or the mere fulfillment of obligations. It requires critical thinking, the ability to engage in dialogue, informed judgment, and the assumption of responsibility. It is inextricably linked to the process of empowerment.

2.1 The three levels of active participation

- **Individual:** Development of self-awareness, social sensitivity, and personal responsibility.
- **Interpersonal:** Collaborating in groups, developing social bonds and communication skills.
- **Sociopolitical:** Engagement in policy-making, social interventions, and collective action.

2.2 Formal and informal participation

The two forms of participation complement each other and contribute equally to the development of active citizens:

Formal Participation	Non-Formal Participation
Electoral processes	Volunteer Activities
Participation in official collective bodies	Social movements and citizen initiatives
Strictly Regulated Institutional Framework	Flexible, adaptive structures
Standardized participation process	Participatory, experiential method

Promoting active participation requires coordinated efforts in the areas of education, policy, and society. Strengthening non-formal learning, creating participatory structures, and systematically empowering young people are critical factors.

3 Active Citizenship and Youth

Active citizenship refers to citizens’ ability and willingness to participate in public life, take on responsibilities, and contribute to the creation of a just and sustainable society. For young people, active citizenship takes on particular importance, as it is directly linked to the development of identity and values. It encompasses a wide range of actions, such as participation in democratic processes, volunteering and social service, defending human rights, and engaging in collective initiatives.

The inclusive dimension of active citizenship essentially involves ensuring that no individual is excluded on the basis of origin, gender, disability, or socioeconomic status.

3.1 Factors Shaping Active Citizenship

Factor	Impact
Education	Civics education, critical thinking, and participatory learning enhance understanding of democratic processes.
Family & Community	The family and social environment shape values, attitudes, and social responsibility.
Institutional Framework	Youth councils and volunteer programs provide a framework for participation.
Hands-on experience	Direct involvement in initiatives boosts self-confidence and a sense effectiveness.

4 European Values as the Core of Participation

European values form the ethical and normative core of active participation. They function not only as abstract principles but as an educational tool for developing active citizens. Through non-formal learning and social experiences, young people can internalize these values and translate them into participatory practices.

Value	Relationship to Active Participation
Freedom	Allows individuals to consciously choose the degree and nature of their involvement in social processes.
Democracy	Legitimizes participation and creates structures for consultation and collective .
Equality	Ensures equal access to participatory processes for all members of society.
Rule of law	It strengthens trust in institutions by creating the necessary conditions for active engagement.
Human dignity	It constitutes the ethical foundation of participation and the recognition of the value of every individual, without discrimination.
Solidarity	Transforms individual action into collective responsibility, strengthening the cohesion of society.

5 The Role of Volunteering in Active Participation

Volunteering is one of the most important mechanisms for promoting active participation. As a form of non-formal engagement, it provides a flexible and accessible framework for action. It is characterized by voluntary commitment, the absence of financial motivation, and a focus on the common good.

5.1 Benefits for young people

- Personal level: Development of self-awareness, self-esteem, and a sense of purpose. Cultivation of solidarity, empathy, and respect.
- Social level: Facilitating social integration, developing communication skills, and strengthening networks.
- Professional level: Gaining practical experience and leadership skills; improving employment prospects.

5.2 Barriers to participation at each level

Understanding these barriers is essential for designing effective interventions:

Level	Main barriers
Individual	Lack of time, a heavy course or work load, low self-confidence, a feeling a lack of impact.
Social	Limited information about opportunities, lack of a culture of volunteering, financial costs of transportation.
Institutional	Bureaucracy, low trust in institutions, insufficient recognition of volunteer contribution.

Systematically identifying and addressing these barriers enables the design of targeted actions that substantially increase participation and empower socially conscious citizens.

6 The Role of Youth Workers

Youth workers serve as key mediators between young people, institutions, and civil society. Their contribution falls within the framework of non-formal learning. Their role is not limited to organizing activities but extends to creating supportive environments that foster critical thinking, autonomy, and democratic participation.

Role Dimension	Description
Empowerment	Fostering self-awareness, self-esteem, and a sense of efficacy in young people.
Creating opportunities	Designing initiatives that create opportunities for participation at the local, national and European levels.
Developing skills	Fostering transferable skills such as communication, critical thinking, leadership, and teamwork.
Inclusion	Equal access for young people with fewer opportunities, regardless of background.
Mediation	Bridging the gap between young people and institutions. Conveying needs to decision-makers.
Development Support (development support/growth support)	Counseling, building self-confidence, and fostering social awareness.

In the context of every educational activity, the youth worker assumes the role of a facilitator rather than an authority figure. They focus on creating a safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environment for all group members.

7 Educational Tools and Methodology

The use of appropriate educational tools is a key factor. The modern approach is shifting from teacher-centered knowledge transfer toward participatory, experiential, and learner-centered processes, guided by the theory of social constructivism.

7.1 Non-Formal Learning

It is characterized by flexibility, participation, and an emphasis on experiential learning. It reinforces self-directed learning, promotes critical thinking, encourages initiative, and fosters democratic values.

7.2 Experiential and participatory methods

- role-playing : understanding of different perspectives and developing empathy.
- (simulations): The representation of decision-making processes — understanding institutions.
- Debate (structured discussion): Argumentation, respect for opposing views.
- World Café: The collective synthesis of knowledge through circular dialogue.
- Focus Group: A thorough and in-depth documentation of experiences and attitudes.
- Digital tools (e-participation): Online participation, digital campaigns, online consultation.

7.3 Reflection

Reflection is an essential stage of any learning process. Without reflective practice, experiential learning does not translate into meaningful learning. It is carried out through structured discussion, learning journals, or group evaluation.

8 Educational Activities

This module includes ten structured activities based on non-formal learning and experiential education. Each activity places the participants at the center of the process. The youth worker takes on the role of facilitator rather than instructor.

Learning objectives: Upon completion of the activities, young people are expected to: understand active participation

- a. recognize their role as active citizens b. develop communication and collaboration skills
- c. participate in decision-making processes d. plan and implement actions

8.1 Overview of Activities

Activity Title	Duration	Participants	Location
Role-Playing Game - Community Youth Council	90'	15–25	Room
Simulation of a European Consultation	120'	15–25	Room
Debate: Volunteering. Mandatory or Not?	60'	10–20	Room
World Café: Youth Participation	90'	15–30	Room
Focus Group: Barriers to Participation	60'	6–10	Room
Digital Campaign	2–3 days	10–20	Hybrid
Reflection session	45'	10–20	Room
Outdoor walk. The community speaks	120'	15–20	Outdoor
Mission Possible (Outdoor Game)	90'	15–20	Outdoor
Creative Expression: If I Were Mayor	90'	15–20	Internal/External

Community Council on Climate Change

Hands-on experience in democratic dialogue for young people



PARTICIPANTS

15–25 young people (ages 15–30)



LOCATION

Circular **room**



DURATION

90 minutes total

◎ BENEFITS

Enhances **empathy**, **dialogue**, and **negotiation** skills. Participants experience the democratic process firsthand.

📅 PLANNING

Participants take on roles—**mayor**, **activists**, **businesspeople**, **residents**—and are asked to make decisions about an environmental issue through a realistic scenario.

📋 PREPARATION

01

Create **role cards** with clear interests and priorities

02

Defining a **scenario** and questions for discussion

03

Establishing **dialogue rules** for smooth participation

B C D M A IMPLEMENTATION

TERI
ALS

01

10'

Scenario Presentation

02

25'

Assigning roles and preparation in small groups

03

40'

“Council” session—negotiation and decision-making

04

15

Reflection: what I learned, what I found difficult, what changed



IMPACT

Participants understand that every voice counts in collective decision-making on climate issues.

European Youth Consultation for Youth

Hands-on simulation of political participation in European institutions



PARTICIPANTS

15–25 people (ages 15–30)

LOCATION

Workshop **room**

DURATION

120 minutes total

EXPECTED BENEFITS

Development of **civic engagement skills**, understanding of **European institutions**, and strengthening of **political self-confidence**.



PLANNING

Simulation of a real consultation. Working groups—**youth representatives, organizations, policymakers**—develop proposals on a youth policy issue.



PREPARATION

01

Selecting a **policy issue** and drafting briefing notes

02

Establishing **working groups** and assigning roles

03

Preparing **the stages**: analysis, consultation, presentation

PRO ICASIA IMPLEMENTATION CESS

01

15'

Presentation of the institutional framework and objectives

02

30'

Group analysis of the topic and development of proposals

03

45'

Intergroup consultation phase

04

20

Presentation of final proposals to the plenary session

05

10

Reflection: barriers to collaboration, procedural issues

EXPECTED IMPACT



Young people understand European consultation processes and recognize that participation in policymaking is **both a right and an opportunity**.

Should volunteering be mandatory?

Structured debate to foster critical thinking



PARTICIPANTS

10–20 people (ages 15–30)



LOCATION

Workshop **room**

DURATION

60 minutes total

EXPECTED BENEFITS

Enhancement of **critical thinking**, **argumentation**, and **respect** for differing viewpoints.



PLAN

Two teams take **opposing positions**—assignments are made at random, regardless of personal beliefs. This enhances the ability to understand viewpoints that one does not share.



PREPARATION

01

Establishment of **rules**, timing of interventions, and evaluation criteria

02

Random assignment of positions within the teams



PROCESS

IMPLEMENTATION

01

10'

Presentation of rules and division into groups

02

15

Preparation of arguments within teams

03

25

Structured debate rounds

04

10'

Feedback, evaluation, and reflection

EXPECTED OUTCOME



The capacity for **informed dialogue** is strengthened. Participants come to realize that respect for diversity is a fundamental prerequisite for democratic participation.

How does youth participation?

Co-creative method of collective dialogue at rotating tables



PARTICIPANTS

15–30 people (ages 15–30)



V E N U E

Workshop **room**



DURATION

90 minutes total



EXPECTED BENEFITS

Promotion of **collective thinking**, **exchange of ideas**, and **co-creation** of solutions.



PLANNING

Tables are set up **with different questions**. Participants rotate among the tables, enriching the discussion. Each table has a **“host”** who summarizes and connects the ideas.



PREPARATION

01

Select **questions for each table**—at least 3–4 tables

02

Prepare **recording materials**: paper, markers, sticky notes

PRO I K A S I A IMPLEMENTATION → C E S S

01

10'

Introduction to the method and presentation of objectives

02

3 × 20'

Three rounds of discussion with **table rotations**

03

20'

Presentation of ideas from each table and **collective synthesis**

EXPECTED OUTCOME



Participation is enhanced, as is the understanding that knowledge is produced collectively—a fundamental principle of democratic culture.

Barriers to youth participation

Structured qualitative research through in-depth group discussion



PARTICIPANTS

6–10 people (ages 15–30)



LOCATION

Room arranged in a circle or around a table



DURATION

60–70 minutes total



EXPECTED BENEFITS

In-depth documentation of **experiences, attitudes, and perceptions**. Generation of **qualitative data** for the design of interventions.



PLANNING

Structured discussion led by a facilitator. The small group size fosters a **confidential atmosphere** and an in-depth exchange of views.



PREPARATION

01

Development of a **questionnaire**—open-ended questions with no suggested answers

02

Preparation **for recording** or discreet audio recording (with consent)

PROCESS

01

10'

Introduction, presentation of objectives, and fostering a **safe environment**

02

40'

Structured discussion—the facilitator **guides**, but does not direct

03

10–20'

Summary, confirmation of views, and feedback

EXPECTED IMPACT



The data collected can inform **policy decisions** and planning strategies at the local or regional level.

Get involved citizen

Planning and implementing a real-world digital media campaign



PARTICIPANTS

10–20 people (ages 15–30)



LOCATION

Hybrid / online



DURATION

2–3 days total



EXPECTED BENEFITS

Development of **digital literacy** and understanding of **online participation** as a tool for social change.



PROGRAM

Young people design and implement **a real-world** digital media **campaign**. Working groups with specialized roles: **content creation, visual design, communication**.



PREPARATION

01

Defining **the topic, target audience**, and digital platform

02

Formation of **working groups** with a clear division of roles



IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

01

DAY 1

Strategy planning, role assignment, and content creation

02

DAY 2

Publication and monitoring of response

03

DAY 3

Evaluating Results and Reflection

EXPECTED IMPACT



Young people develop **digital skills** and understand that an online presence is a modern form of political action.

What does active participation?

A combination of individual writing and group dialogue to enhance self-awareness



PARTICIPANTS

10–20 people (ages 15–30)

LOCATION

Quiet room

DURATION

45 minutes total

EXPECTED BENEFITS

Enhanced **self-awareness**, linking experience with **learning**, and fostering **intrinsic motivation**.

PLANNING

A combination of **individual writing** and **group discussion** through targeted self-assessment questions.

PREPARATION

01

Developing **reflective questions**—e.g., “Which participatory experience has influenced you the most?”

02

Prepare **worksheets** for the writing process

DIADIKASIA IMPLEMENTATION



01

10'

Individual writing — answering reflective questions

02

20'

Small-group discussion

03

15

Plenary session: presentation of ideas and connection to the broader context

EXPECTED IMPACT



Experiential learning is transformed into **internalized knowledge**. Personal commitment to society as a whole is strengthened.

The community speaks

A structured experiential tour and mapping of social issues in public spaces



PARTICIPANTS

15–20 people (ages 15–30)



LOCATION

Outdoors, neighborhood/city



DURATION

120 minutes total



EXPECTED BENEFITS

Connecting young people with the **local community**, fostering **observational skills**, and identifying **social issues**.



PLANNING

Structured experiential tour. The facilitator identifies **points of interest** in advance—parks, abandoned spaces, public services—and creates a **“participation trail”** with observation questions.



PREPARATION

01

Route mapping and selection of observation points

02

Worksheets: What is the problem? Who is affected? What can be changed?

03

Equipment: notebooks or mobile devices for taking photos

DIADIKASIA IMPLEMENTATION



01

10'

Introduction and presentation of **the mission**

02

60'

Group tour: observation, recording, discussion

03

30

Presentation of findings and **recommendations for action**

04

20

Reflection: linking observations to active participation

EXPECTED IMPACT



Young people realize that participation begins with **everyday reality** and that every community offers opportunities that call for action.

Mission Possible

Outdoor mission game for collaboration and problem-solving



PARTICIPANTS

15–20 people (ages 15–30)

LOCATION

Outdoor park / courtyard

DURATION

90 minutes total

EXPECTED BENEFITS

Enhancing **collaboration**, **problem-solving**, and **initiative-taking** through an interactive setting.

PLANNING

Challenge-based learning in an outdoor setting. **Mission stations** are set up that require active participation. Each team receives **mission cards** and completes them within a time limit.

PREPARATION

01

Mission design: short, creative, collaborative

02

Print **mission cards** for each team

03

Mapping out stations at the event venue

PRO ICASIA IMPLEMENTATION CESS

01

10'

Introduction of **rules** and group assignment

02

60'

Moving between stations and completing missions

03

10'

Presentation of **the experience by each team**

04

10'

Reflection: Collaboration, Obstacles, Strategies

EXPECTED OUTCOME



Participants experience participation as a **collective action** and discover that the skills they have developed have direct application in social reality.

If I were Mayor...

Art-based learning for the transition from imagination to a concrete proposal for action



PARTICIPANTS

15–20 people (ages 15–30)

LOCATION

Indoors or outdoors

DURATION

90 minutes total

EXPECTED BENEFITS

Enhancement of **creative thinking, expression**, and the connection of ideas to **potential social action**.



PLANNING

Art-based learning: young people imagine themselves as responsible for their community and plan changes, freely choosing a form of expression—**poster, video, presentation, or play**. Thematic areas: environment, youth, equality.



PREPARATION

01

Gathering **creative materials**: paper, markers, digital tools

02

The instructor defines **the thematic areas**

PROCE I K A S I A IMPLEMENTATION



01

10'

Introduction, presentation of themes, and selection **of form of expression**

02

40'

Creation, individually or in groups

03

25'

Presentation of ideas to **the whole class**

04

15

Discussion: How does a creative idea become **a proposal for action?**

AN EXPECTED REACTION



Young people understand that **social change** and active participation begin with ideas that take the form of action.

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